

Protection Towards Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflict: A Comparative Study of Islam and Christianity

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Abstract

Research Analysis: Islamic and Christian Perspectives on Cultural Heritage Protection, **Research Objective:** This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of challenges in articulating ethical approaches to heritage preservation within Islamic and Christian contexts. **Research Methodology:** The research employs a doctrinal method, analysing religious teachings from Islamic jurisprudence sources and Christian ecumenical council doctrines to understand each tradition's perspective on cultural heritage protection. **Results:** The investigation reveals that neither the Quran nor the Bible explicitly mandates cultural heritage protection. However, Islamic teachings through Prophet Muhammad's traditions emphasize respect and conservation of cultural heritage. Christian denominations following ecumenical councils adopt a liberal approach, viewing heritage protection as preserving liturgical truth, divine concepts, and sacred icons. **Findings and Implications:** The study identifies dual challenges: Islam faces difficulties in comprehensively capturing phenomena and confronts existing biases in heritage preservation studies, while Christianity demonstrates more flexible interpretations linking heritage protection to spiritual preservation. These findings suggest both religions provide implicit ethical foundations for cultural heritage. **Conclusion:** While cultural heritage protection constitutes customary international law and war crimes under the Rome Statute, Islamic and Christian perspectives offer distinct yet supportive ethical frameworks for preservation efforts. **Contribution:** This research contributes comparative theological analysis to heritage studies, bridging religious ethics with international cultural protection frameworks and addressing gaps in religion-based preservation approaches. **Limitations:** The study restricts analysis to two major religions and relies solely on doctrinal methodology, potentially overlooking practical implementations and contemporary challenges in heritage protection. **Suggestions:** Future research should expand to include additional religious



perspectives, integrate empirical methodologies examining practical applications, and develop comprehensive frameworks addressing identified biases in heritage preservation studies while exploring concrete case studies of religious principles in cultural protection contexts.

Introduction

At some stage between their inception and widespread influence, religions acquired a reputation for overlooking the status quo and political affairs. This perception has led scholars to suggest that, in the development of secular economic theories, religions would ultimately become irrelevant. They could not have anticipated the remarkable resurgence of religions' social roles in today's society.¹ From 1975 to 2015, data of armed conflict between governments and rebel groups still show many tendencies of people waging war to protect the divine.²

Type of Religious Insurgency Claims	Examples of Groups
Islamist	
Separatist Islamist	Hamas (Israel–Palestine), MILF (the Philippines)
Revolutionary Islamist	GIA (Egypt), AIS (Algeria)
Transnational Islamist	Al-Qaida, IS
Secularist	
Separatist secularist	LTTE (Sri Lanka), KIO (Myanmar)
Revolutionary secularist	CPN-M (Nepal), MEK (Iran)
Evangelist	
Separatist evangelist	NLFT (India), BDK (DRC)
Revolutionary evangelist	LRA (Uganda), forces of Paul Joseph Mukungubila (DRC)
Other religious claims	
Sikh separatist	Sikh insurgents (India)

Note: For all group names, see our data set. LRA = Lord's Resistance Army; IS = Islamic State; MILF = Moro Islamic Liberation Front; GIA = Armed Islamic Group; AIS = Islamic Salvation Army; LTTE = Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; KIO = Kachin Independence Organization; CPN-M = Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist; MEK = Mujahideen e Kalq; NLFT = National Liberation Front of Tripura; BDK = Bundu-dia-Kongo; DRC = Democratic Republic of Congo.

Table 1. Different Types of Religions Claim, cr. Svensson and Nilsson Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data

It has been observed that Islamist groups generally advocate for a more prominent role of Islam in society, a position similarly held by Evangelical Christians. Conversely, some separatist

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¹ Roger Williamson, "Why Is Religion Still a Factor in Armed Conflict?" *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 21, no. 3 (1990), 243–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/096701069002100301>

² Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, "Disputes over the Divine," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 5 (2017), 1127–1148 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717737057>



Islamists and separatist Evangelicals take a more secular approach, calling for a distinct separation between state law and religious practices. Transnational Islamists are regarded as the most radical advocates of Islamic dominance. Within both faiths, Revolutionary Secularists are also perceived as confrontational, as they often demand a comprehensive new ideology for the entire nation. The fundamental distinction among these groups lies in their varying interpretations of faith—specifically, how each group interprets or attempts to influence others to interpret the tenets of their beliefs. This divergence can significantly influence their perspectives on engaging in warfare to defend their religion and the potential consequences of such actions.³

According to the Qur'an, the fundamental source of law, war is generally considered unjust unless it is conducted in self-defense or to liberate oneself from oppression.⁴ When it comes to war, Islam has certain rules laid out in ḥadīth. For example, it clearly says that torture and causing unnecessary suffering are not allowed.⁵ Islamic law jurisprudence, known as fiqh, has developed and varied significantly among different Islamic schools of thought over the years. In more radical interpretations of the Qur'an, some argue that verses advocating for peace and prohibiting offensive warfare have been abrogated. As a result, these interpretations contend that war may be waged against non-believers. Islamic law jurisprudence, known as fiqh, has evolved and varied across different Islamic schools of thought over the years. Some more radical interpretations of the Qur'an suggest that verses advocating for peace and prohibiting offensive warfare have been abrogated. Consequently, these interpretations also assert that war can be waged against non-believers.⁶

Islamic law has evolved in intriguing ways, with certain schools of thought incorporating principles of proportionality and contemporary circumstances. This is evident in instances such as the support of Islamic scholars for Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who prohibited the practices of cutting and burning trees during a battle with Banū Al Naḍīr, which had been initiated by Prophet Muhammad.⁷ Arguably, this is the first time environmental law protection in armed conflict is developed under Islam and International law.⁸ Islam comprises a variety of branches of thought, resulting in many debates about its interpretation and teachings. Furthermore, there is a scientific methodology for evaluating the credibility of hadiths by tracing their connections to the Prophet. This approach aids in determining whether the hadiths are valuable or merely fabricated.⁹

Different schools of thought exist regarding the interpretation of the Al-Qur'an, leading to a variety of approaches. The three largest interpretations are from Sunni Islam, which values consensus (ijma') and elects a head of state known as the Khalifah; and Shia Islam, which derives

³ Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, "Disputes over the Divine.

⁴ Qur'an 22:39, Qur'an 22:40, Qur'an 4:75.

