

# Response to Objections from a Muslim

Ankerberg Staff Writer

Dear Sir:

We want to thank you for your recent letter. In response to your letter, may we comment point by point?

You have said of the booklet *The Facts On Islam*<sup>1</sup> you are not sure whether “to laugh at the ignorant statements or to cry because of the deliberate lies.” Of course, we will be happy to correct any factual errors (as opposed to interpretative differences) if you would be so kind to point these out. Hundreds of scholars have spent a lifetime studying Islam. They do not always agree and sometimes they make errors. It is always possible that we have also made errors and would appreciate the chance to make any needed corrections.

Let us assure you that our motive was not, in any way, to produce a booklet that contained distortion or lies. A lie is defined as a “false statement made with the purpose of deceiving.”

It would seem the problem between us is one of a priori assumption and subsequent interpretation based on that assumption. For example, as long as Muslims truly believe that the God of the Bible and the God of Islam are the same God, it is virtually impossible that they would interpret the conclusions in our booklet as anything else but “distortion,” “false,” and “lies.” If the Koran is God’s latest revelation and it denies that God has a Son, then obviously, Christians must have tampered with the Bible—and all non-Koranic conclusions derived from the Bible are, by definition, false.

In other words, it is the assumption of Islam—that Allah really is the author of both the Bible and the Koran and that Jehovah and Allah are one in the same—that conditions and interprets the Muslim response to our booklet. However, the real question is, “Is the assumption valid?” Only Muslims think it is. Obviously, if Muslims are incorrect in this assumption, then the conclusions in our booklet could be correct.

In light of their contrary premises and beliefs, perhaps it is best that Muslims and Christians should “agree to disagree.” From a Christian perspective, it is difficult for Muslims and Christians to dialogue effectively if Muslims insist upon changing the nature and attributes of the biblical God into those of the Koranic Allah. But biblical teaching concerning God cannot be so easily disposed, as we will later show. Even scholars of comparative religion agree that the Muslim and Christian concepts of God are not the same. It is only Muslim belief, based on the teachings in the Koran, that accepts a belief that Allah is the one true God, making Jehovah the same deity (now presumably corrupted by Christians.)

Have Muslims ever proven that Christians distorted God’s nature as revealed in the Bible? No. This is why Christians believe it is the biblical God who is the one true God—and not Allah.

Among the specific charges you make are: “Among the ‘facts’ mentioned in your book is the blasphemy that ‘Allah’ is one of the Arab pagan Gods! You borrowed this one, like the others, from Anis Shorosh.”

But, in fact, never did we state that “Allah is [currently] one of the Arab pagan Gods.” We were careful to point out that the current conception of Allah is different from the earlier

pagan deity named Allah. Further, we did not borrow this from Dr. Shorrosh. We noted the fact being referenced in several texts on comparative religion.

When you say, “You can ask the Christians and Jews who speak Arabic: whom do you worship?... They will tell you Allah”, this is a good illustration of the semantic problems that arise when God-concepts are confused.

Allah as a generic term for God is one thing. But for Muslims the term “Allah” is imbued with the meaning that the Koran and Muslim tradition give it—Allah is a specific kind of deity (e.g., Unitarian) with specific attributes. He is not the Christian God who is trinitarian and also who has specific attributes, some of which are different from Allah’s.

The Christian God and the God of Islam are simply not the same God. Therefore, true Christians and Jews who speak Arabic will *not* tell you they worship Allah if by Allah you mean the God of Islam. Christians will tell you they worship the God of the Bible and Jews will tell you they worship the God of the Old Testament. But neither the God of the Old Testament or the New Testament is the God of the Koran. (Again, Allah may be one of the standard Arabic words for the generic term God—but one cannot logically conclude from this that the God of Islam (Allah) and the God of the Bible (Jehovah) are the same God.)

You have kindly encouraged us to “come and worship the God worshiped by Jesus and by all the prophets. The God to whom Jesus fell to face and prayed. The God to whom Jesus cried for help. The God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Your God and my God. The Creator of all.”