⁵ Fajri M Muhammadin, "Fiqh Al-Jihād in the Contemporary World: Addressing the Gaps in the Regulations on the Means and Methods of Warfare" Thesis (2020), 11, <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fajri-Muhammadin/research>

⁶ BBC News, "[Archived] BBC - Religions - Islam: War," www.bbc.co.uk (2009), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/war.shtml#:~:text=Islam%20allows%20war%20in%20self>

⁷ Ibn Rushd's, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer (Vol 1)*, trans. Imran A. N. Khan, Reading: Garnet, Cop., Rist (2000).

⁸ Fajri M Muhammadin, "Fiqh Al-Jihād in the Contemporary World: Addressing the Gaps in the Regulations on the Means and Methods of Warfare" Thesis (2020), 11, <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fajri-Muhammadin/research>

⁹ Masrukhin Muhsin, "*Studi Kritik Matan Hadis*", A-Empat (2017).



its interpretation from a descendant of Prophet Muhammad,¹⁰ the Hanafi school of thought in Islam places significant emphasis on the use of logical reasoning to interpret religious principles. This approach often involves concepts such as *Istihsān* and *Maslahah al-Mursalah*, which contribute to a nuanced understanding of Islamic teachings.¹¹

Christianity includes a diverse range of biblical interpretations, and it is widely recognized that about half of all Christians globally identify as Catholic. Research conducted by Statistical in 2010,¹² indicated this figure to be approximately 50.1%, while the World Atlas reported it to be around 40% in 2018.¹³ Most studies tend to support the notion that roughly half of the Christian population is Catholic.¹⁴ Additionally, there are discussions regarding the next largest group, Protestant Christians, who make up approximately 30-40% of the Christian population. Protestants generally trace their origins to those who endorsed Martin Luther's 95 Theses and his critiques of the Roman Catholic Church's practices that they believed strayed from God's intentions during the 1500s.¹⁵

Martin Luther was supported by prominent figures such as John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, and Oliver Cromwell, who helped further the discourse initiated by the Catholic Church. They created their own reformatory statements and, in doing so, established several denominations within Protestantism.¹⁶ Collectively, these branches are identified under the broad umbrella of Protestantism, although recent discussions have raised questions about whether the Anglican Church should be considered part of the Protestant denomination.¹⁷

By the early 21st century, Lutheranism, the Protestant denomination that originated from Martin Luther's initial protest, is recognized as the second-largest Protestant denomination, following the Baptist Churches.¹⁸ Given its foundational role in challenging Catholic modes of faith,

¹⁰M. Cherif Bassiouni, "Schools of Thought in Islam," Middle East Institute (2012), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/schools-thought-islam>

¹¹ Maslaha, "SCHOOLS of ISLAMIC LAW," Maslaha, n.d., <https://www.maslaha.org/UntoldIslam/In-depth/SCHOOLS-OF-ISLAMIC-LAW>

¹² Statista Research Department, "Christianity - Denomination of Christian Population Worldwide in 2010," Statista (2011), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/214718/denomination-of-christians-worldwide/>

¹³ WorldAtlas, "Largest Christian Denominations in the World," WorldAtlas (2018) <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/christian-denominations-by-the-numbers.html>

¹⁴ Antal Birkás, "The Protestant Reformation: Origins, Impact and Heritage," *Polgári Szemle* 14, no. Special Issue (2018), 424–34, <https://doi.org/10.24307/psz.2018.0427>

¹⁵ American Humanist Organization, "Protestantism," November 2016, <https://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/christianity.pdf>. W. Owen Chadwick and James C Spalding, "Protestantism | Origin, Definition, History, Doctrines, & Facts," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism>.

¹⁶ Robert Dudley Woodberry and Timothy S. Shah, "The Pioneering Protestants," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004), 47–61, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0037>> ; W. Owen Chadwick and James C Spalding, "Protestantism | Origin, Definition, History, Doctrines, & Facts," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism>. Antal Birkás, "The Protestant Reformation: Origins, Impact and Heritage," *Polgári Szemle* 14, no. Special Issue (2018), 424–34, <https://doi.org/10.24307/psz.2018.0427>

¹⁷ WorldAtlas, "Largest Christian Denominations in the World," WorldAtlas (2018) <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/christian-denominations-by-the-numbers.html>

¹⁸ Hans J Hillerbrand, "Lutheranism | Definition, Beliefs, History, & Facts," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lutheranism>.



it is crucial to understand Protestantism through the lens of Lutheranism. While Catholicism derives much of its teaching from a centralized interpretation by the Church in the Holy City of the Vatican, Lutheranism emphasizes individual conscience in its practice of faith. Both contemporary teachings from these traditions appear to advocate for peace and stability within their communities.

The coexistence of diverse methods of interpretation within the same religions and faiths is a complex issue. Some progressive followers are able to reconcile their beliefs with contemporary knowledge and conditions, embracing new norms that do not conflict with their fundamental teachings. Conversely, there remains a significant risk that rigid traditional interpretations may prevail, potentially leading to unjust conflicts when enforced strictly. This paper seeks to analyze doctrinal writings—specifically those relating to armed conflict—and the varied interpretations offered by different groups. The objective is to shed light on how religious interpretation should, or should not, be approached in the practice of faith.

How do various religions understand armed conflict and the protection of culture and heritage amidst these conflicts within their basic doctrinal frameworks? Based on the International Criminal Court's verdict in the case of Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, what discrepancies can be identified between Al Mahdi's interpretation and the doctrinal views of Islam concerning armed conflict and heritage protection? How did Al Mahdi justify his actions in destroying historic monuments and buildings?

Method

This study employs a doctrinal research methodology complemented by historical analysis to examine Islamic and Christian perspectives on cultural heritage protection. This approach facilitates a systematic exploration of the theological principles and jurisprudential foundations within both religious traditions. Data collection is conducted through a systematic literature review of secondary sources, which includes primary legal texts such as the Quran, Hadith, and Ijma, as well as secondary scholarly materials like peer-reviewed articles, academic monographs, and theological treatises. The historical dimension of the study traces the evolution of doctrinal interpretations from foundational texts to contemporary perspectives.

The analysis utilizes thematic content analysis to identify patterns, divergent viewpoints, and theological commonalities. This analytical framework draws qualitative insights from scholarly discourse, highlighting the challenges associated with developing ethical approaches to heritage preservation within both religious contexts. Overall, this methodological design maintains analytical rigor through systematic source evaluation and comparative theological analysis while acknowledging the interpretative nature that characterizes doctrinal research.

Result and Discussions

Doctrine and Legal Theory of Christian Armed Conflicts

As the oldest and largest denomination of Christianity, the Catholic Church was founded in the first century and has faced numerous historical events and conflicts that have presented significant challenges to humanity. This history has prompted the documentation of its doctrines and teachings across various sources,¹⁹ including the Christian Bible—which is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament—and formal letters known as encyclicals. Through these mediums, the Catholic Church endeavors to share God's teachings with the world.

While the Church's teachings do not explicitly mandate the preservation of cultural heritage in a broad sense, as reflected in neither the Old nor the New Testament of the Holy Bible, it does encourage its followers to safeguard certain aspects of Catholic cultural heritage through

¹⁹ Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations*, Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers (2015).



various directives. For instance, the Code of Canon Law contains several regulations that require Catholic believers to protect sacred goods and places of worship. Specifically, Canon 1220 § 2 states that "ordinary care for preservation and fitting means of security are to be employed to protect sacred and precious goods."²⁰

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II established the Pontifical Council for Culture to promote dialogue between humanity and culture, thereby reinforcing the connection between faith and culture. The task of preserving Catholic-related historical artifacts was entrusted to a subdivision of this Council known as the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church, which regards this mission as a form of evangelization aimed at both Catholic believers and non-believers alike. Despite these commitments to preserving Catholic cultural heritage, the Church does not specifically encourage its followers to protect any form of cultural heritage during times of armed conflict.

Since the First World War, the Catholic Church has increasingly dedicated itself to promoting peace, as evidenced by various passages from both the Old and New Testaments, including Galatians 5:22-23 and Psalm 4:8. During this global conflict, the Church took a firm stance against war by maintaining neutrality and refusing to align with either the Triple Entente or the Central Powers.²¹ To underscore this commitment to neutrality, Pope Benedict XV, who presided over the Church during this tumultuous period, issued numerous decrees advocating for an end to hostilities. One of the most significant was the Papal Peace Note of 1917, in which he vehemently condemned war and underscored justice as a pathway to peace. In this decree, he proposed several recommendations for the warring nations, including the reduction of armaments, the establishment of an international court, the promotion of economic cooperation, the assurance of maritime freedom, and the implementation of arbitration treaties.²²

Pope Benedict XV's attempts to bring an end to the war were ultimately unsuccessful, primarily due to the secularization of Western nations, which began with the enactment of the Law of 1905 in France. Nevertheless, the Papal Peace Note of 1917 clearly articulates the Catholic Church's opposition to warfare.²³ However, the Church does not categorically condemn war. The Second Edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1910) states that "it is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies,"²⁴ indicating that the state may resort to the use of force under certain circumstances.

These circumstances are further explained through the just war theory, initially articulated by Augustine of Hippo,²⁵ a venerated saint in the Catholic Church. According to Augustine's just war theory, war is considered justified if it meets specific criteria: a punitive perspective on war, an assessment of the moral evil associated with warfare, a pursuit of authorization for the use of violence, a dualistic understanding that highlights spiritual goods, an interpretation of evangelical principles focused on inner attitudes, a passive response to authority and societal change, the employment of Biblical texts to justify participation in warfare, and an

²⁰ Can. 1220 § 2.

²¹ Maggie Brennan, "A Light in the Darkness: The Interaction between Catholicism and World War I," *The Purdue Historian* 6, no. 1 (2013), 14–33, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/puhistorian/vol6/iss1/2>

²² Maggie Brennan, A Light in the Darkness,

²³ Maggie Brennan, A Light in the Darkness,

²⁴ Saint Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church," www.scborromeo.org, <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c2a2.htm>

²⁵ James F. Childress, "Just-War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities, and Functions of Their Criteria," *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (1978), 427–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056397803900302>



analogical comprehension of peace.²⁶

It is essential to understand that Augustine's just war theory is not intended as a blanket justification for engaging in warfare. According to Augustine, the Catholic Church asserts that war is only permissible when conducted with the aim of achieving peace. Thus, the ultimate goal remains the maintenance of harmonious relationships among humanity, a principle emphasized in Chapter V of *Gaudium et Spes*.

Christian Protestant Lutheranism

Protestantism is a major branch of Christianity that exists alongside Catholicism. It encompasses a variety of denominations that emerged from the conflict initiated by Martin Luther's rejection of certain teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. These diverse branches vary in their interpretations of the Bible as well as their approaches to worship.²⁷ Lutheranism recognizes the teachings of the Ecumenical councils as a collective effort to foster unity among all branches of Christianity.²⁸ However, tensions arise when examining the teachings of the Reformation alongside those of Anglican Protestant denominations.²⁹

In addition to the insights from the Ecumenical councils, Protestant Lutherans rely on their own interpretations of biblical teachings to guide their faith and practices. A vital topic addressed in the Augsburg Confession, the most authoritative document of Lutheran churches—particularly in Article 16—is the matter of armed conflict and humanity's accountability for wrongdoing.³⁰

The key distinction between Lutheran teachings and Catholic doctrine lies in the Lutheran understanding of obedience to the law and the role of good deeds in relation to salvation. Lutherans assert that salvation is attained solely through God's grace,³¹ a stance that contrasts with the position of the Catholic Council of Trent, which asserts that good deeds play a part in the process of salvation.³² This belief does not suggest that Christians are free to engage in immoral actions. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of performing good deeds not to earn spiritual rewards, but as obligations individuals owe to themselves and to their communities, while also acknowledging their relationship with God.³³

Regarding the concept of war, the Augsburg Confession affirms that just wars are possible, specifically those aimed at restoring peace. The Lutheran Council in the USA has articulated additional criteria for a just war: a) It should have a just cause, such as protecting the innocent or

²⁶ Saint Charles Borromeo Catholic Church.

²⁷ Christian Enquiry Agency, "Protestant Christians," Christianity (2020), <https://christianity.org.uk/article/protestant-christians>

²⁸ "The Ecumenical Councils and the Authority in and of the Church" (PDF). Lutheran World Federation (1993)

²⁹ William G Rusch, "Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," Collegeville Minn, Liturgical Press (2003), x & 1.