But if, as Christians, we are committed to the biblical God, who warns and commands us in Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other Gods before me,” how can we possibly come and worship a different God? If we did, we would be guilty of idolatry.

This illustrates why as Muslims and Christians we must learn to “agree to disagree.” Based on their respective religious traditions, neither committed Muslims nor Christians can logically be expected to change their beliefs. To be a “Christian” requires obedience to the Person and teachings of the Jesus of the New Testament—not the Jesus of the Koran. Why? Because the great preponderance of the textual and archaeological data require the conclusion that the gospels are accurate portrayals of the historical Jesus. This is why it is a historical fact that Jesus did and taught what the New Testament documents say he did and taught.

Those who disagree should be able to offer objective, independently established evidence to the contrary before they can expect others to accept their conclusions. Unfortunately, the frequently rationalistic and biased critical conclusions of liberal Christian scholarship are simply not objective, nor are they independently established, nor are they very convincing.

But to return to your earlier argument re: a “pagan” Allah, the paganism of pre-Islamic religion and its connection to Islam are well known. But unfortunately, as Dr. Morey remarks:

Since the faith of Islam would deem it blasphemous to even suggest that the teachings of Muhammad and the Quran find their source in earthly pre-Islamic custom, culture, and religion, no Muslim scholars did any research on what pre-Islamic Arabia was like.

It was thus left to Western scholars since the turn of the century to discover the cultural and literary sources that Muhammad used in the construction of his religion and of the Quran itself.

This is why every Western reference work on Islam begins with a section on pre-Islamic Arabia and its influence on the teachings and religious rites of Muhammad. The historical background of Islam cannot be ignored.

Indeed, if sources for Islam can be found in pre-Islamic Arabian culture, custom, and religion, then the doctrine that Muhammad's faith and the Quran were brought down from Heaven and do not have any earthly human origin would be at stake.

Muslims frequently argue in a circle at this point. They argue that since the faith of Islam and the Quran were sent down out of Heaven, there can be no earthly sources or materials that were used in their construction. Thus they begin with the assumption that such things cannot be.

But Western scholarship cannot make such a gratuitous assumption. As we shall see, the Islamic faith and the Quran itself can be completely and sufficiently explained in terms of pre-Islamic Arabian culture, custom, and religion.

Special attention should be made to the pioneering work of Julius Wellhausen, Theodor Noldeke, Joseph Halevy, Edward Glaser, William F. Albright, Frank P. Albright, Richard Bell, J. Arberry, Wendell Phillips, W. Montgomery Watt, Alfred Guillaume, Arthur Jeffery, etc.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the paganism of pre-Islamic religion and its connection to Islam have long been documented. For example, the *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*, states the following concerning Allah:

Allah was a central figure in the pre-Islamic pantheon, but he seems not to have been worshiped as the chief deity. The Quran (Sura 53:19-20) mentions three deities who were apparently thought to be daughters of Allah: Manat, Al-Lat, and Al-Uzza, who were widely venerated. This notion parallels the position of *Baal* in the Northwest Semitic pantheon (Gordon). The Meccans regarded Allah as the creator and possibly the controller of the weather, functions appropriate to the head of a pantheon (see Sura 13:16; 29:61, 63; 31:25; 43:9-19). Jinn were also thought to be related to Allah (Sura 37:158) and to associate with him in his activities (Sura 6:100)... In the Quran God is seen as above his creation, directing it by his will. He guides whom he wills and leads into error whom he wills (Sura 13:27; 74:31), sealing the hearts of sinners (Sura 7:99-100).<sup>3</sup>

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* asserts that during Muhammad's time, "some men regarded Allah as a 'high god' who stood above lesser deities" (Vol. 12, p. 606). It also notes that "the earliest passages of the Quran... call on [the Meccans]... to be grateful and to worship 'the Lord of the Kabah,' who was thus identified with God" (ibid.).