³⁰ David S. Yeago, "Just War: Reflections from the Lutheran Tradition in a Time of Crisis," *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 10, no. 4 (2001), 401–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385120101000402>

³¹ Kathryn A. Kleinhans, "Good Government and the Vocation of Citizenship: A Lutheran Perspective," *Dialog* 57, no. 2 (2018), 394, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12392>

³² John Feister, "Faith and Works: Catholics and Lutherans Find Agreement | Franciscan Media," [www.franciscanmedia.org](https://www.franciscanmedia.org/st-anthony-messenger/faith-and-works-catholics-and-lutherans-find-agreement) (2020), <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/st-anthony-messenger/faith-and-works-catholics-and-lutherans-find-agreement>

³³ Kathryn A. Kleinhans, "Good Government and the Vocation of Citizenship: A Lutheran Perspective," *Dialog* 57, no. 2 (June 2018), 395, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12392>



restoring fundamental rights that have been unjustly denied. b) It should be considered a last resort, undertaken only after all peaceful alternatives have been exhausted. c) It must be declared by a proper authority within the nation. d) It should have a reasonable likelihood of success in achieving its objectives, while minimizing harm to civilian lives and property.³⁴

It is important to note that Martin Luther was one of the most vocal opponents of the war waged by Catholics against the Turkish Ottoman Empire.³⁵ He believed that the conflict was not about spreading religious teachings but was instead focused on seizing the wealth and resources of the Ottomans.³⁶ Thus, what might have been considered a just war in the context of fighting against an enemy of Christianity is seen as dishonorable if driven by motives of power and wealth.

Moreover, Luther's teachings reflect his concerns about the corruption of the church when it is united with the state. He argued that neither a priest nor a pope has the right to designate any war as a 'spiritual calling' since their true vocation is to serve the spirit rather than engage in politics. This perspective suggests that Lutherans only recognize wars waged by Christian rulers as means of Christian expansion.³⁷ However, since no war is purely intended to spread religion and since there are no current wars fought in the name of Christianity, this raises the possibility that Protestant Lutherans may have effectively rejected the legitimacy of all wars since the rise of Christian empires.³⁸

In alignment with contemporary criminal law theories, the Lutheran denomination acknowledges the dilemma faced by soldiers who are compelled to follow unlawful orders from their superiors. The Lutheran view emphasizes that accountability or guilt rests on the soldiers' consciences to discern orders that lead to 'wrongfulness,' rather than simply labeling them as 'illegal,' as criminal law theories would suggest. Thus, a Christian should refrain from participating in wars or obeying commands from superiors that conflict with their conscience.³⁹ The practical teachings of the denomination heavily discuss this issue, suggesting that Christians should avoid any involvement in warfare that involves killing, which goes against human conscience,⁴⁰ making it difficult for Christians to justify participation in wars today.

The teachings of the Lutheran churches do not prescribe specific regulations for preserving Christian culture or heritage in times of war, nor do they advocate for the destruction of the cultural and heritage practices of other faiths. Rather, they call upon all Christians to adhere

³⁴ E Hackmann, "The Just War and Lutheran Theology," *Issue 1 Article 11*, no. 1 (1985), 4, <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2131&context=consensus>

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Works Vol. 46*, Ed. By Robert C. Schultz, Transl. By Charles M. Jacobs, Saint Louis Concordia Publ. House (1967), 163-4.

³⁶ Martin Luther, *Works Vol. 46*, pp. 163-165.

³⁷ Martin Luther, *Works Vol. 46*, Ed. By Robert C. Schultz, Transl. By Charles M. Jacobs, Saint Louis Concordia Publ. House (1967), 130; R. C. Nagpal, "DISOBEDIENCE to UNLAWFUL SUPERIOR ORDERS," *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 21, no. 3 (1979), 397-406, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43950643>

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Works Vol. 46*, p. 165.

³⁹ Edward Schneider, "War and Peace: A Review of Relevant Statements by Church Bodies Which Preceded the Founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, (2001), 11, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1021>

⁴⁰ Dr Matthew Phillips, "Dr Luther on the Soldier's Obedience and Just War," *Steadfast Lutherans* (2016), <https://steadfastlutherans.org/2016/06/dr-luther-on-the-soldiers-obedience-and-just-war/> ; Amy Blumenshine, "Our Saviours Lutheran Church - a Lutheran Response to the Drums of War," *Our Saviors' Lutheran Church*, (2018) <http://oursavioursmpls.org/a-lutheran-response-to-the-drums-of-war.html>.



to the laws of the states and governments where they reside.⁴¹ Additionally, there is a recommendation for the emperor or sovereign to engage in a just war against “The Turks” (a reference to Muslims in the southern and eastern regions of Saxony during the time the document was written)⁴² to defend Christian territory.⁴³

What we can glean from these teachings is that contemporary violence, as well as the destruction of property and heritage, is condemned by law, which Christians are obligated to follow. While early Protestant Lutheran teachings suggested waging war against those of differing faiths, there is no explicit call to destroy their property or culture; rather, the emphasis was on reclaiming Christian lands. In recent discussions within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the community condemned one of Luther’s teachings that advocated for war against Jews who would not convert to Lutheranism.⁴⁴ This condemnation stems from a commitment to oppose antisemitism and any form of hatred and violence.⁴⁵

This perspective aligns with biblical teachings, as the Apostle Paul states in Titus 1:14 to “...pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.” This serves as a reminder to abandon traditions or human-made teachings when they cease to be beneficial.

Doctrine and Legal Theory of Islamic Armed Conflicts

The Holy Qur'an and the Sunna are the two primary texts in Islam from which the principles of Islamic law are derived. These resources offer comprehensive explanations on various topics but do not address every issue in detail. In some cases, Qur'anic verses and the traditions of the Prophet are not entirely clear and require further interpretation. As a result, Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh, holds the authority to interpret and make rulings on contentious issues, while also formulating Islamic principles based on scholarly consensus (ijma') and analogical reasoning (qiyas).⁴⁶

Despite their historical and cultural contexts, a minority of Muslim scholars interpret Hadiths or Qur'anic verses strictly literally. This misinterpretation can negatively impact issues such as women's rights and religious freedom. However, this discussion will specifically focus on the misinterpretation of Islamic law regarding the preservation of cultural heritage.⁴⁷

Extremist groups have frequently misused and distorted these sources to justify their actions. It is essential to recognize that the misinterpretation of religion is a global issue, not confined solely to Islam; followers of various faiths have used their religious doctrines to rationalize radical actions. Recent examples include the destruction of Buddhist statues by the Taliban, attacks on Mali's sacred monuments by Al-Qaeda, and the devastation of cultural artifacts in Iraq and Syria by Daesh. These extremists claim their actions are rooted in religious practice, viewing them as a continuation of the traditions of Ibrahim.

⁴¹ Martin Luther, ed. Glen L. Thompson, “The Unaltered Augsburg Convention A.D. 1530,” Article 16 (5) (2005), http://www.lutheran.ro/iratok/ca_en.pdf

⁴² Jason Mahn, “Why Interfaith Understanding Is Integral to the Lutheran Tradition,” *Intersections* 5, no. 40 (2014), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234815782.pdf>

⁴³ Martin Luther, ed. Glen L. Thompson, “The Unaltered Augsburg Convention A.D. 1530,” Article 21 (1) (2005), http://www.lutheran.ro/iratok/ca_en.pdf

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, ed. Glen L. Thompson.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, ed. Glen L. Thompson.

⁴⁶ Trinidad Rico, “Islam, Heritage, and Preservation: An Untidy Tradition,” *Material Religion* 15, no. 2 (March 15, 2019): 148–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2019.1590003>.

⁴⁷ Fatimah Alshehaby, “Cultural Heritage Protection in Islamic Tradition,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 27, no. 3 (August 2020): 291–322, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0940739120000259>



The extremist perspective distorts the Qur'an and the Sunna to validate the destruction of idols and historical monuments. One common misunderstanding arises from the companions' destruction of idols during the Muslim conquest of Mecca. Some scholars argue that this decision pertained specifically to the Arabian Peninsula and should not be applied to other regions within the Islamic world. Although idols were destroyed because they were considered objects of worship, this was not the only reason. Such actions contradict Islamic beliefs regarding the prohibition of coercion in matters of faith.

This destruction can also be contextualized by the fact that the idols were located within the Grand Mosque, which contravenes Islamic doctrine about displaying objects of worship in places of worship. Another misunderstanding relates to a Hadith that states, "The people who will be most tortured on the Day of Judgment are the image-makers."⁴⁸ Radicals have misinterpreted this Hadith to legitimize their actions. Despite ongoing debates surrounding this Hadith, some scholars maintain that the Prophet's statement was made during a period of paganism when similar figures were created for idol worship.

In some instances, references have been made to Hadiths considered weak, suspicious, or contentious by Muslim scholars. These Hadiths have contributed to misunderstandings of Islamic ideals and a general misconception of the religion. Importantly, according to Islamic teaching, not everyone is qualified to analyze or draw conclusions about contentious issues.

The Implementation of the Doctrine on Armed Conflict and Heritage Protection: The Case of Al-Mahdi

Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi was sentenced for the war crime of deliberately directing attacks that led to the destruction of ten religious and historical monuments. By the age of 12, he had mastered the Quran and its interpretation, achieving a knowledge level comparable to that of an imam.⁴⁹ This case marked the first time the International Criminal Court (ICC) was called upon to pass judgment on the destruction of cultural monuments, categorizing such acts as war crimes.⁵⁰ Al Mahdi received a sentence of nine years in prison and was ordered to pay €2.7 million in compensation, taking into account his admission of guilt.⁵¹

Al Mahdi was the leader of Hesba, one of four command structures within the Ansar Dine organization, which had seized control of northern Mali and had ties to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).⁵² Like other al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations, Ansar Dine aims to establish sharia rule by gaining notoriety through spectacular acts, attracting new supporters, and demonstrating its zeal and effectiveness to existing followers.⁵³

As the head of Hesba, Al Mahdi was responsible for destroying beliefs that contradicted Islam. He was directed by Iyad Ag Ghali, the commander of Ansar Dine, to destroy the monuments. During discussions leading up to these attacks, Al Mahdi—viewed as an authority on religious matters—warned others of Sharia law, which states that suppressing vice cannot justify creating equal or greater harm. He cautioned the members of Ansar Dine that a greater misfortune would befall the people following the destruction of the mausoleums, particularly due to inciting hatred

⁴⁸ Hadis Sahih, Al-Bukhari 7558

⁴⁹ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.

⁵⁰ ICC, *Prosecutor v. Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi*, ICC-01/12-01/15, Summary of the Judgment and Sentence in case, September 27, 2016.

⁵¹ ICC, *Prosecutor v. Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi*.

⁵² ICC, *Prosecutor v. Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi*.

⁵³ Stanford University, Stanford, and California 94305, "MMP: Ansar Dine," [cisac.fsi.stanford.edu](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-dine#highlight_text_7833), n.d., https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-dine#highlight_text_7833.



among the local population. Despite believing that the destruction lacked legal justification under Sharia, he proceeded with the demolition. The Chamber regarded his involvement as an endorsement, as he was responsible for all aspects of the operation, including planning the demolition sequence, organizing logistics, and publicly defending the attacks.⁵⁴

The Chamber took into account Al Mahdi's initial reluctance to destroy the sites when determining his punishment. They acknowledged his complete involvement in the destruction but also appreciated his early resistance. Furthermore, Al Mahdi accepted responsibility for his actions and expressed remorse from his first interviews with the prosecution. The Chamber noted that his prompt and sincere admission of guilt reflected a genuine desire to take responsibility for his actions and show heartfelt remorse. This acknowledgment likely expedited the case's resolution, conserving court time and resources while minimizing the emotional burden on witnesses and victims.

Additionally, by admitting the extent of the destruction, his acknowledgment could facilitate peace and harmony in northern Mali by alleviating the moral distress of the victims. Ultimately, such admissions may deter others in Mali and beyond from committing similar crimes.⁵⁵ Al Mahdi urged that individuals should not be associated with the kinds of activities he engaged in, as they claim to serve a greater purpose while ultimately inflicting suffering on humanity.

When asked how to protect young people from radical influences, Al Mahdi's response impressed Mr. Mayombo Kassongo, the legal representative of the victims, who considered the trial exemplary. Al Mahdi asserted that while he believes Muslim nations should be governed by Islamic teachings encompassing both religious and political elements, this belief stems from Sharia's establishment of universal principles applicable at all times and in all places.