In Volume 9, page 927, it observes: "The area of Mecca was a sacrosanct territory that other tribes feared to attack, and its little temple, the Kabah, sacred to a shadowy deity known simply as 'the god' (Allah, probably from Al-Ilah, the god, and cognate with Aramaic Alaha), had been skillfully raised by the Quraysh to the position of an Arabian pantheon in which all the gods were worshiped (it even included Christian icons, or pictures) and in which the Arab tribes came on pilgrimage to worship and to trade....By the time that Muhammad was born,...the influence of both Judaism and Christianity was experienced even in the inner areas of Arabia. A general notion of a supreme and sovereign deity seems to have been held by many Arabs, and some were identifying the God of the Jews and Christians with Allah, the Lord of the Kabah."

This is why Dr. Robert Morey states in his book on Islam, "The archaeological and linguistic work that has been done since the latter part of the 19th century has unearthed overwhelming evidence that Muhammad constructed his religion in the Quran from preexisting material in Arabian culture."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Morey also points out that some 360 gods were

represented at the Kabah, and that a new deity could be added if a traveler came into town and wanted to worship his own god at the holy site.

Morey also points out the following:

Neither is “Allah” a Hebrew or Greek word for God as found in the Bible. Allah is a purely Arabic term used in reference to an Arabian deity.

*Hasting's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* states, “‘Allah’ is a proper name, applicable only to their [i.e., Arab] peculiar God” [Vol. 1, p. 326].

According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, “‘Allah’ is a pre-Islamic name...corresponding to the Babylonian Bel (Baal) [Paul Meagher, et. al., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 117].<sup>5</sup>

He continues,

Due to past experiences with recalcitrant students who found it hard to believe that ‘Allah’ was a pagan name for a peculiar pagan Arabian deity in pre-Islamic times, the following citations are given:

“Allah is found...in Arabic inscriptions prior to Islam” [*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 1, p. 643].

“Allah was known to the pre-Islamic Arab; he was one of the Meccan deities” [Gibb, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1, p. 406].<sup>6</sup>

Like us, he also cites Dr. W. Montgomery Watt, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Edinburgh University and visiting professor of Islamic studies at College de France, Georgetown University and the University of Toronto—who has done extensive work on the pre-Islamic concept of Allah. Montgomery concluded:

In recent years I have become increasingly convinced that for an adequate understanding of the career of Muhammad and the origins of Islam great importance must be attached to the existence in Mecca of belief in Allah as a “high god.” [Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca*, p. vii]<sup>7</sup>

Morey further comments upon the “daughters of Allah” which we referred to earlier:

The name Allah was used as the personal name of the moon god versus other titles that could be given to him.

Allah, the moon god, was married to the sun-goddess. Together they produced three goddesses who were called “the daughters of Allah.” These three goddesses were called Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat.

The “daughters of Allah,” along with Allah and the sun goddesses were viewed as “high” gods. That is, they were viewed as being at the top of the Pantheon of Arabian deities.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Morey concludes:

“The significance of the pre-Islamic source of the name Allah cannot be overestimated” and, “The Quran’s concept of deity evolved out of the pre-Islamic pagan religion of Allah-worship. It is so uniquely Arab that it cannot be simply reduced to Jewish or Christian beliefs.”<sup>9</sup>

In light of all this, we are forced to agree that:

In the field of comparative religions, it is understood that each of major religions of mankind has its own peculiar concept of deity. In other words, all religions do not worship the same God under different names.

The sloppy thinking that would ignore the essential differences which divide world religions is an insult to the uniqueness of these religions.<sup>10</sup>

Now let us turn to an even more important issue in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Is it truly possible for Muslims to accept what the Koran teaches *concerning* the Bible—and to simultaneously reject *what* the Bible teaches? We discussed this subject in our booklet.