He advised young people to focus on their goals, aspirations, nation, and religion, emphasizing that religion is a personal matter. A healthy and responsible youth, he argued, recognizes that joining extremist Islamic groups serves no purpose and is built upon the pillars of faith, trust, and hope. He rejected the notion that young people are merely naive followers who need to be controlled. He added that these broader principles, drawn from the Prophet's teachings and the sacred texts of the Quran, allow lawmakers the flexibility to enact legislation relevant to various situations. Sharia does not require strict adherence to historical traditions or their exact application to contemporary circumstances. Importantly, Islam demands a high level of understanding of Sharia for anyone seeking to hold political office.⁵⁶

Analysis of Al Mahdi's method of interpretation

As elaborated above, Al Mahdi as the accused plead guilty in the trial proceeding, in which according to The Chamber, despite pleading guilty, Al Mahdi was first reluctant to destruct the mausoleums, indicating that he did not entirely justify the Mausoleums' destruction action of Ansar Dine. In an interview with UNESCO, he clarified his stance during the occurrence of the crime that, "[i] thought such an action was not appropriate", and he clearly repudiate the method of interpretation that was utilized by the other members of the Ansar Dine especially because it led to a wrong conclusion of the Sharia Law, "[t]here was no one in the groups I joined who had a greater understanding of Sharia than I had".⁵⁷

⁵⁴ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.

⁵⁵ ICC, *Prosecutor v. Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi*, ICC-01/12-01/15, Judgment and Sentence, September 27, 2016.

⁵⁶ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.

⁵⁷ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.



Moreover, he further elaborated that even though the Fatwa prohibits people to establish tombs higher than one chibr or ten centimeters above the ground, however, this fatwa is not applicable to existing graves; it is solely applicable to new tombs.⁵⁸ In addition to this, according to Al Mahdi, destroying Mausoleums is not legally justified under Sharia Law and does not possess any legal basis.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, despite nothing in the Sharia Law encouraging or justifying the destruction of the Mausoleums, it is mentioned in Hadits that when the Prophet was alive, he commanded the people to destruct a building in the Dzul Khalasah region, with regard to the reason for the destruction of the building, is because that place is classified as a place of idol worship. Besides in the Hadits, particularly in Article 58 of Al-Anbiya, it is mentioned that "[i]brahim smashed the idols to pieces", which in this case, the Ansar Dine comprehended the previously mentioned article in a literal sense without taking into account other considerations regarding the risk of harming the lives of the society, and implement it as a justification for their actions. The terminology of "idol" is comprehended as properties that are not in line with their Islamic school of thought and caused the Ansar Dine group to destroy the mosques, even though mosques are the player place of Muslims.

Based on the foregoing research, it can be concluded that the Ansar Dine used a literal method of interpretation, which is consistent with the Ansar Dine's believed ideology known as Salafi jihadism.⁶⁰ Although innovation is permitted in Islamic teachings in order to make existing Islamic Law compatible with the current situation and in line with new developments in the modern world, an innovation that is prohibited under Salafi jihadism causes the Ansar Dine to achieve its goal of spreading Sharia by disregarding any new developments in society and solely emphasizing God's sovereignty, and thus everything that is not directly from God is considered as illegal.

The Discrepancy of Interpretation Between Al Mahdi Compared to Islamic Teachings on Armed Conflict and Heritage Protection

Islam seeks to prevent the corruption of the earth, which includes the destruction of cultural heritage. Muslim jurists have argued that destroying cultural heritage can be seen as an act of corruption, consistent with the meanings in Qur'anic verses.⁶¹ The case of Al Mahdi illustrates how different interpretative methodologies can lead to varied beliefs within Islam. In this instance, Al Mahdi and Ansar Dine employed a literal method of interpretation, meaning they took the words of God and the Prophet at face value.

This radical belief often stems from a literal interpretation of specific verses, such as QS. An-Nisa verse 76 and QS. Al-Anfal verse 39, portrays non-believers as evil and unjust, thereby justifying their fight against them. By adhering strictly to these verses without considering the broader context, they conclude that non-Muslims must be banished. However, many other verses in the Qur'an emphasize the importance of maintaining peace whenever possible. The actions of Al Mahdi and Ansar Dine are not justified and condemned in the Qur'an.

This condemnation is evident in Qur'an surah Al-Baqarah verse 114:

"And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in places for the worship of Allah, Allah's name should be celebrated? - whose zeal is (in fact) to ruin them? It was not fitting that such

⁵⁸ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.

⁵⁹ UNESCO, "Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi.

⁶⁰Giovanni Faleg and Postdoctoral Fellow, "Salafi Jihadism in Africa," 2021, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_12_2021.pdf.

⁶¹ Alshehaby, Fatimah. "Cultural Heritage Protection in Islamic Tradition." International Journal of Cultural Property 27, no. 3 (2020), 291–322, <doi:10.1017/S0940739120000259>



should themselves enter them except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to come, an exceeding torment.”⁶²

The interpretation of this verse suggests that the term ‘masājid’ refers to ‘houses of worship’ for all religions,⁶³ not just mosques or Islamic holy places. Another verse that condemns the actions of Al Mahdi and Ansar Dine is Qur'an surah Al-Hajj verse 40:

“(They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, - (for no cause) except that they say, ‘our Lord is Allah.’ Did not Allah check one set of people using another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); - for verily Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will).”⁶⁴

Islam and the Qur'an uphold the value of diversity and differences in the world, as evidenced by the many verses condemning discrimination. Unfortunately, extremist individuals and groups have misinterpreted Islamic sources to legitimize their radical actions. To prevent such radical events from occurring in the future, it is crucial to address the misinterpretation of the Qur'an. Contextual interpretation minimizes the chance of misunderstanding Qur'anic verses by considering the provision within its context and interpreting it alongside other provisions.⁶⁵ For example, the failure to acknowledge QS. Al-Baqarah 114 and QS. Al-Hajj 40 leads to misinterpretations when carrying out jihad based solely on QS. An-Nisa verse 76 and QS. Al-Anfal verse 39.

On the topic of armed conflict and heritage protection, Christian Catholicism and Lutheranism provide distinct perspectives. During the colonization period, colonizers often used the spread of Catholicism to justify their conquests. In the contemporary era, however, the Catholic Church encourages its followers to share God's salvation without resorting to destruction of beliefs that diverge from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Consequently, the Catholic Church asserts that wars or any form of force are not permissible unless they adhere to Augustine's just war theory, which emphasizes proportionality. This principle states that the severity of the force used must be proportionate to the outcome, including potential casualties.⁶⁶ For instance, the Catholic Church has strongly condemned the use of force at the Gaza-Israel border due to the disproportionate nature of the force relative to the outcomes, which resulted in casualties.⁶⁷ Therefore, any military action must meet the prerequisites established by Augustine to be considered justified in the eyes of the Catholic Church.

Currently, there is no large-scale conflict specifically aimed at spreading Christianity. The issues that have been highlighted, such as “anti-abortion” terrorism and the fusion of Christianity

⁶² The Holy Quran 2: 114.

⁶³ Asad, Muhammed. “Message of The Quran.” The Book Foundation (2005)

⁶⁴ The Holy Quran 22: 40.

⁶⁵ Lydia Scholz, “Contextual Interpretation,” Wikis der Freien Universität Berlin, (September 10, 2022), <https://wikis.fu-berlin.de/display/oncomment/Contextual+ Interpretation>

⁶⁶ Amaya Amell, “The Theory of Just War and International Law: From Saint Augustine, through Francisco de Vitoria, to Present,” *Hispanic Journal* 38, no. 1 (2017): 63–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26535329>.

⁶⁷ CNA, “Catholic Leaders Condemn Use of Disproportionate Force at Gaza-Israel Border,” Catholic News Agency (2018), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/38418/catholic-leaders-condemn-use-of-disproportionate-force-at-gaza-israel-border>



with white racism,⁶⁸ do not represent broad religious conflicts. For instance, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) seeks to forcibly convert people to Christianity,⁶⁹ but this motivation is often tied more to goals of liberation than to religious doctrine. The NLFT's flag and emblem lack Christian symbols, and their constitution includes only a few references to Christianity in its establishment.⁷⁰

In the case of the Breivik Massacre in 2011, it was perpetrated by an individual and can be classified more accurately as a hate crime against Muslims rather than an effort to spread Christianity. Historically, there have been dogmatic or theological teachings in Christianity that indirectly endorse waging war against pagan gods.⁷¹ A notable example is found in the story of Gideon in the Book of Judges (6:25-26), where God instructs Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal during the oppression of the Midianites and replace it with an altar for Himself.⁷² In terms of armed conflict, it is well-documented that the Israelites, viewed as the chosen people, were in a state of constant warfare due to various tribes blocking their entry into Canaan, the land promised to them by God.⁷³

God's initial command to the Israelites was that they must overthrow any kin preventing their entry into Canaan and destroy their sacred pillars to ensure that Israelites do not bow to these pagan gods. While it can be understood that the Israelites initially viewed their conflict with pagans as part of Israel's divine mission, whether such traditions should continue is debatable and can be reassessed through the lens of contemporary Christian morality and conscience. For example, the brutal Crusades against the Ottomans, which were initially justified as attempts to spread Christianity, are now condemned by Lutheranism. This evolution in Lutheran thought emphasizes that disruptions of peace are undesirable and that armed conflict should only be waged if forced upon us. Initiating war against neighbors of different faiths is deemed unacceptable.

Overall, Lutheranism continues to denounce practices that violate conscience and morality based on biblical teachings. A deprivation of human rights during armed conflict is fundamentally against these teachings. This stance is reflected in events from the 1918 Finland Civil War to the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.⁷⁴ Typically, the church supports the state and government during internal rebellions like the one in Finland. However, the church, which advocates for the poor and oppressed, must evaluate whether the state's legislation has caused oppression that led to rebellion. In such cases, the state must adopt a more just approach

⁶⁸ Marek Čejka, "CHRISTIAN ARMED GROUPS," *Obrana a Strategie: Defence and Strategy*, 20, no 2 (2020), 61–78, <https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.20.2020.02.061-078>

⁶⁹South Asia Terrorism Portal, "National Liberation Front of Tripura, India, South Asia Terrorism Portal," www.satp.org, (2012-2017), https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/tripura/terrorist_outfits/NLFT.HTM.

⁷⁰ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), "Norway Massacre: Court Weighs Mass Killer Breivik's Application for Parole | DW | 18.01.2022," DW.COM, January 18, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/norway-massacre-court-weighs-mass-killer-breiviks-application-for-parole/a-60456049>.

⁷¹ Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, Judgment 6:25-26, (New York: American Bible Society, n.d.).

⁷² Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, Judgment 6:25-26, (New York: American Bible Society, n.d.).

⁷³ E Hackmann, "The Just War and Lutheran Theology," *Issue 1 Article 11*, no. 1 (1985), 1–15, p. 4, <<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2131&context=consensus>>

⁷⁴C W Heathcote, "The Lutheran Church and the Civil War", Burlington, Iowa, Lutheran Literary Board (1919), p.73.



to protect the interests of both the powerful and the vulnerable.⁷⁵

The church, however, is not a subordinate of the state and has the authority to speak out against it. During the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, the United States government faced criticism for what many deemed unjust conflicts. In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Evangelical Church, rooted in the Augsburg Confession, has condemned this action, asserting that Lutheranism does not recognize any alternative to peace and urging Russia to withdraw.⁷⁶

According to Christian doctrine, a just war is defined as one that "...stops short of countenancing the utter destruction of the adversaries and tends to limit the incidence of violence through codes of right conduct, non-combatant immunity, and other humanitarian restrictions." A just war is thus characterized as an unavoidable conflict between states, deemed necessary due to grave injustice, with the sole aim of restoring justice to the previous status quo. Preemptive self-defense or initiating an offensive is not considered a valid justification for a just war.⁷⁷

Analysis of Christianity Method of Bible Interpretation: Christian Catholicism and Christian Lutheranism

The Catholic Church utilizes the concept of the Holy Trinity as a fundamental basis for interpreting the Holy Bible and has established specific guidelines for Catholics when engaging with Scripture, as outlined in the Magisterium of the Church.⁷⁸ According to this Magisterium, there are three essential principles for interpretation. First, the text of the Holy Bible should be read in context, treating it as a cohesive whole while considering the interconnections among its various elements. Second, the living tradition of the Church must be acknowledged as a crucial component in understanding the Bible. Third, faith should serve as a lens through which to interpret the text.