In a paper delivered September 29, 1989, Dr. Gleason L. Archer also made a number of relevant observations on this topic. He shows that the Koran accepts the plenary inspiration of the Old Testament and the Gospels of the New Testament as being the authoritative Word of God. The Koran itself it said to be a verification of the contents of the teachings of the Bible.

Dr. Archer alleges that the efforts of present day Muslim apologists to discredit the teachings of the Bible places them in an impossible position of contradicting the Koran.

For example, in Sura 5 Muslims are commanded to consult the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures for confirmation of Muhammad's revelations in the Koran. Yet, Muslims characteristically attempt to discredit the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, which their own Bible *affirms* to be the Word of God. This is tantamount to rejecting the authority of the Koran that they claim to defend.

Dr. Archer also points out that the only solution to the dilemma is if the text of the Old and New Testament that we now possess is "radically different" from that which existed in the period of Muhammad. Citing a variety of manuscripts of the New and Old Testament (Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, etc.) he proves that the Bible we now possess is the same Bible that existed in Muhammad's time. He then reveals:

In view of this universally acknowledged evidence of the antiquity of the [biblical] text of Scripture, the same Scripture which we now have with us in the scholarly editions of the Bible in its original languages, it is completely out of the question that the Quran could have been referring to any other text than that which has been preserved to us down to the present time. No other conclusion can be drawn from these data but that the Quran certified the accuracy and binding authority of the Bible, even though in point of fact it differs from it essentially in its doctrine of God and of salvation. Any Muslim apologete, therefore, who seeks to discredit the text of the Bible in any way, puts himself in rejection of the authority of the Quran itself, for he implies the Quran is in error in regard to the Holy Bible! There is no way in which he can evade the charge of imputing error to the very Quran which he professes to uphold.

The problem this raises is obvious. The Koran and the Bible teach an entirely different theology concerning the nature of God (Trinitarian vs. Unitarian), the nature of Jesus Christ (incarnate God vs. a human only virgin-born prophet), and the nature of salvation (by grace through faith alone vs. faith and works).

In other words, the Bible and the Koran teach such entirely different religious philosophies they cannot possibly be reconciled. As Dr. Archer comments;

There remains only one credible explanation of this paradox: the author of the Quran did not really know the full or indeed the essential teaching of the Bible as it existed in the early 7th century A.D. This ignorance betrayed in the Quran would seem fatal to its claims of inerrant authority, and serves to make it clear that the Quran was indeed composed by Muhammad himself rather than having been revealed to him by God. The omniscient Lord of the universe could have never dictated the statements cited in the Suras above quoted, since they implied a harmony of doctrine between Bible and Quran which simply does not exist.

For example, in the Koran Jesus is a Muslim. But this is not the Jesus of the Bible—or history—as proven by the New Testament documents. In the Koran, God is one Person only—but again, this is not the Trinitarian God of the Bible.

In the Koran, salvation is achieved solely by faith and good works—but this is not the teaching of the Bible which stresses again and again that salvation comes only through the grace of God by faith alone. Biblically, good works are the product and not in any manner the cause of salvation. It is faith in the atoning death of Christ for our sins (alone) that saves men.

What all this means is that the Koran and Bible could not *possibly* be inspired by the same God.

Another problem is seen in Sura 16:101 and 2:105 which clearly teach that God supersedes and abrogates various Scriptures for other Scriptures. The immediate impression one receives is that Allah has the authority to change his mind or even contradict himself.

As Archer comments, “If so, this precludes the Muslim critic from attacking the credibility of the Bible itself on the basis of alleged contradictions between different passages. Yet we hasten to add that two propositions that contradict each other cannot both be true. A credible defense of Scripture must deal with alleged contradictions in such a way as to show that they are only apparent, not real—even though the Quran does not regard this defense is necessary.”