The Catholic Church emphasizes a contextual method of interpretation, which considers the broader contexts and themes present in Scripture. This approach is exemplified by the use of highly symbolic, metaphorical, and hyperbolic language within the texts. For instance, in Matthew 5:30, it states, "If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away." This passage does not literally instruct individuals to sever their hand if they sin. Instead, by recognizing the hyperbolic nature of this statement, it becomes clear that God intends for Catholics to avoid sin, as it can lead to detrimental consequences.⁷⁹

Furthermore, this contextual method of interpretation can serve as a protective measure against extremist groups that misappropriate religion while still upholding the core values of Catholicism. It also enables a consideration of contemporary societal values, particularly concerning the recognition of human rights as established by international legal instruments, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Christian Lutheranism Analysis

Lutheranism in general is not such a legalist interpreter Christianity branch as they even

⁷⁵C W Heathcote, "The Lutheran Church and the Civil War".

⁷⁶ The Lutheran World Federation, "Ukraine: Lutheran Churches across the World Call for Peace and Support," The Lutheran World Federation, (February 28, 2022), <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/ukraine-lutheran-churches-across-world-call-peace-and-support>.

⁷⁷ Nigel Biggar, "In Defence of Just War: Christian Tradition, Controversies, and Cases," *De Ethica* 2, no. 1 (2015), 5–17, <https://doi.org/10.3384/de-ethica.2001-8819.15215>

⁷⁸ Catholics Team, "What Do Catholics Believe about the Bible?" About Catholic, accessed September 10, 2022, <https://www.aboutcatholics.com/beliefs/catholics-believe-bible/>.

⁷⁹ Catholics Team, "What Do Catholics Believe about the Bible?".



separated from the Catholic due to their strict legal organization and doctrines.⁸⁰ Martin Luther indeed built the religion upon *sola scriptura* as mentioned in the Augsburg Confession⁸¹ or 'Scripture alone' which would be a very legalist literature interpretation and would lead to conflict in the name of Christianity. Lutheranism today centralizes interpretation of law and the bible on conscience, though in the context of conscience as a specific human capability to apply knowledge to individual cases based from the soul of a human.⁸²

There is also an extra wall that while it is very based on conscience, it disdains arrogance. Luther took a brute approach on Aristotle's attempt in *Physics, Metaphysics, Concerning the Soul, and Ethics*,⁸³ which tried to convince churches at the time that earth was the center of the universe and instill the overall arrogance of intellect mankind.⁸⁴ What was contrary to this is that Luther proposes a more arrogant view on righteous deeds, standing on a belief that we are made righteous by faith and because of it the things we do would be--in a sense--righteous.⁸⁵

This basis of conscience and ability to apply knowledge has contributed highly to the western intellectual development. It also leads to the modern consensus in Lutheranism that many wars are unjust and the disdain for attacks of a state that is preemptive or provocative instead of based on self-defense. However, due to its accommodation of contemporary ideas but clashing views on *sola scriptura* or how believers are righteous by faith,⁸⁶ it is not impossible for interpretation to be led astray in the future. Regardless, humans possess different levels of conscience and ability to apply knowledge, and may lead to separatist interpretations of bible teaching within the Lutheran Church itself. It is not an exaggeration to say that 'conscience' on the morality of conflict and just war may spiral back to the early Christian days in the years ahead, and it is only through a continuous recall of how Lutheranism is built from the critic of the bloody wars Christians have waged may we prevent another straying interpretation of how to serve Christian faith.

Conclusion

Contemporary geopolitical conflicts increasingly reveal a trend where both state and non-state actors utilize religious justifications in armed confrontations. This phenomenon spans various denominational boundaries, with both Islamic and Christian separatist movements exhibiting a paradoxical inclination toward secularization through their advocacy for the separation of religious doctrine from governmental legislation. The inherent doctrinal diversity within major world religions facilitates interpretive frameworks that accommodate both progressive theological adaptations and fundamentalist adherence to traditional scriptural interpretations.

The case of Al Mahdi, associated with the Al Qaeda-linked organization Ansar Dine, exemplifies the complex theological reasoning that can arise within extremist contexts. His theological stance, which diverges from the views of Ansar Dine's leadership under Iyad Ag Ghali,

⁸⁰ Heinrich Scholler, "Martin Luther on Jurisprudence—Freedom, Conscience, Law," *Valparaiso University Law Review* 15 (1981): 265–82.

⁸¹ Nils Gilje, "The Lutheran Ethic and the Spirit of Early Modern Science," *Were We Ever Protestants?* 2019, 289–310, <https://doi.org/10.1515/97831110600544-017>

⁸² Heinrich Scholler, "Martin Luther on Jurisprudence—Freedom, Conscience, Law,"

⁸³ Nils Gilje, "The Lutheran Ethic and the Spirit of Early Modern Science".

⁸⁴ Britannica, "Aristotle - Physics and Metaphysics | Britannica," in *Www.britannica.com*, accessed September 10, 2022, <<http://britannica.com/biography/Aristotle/Physics-and-metaphysics>>

⁸⁵ Nils Gilje, "The Lutheran Ethic and the Spirit of Early Modern Science,"

⁸⁶ Nils Gilje, "The Lutheran Ethic and the Spirit of Early Modern Science".



illustrates the principle that suppressing one transgression may inadvertently lead to more significant moral infractions. Notably, Al Mahdi's later acknowledgment of his radical interpretive approach, along with his explicit discouragement of youth involvement in such activities, signifies a recognition of the potential disconnect between extremist interpretations and humanitarian outcomes.

These observations highlight the urgent need for improved hermeneutical frameworks that can mitigate the risk of doctrinal deviation from foundational religious teachings. While theological pluralism and interpretive diversity remain intrinsic to religious discourse, academic and religious institutions must prioritize the examination of historical context and original theological intentions. This is essential to prevent the misuse of religious texts for purposes that contradict their fundamental ethical principles. Such measures are vital for preserving the integrity of religious scholarship and safeguarding sacred texts against co-optation by ideological extremism.

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Gracella Chafrina: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing -original Draft. **Stephani Wijayawati:** Supervision, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, **Alya Nabila Ridhanti:** Supervision, Writing - review & editing, **Vernanda Jessica Hendri:** Methodology, Writing - review & editing.

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The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request

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