Finally, Dr. Archer shows that despite the claims of Muslim apologists that the Koran has not been accurately recorded or inerrantly transmitted:

This claim is however very difficult to sustain in light of the account given by Muslim authors considering the standardizing of the text of the Quran. In the *mishkatu' Imasabih* chapter 3 we are informed that by the command of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, the text of the Quran was “collected” by Zaid Ibn Thabit “from palm leaves and stones and from the breasts of those who had learned by heart” the various revelations. This earliest collection took place in A. H. 14, or 636 A.D. after Muhammad’s death. Abu Bakr’s copy was taken over by Caliph Umar after the former had died, according to Al Bukhari. Later it came into the possession of Hafsah, one of Muhammad’s widows. Some time afterward the next Caliph, Uthman, commissioned Zaid to make fresh copies of Hafsah’s manuscript and send it out to various centers of the Caliphate as the only authoritative text. The reason for this was that there were by this time so many discordant forms of various Suras even among the *Hafizun* disciples of the Prophet who had learned it by heart, that standardization was absolutely necessary if later schisms were to be avoided within the Muslim community. Qustalani even states that after Hafsah’s death her copy was torn in pieces by Mirwan, who was Governor of Medina, and so the identity of Uthman’s text with that of Abu Bakr is called in question. The only motive for Hafsah’s text to be destroyed could have been that it was believed to be dangerously deviant or defective from the standpoint of Governor Mirwan.... It should be added that the old cuphic script in which Arabic was then written was of rather uncertain interpretation. Not only did it lack any vocalization, but far more serious was the lack of diacritical dots to distinguish consonants like b, t and th and even n and y, all of which were written as a single vertical jog. Needless to say, the fact that active verbs and passive verbs are often identically written made for a good deal of disagreement as to what the written text really meant, until such time as the vowel points were added at some later period. These factors made for a great deal of disagreement far more serious than was the case with the Sopherim text of the Old Testament, which, to be sure, also lacked vowel points until the advent of the Massorets around 800 A.D., but which accurately distinguished the consonants in their writing system. In light of the foregoing data, it can only be said that the

problem of establishing the original, supposedly inspired, text of the Quran is far more serious than is the case with the Hebrew Old Testament, for which thousands of manuscript copies are still available for textual criticism ranging in age from the 2nd century B.C. to the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Our dear friends, let us assure you that we bear no ill will toward any Muslims all of whom are created in God's image and loved by Him. But we truly believe that Islamic teaching is a hindrance to accurate knowledge of God and true salvation. This is why open dialogue is so vital.

But unfortunately, today, in Muslim countries worldwide, Christian missions are prohibited by law, and Christians are still being persecuted by Islamic governments.

Let us ask you a question. Are Muslim missions restricted or denied permission to operate in America? Would they be in any nation where democratic or Christian principles rule? Muslims are free to proselytize as they choose.

Let us ask you another question. Do Muslim countries grant this courtesy to members of the Christian faith? Do you think this is an equitable situation? When Muslims have historically—and today—persecuted Christians and when Muslim scholars characteristically slander Christianity—e.g., using the false arguments of discredited liberal scholarship—(something you charge us with) do you think those charges are truly fair?

Our God commands us to do good to all men and to respect the image of God in them. But He also commands us to “preach the Gospel to all men” and to “contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). This was the intent in our booklet.

For six hundred years Christianity had *already* independently established its truth claims before the world. God declares that Christ's resurrection from the dead gave “proof to all men” of a coming day of judgment (Acts 17). Centuries later, Muhammad arrived claiming that Jesus was not God, that He was not resurrected from the dead and that Christianity was a false religion.

Christians have a right to defend their personal convictions. When anyone alleges that Christianity is a false religion, we think it is only fair that a response be allowed which includes the critical evaluation of the specific truth claims of those who make the allegations.

We do regret any unnecessary offense. We want to thank you again for your letter.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon, *The Facts on Islam* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991)

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Robert A. Morey, *Islam Unveiled* (Shermans Dale, PA: The Scholars Press), pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> Keith R. Crim, Roger A. Bullard, Larry D. Shinn, eds., *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* (Abingdon Press, 1981), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Morey, *Islam Unveiled*, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*