

THE DARK SIDE
OF ISLAM

R. C. SPROUL
AND
ABDUL SALEEB

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Dark Side of Islam

Copyright © 2003 by R. C. Sproul

Published by Crossway Books
a division of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Kirk DouPonce, UDG / DesignWorks, Sisters, Oregon

Cover photo: Richard T. Nowitz, National Geographic

First printing 2003

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sproul, R. C. (Robert Charles), 1939-

The dark side of Islam / R.C. Sproul and Abdul Saleeb.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-58134-441-4

1. Islam—Controversial literature. 2. Islam—Relations—Christianity. 3. Christianity and other religions—Islam. I. Saleeb, Abdul. II. Title.

BT1170.S67 2003

297—dc21

2003004798

LB	13	12	11	10	09	08	07	06	05	04	03			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

INTRODUCTION

R. C. Sproul: Since the events of September 11 and the beginning of America's war on terrorism, there has been an unprecedented interest in the theological tenets of Islam as well as sincere questions about the true nature of this faith that has taken on such violent overtones in the minds of many. This book is based on a series of conversations with my friend Abdul Saleeb (his pseudonym). In the first seven chapters we discuss the theological points of issue and of conflict between various manifestations of Islam and Christianity. In the final chapter, Saleeb offers his own perspective on the "dark side" of Islam.

Abdul was reared in the Muslim faith in a Muslim country, was converted to Christianity, and has studied thoroughly both Islam and Christianity. He has a degree in Christian theology and is the coauthor of *Answering Islam*, written with Norman Geisler.¹

Abdul Saleeb: I am very glad to finally see among Christians today an interest in understanding Islam. It is very important for the Christian church to know the challenge of Islam and

how to respond to it. There are 5 to 7 million Muslims living in America. Many Christians interact with Muslims every day—as colleagues, coworkers, neighbors. Thus, it is very important for every Christian to have a better understanding of Islam, what Muslims believe, and how to respond to the typical Muslim’s questions about the Christian faith.

It is also important not to stereotype Islam as a simple religion that promotes violence. That is not at all the case. In fact, Islam has a rich tradition in its intellectual history and in its cultural achievements. Throughout history, the Muslim world has produced many philosophers and scientists. We must take Islam seriously as a coherent, systematic faith that presents strong challenges against the Christian faith. After years of studying Islam, living and practicing it, and coauthoring a book on it, I have boiled down the fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity to four main areas: 1) the nature and the authority of the Bible, 2) the nature of God, 3) the view of humankind, and 4) the view of Christ. I hope that at least one thing will become clear in our conversations: Islam and Christianity have diametrically opposed ideas on these four important subjects.

Under each of these main headings we will discuss two sub-points. When we discuss Scripture (chapter 1), we will see that Muslims reject the authenticity of our Bible and therefore reject its authority.

When we discuss God, we will first talk about the Islamic rejection of the idea of the fatherhood of God (chapter 2). It is a great privilege as Christians that we can call God our heavenly Father. In fact, that is how Jesus taught us to pray. The

intimacy we can have with God as His children through faith in Jesus Christ is good news to us; however, when Muslims hear us referring to God as our Father or referring to ourselves as children of God, it does not sound like good news at all to them. We need to put ourselves in the shoes of Muslims and try to understand what they feel and think when they hear Christian terminology. Also and more importantly, Islam very strongly rejects any notion of the Trinity (chapter 3).

In our discussion of humankind we will address the Christian understanding of sin (chapter 4), including the doctrine of original sin, and the Christian understanding of salvation (chapter 5), both of which Islam rejects. How is humankind saved? How can we have a relationship with God? We will see that Islam and Christianity offer two radically different versions of how we can approach God.

Regarding our belief about Jesus Christ, we will talk about the Islamic denial of His death on the cross (chapter 6). Islam and the Qur'an very clearly reject Jesus' crucifixion. We will also discuss the Islamic denial of the deity of Jesus Christ (chapter 7).

Before we get into the details of this outline, let's discuss how the theological challenges that Islam presents to the Christian faith are coming not only from Muslims. In recent centuries, Western intellectuals, liberal Christian scholars, and Enlightenment thinkers have basically expressed the very same challenges to Christianity that Muslims have expressed for the past fourteen hundred years. It is understandable how Muslims can feel intellectually justified in rejecting Christianity. They might say, "We've been saying these things against Christianity for fourteen hundred years, and now your own Western schol-

ars and your own Christian writers are saying the same things that we have been saying.”

For example, the philosopher Immanuel Kant said this about the doctrine of the Trinity: “The doctrine of the Trinity provides nothing, absolutely nothing, of practical value even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses our understanding. It costs the student nothing to accept that we adore three or ten persons in the divinity. . . . Furthermore, this distinction offers absolutely no guidance for his conduct.”²

Thomas Jefferson wrote this about the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: “When we shall have done away with the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from the view the very simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned everything which has been taught since his day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples.”³ And a Muslim would say “Amen and amen” to Thomas Jefferson.

Dorothy Sayers, a Christian, wrote the following tongue-in-cheek play on the Athanasian Creed: “The Father is incomprehensible, the Son is incomprehensible, and the whole thing is incomprehensible. Trinity is something put in by theologians to make it more difficult—nothing to do with daily life or ethics.”⁴

This is the impression many Westerners have had about the doctrine of the Trinity. A Muslim might say, “Our holy book, the Qur’an, told us fourteen hundred years ago that there is

only one God, and we should worship that God; and that Christians have been misled from the teachings of Prophet Jesus when they have professed the doctrine of the Trinity. And now, after all these centuries, your own Western intellectuals and your own Christian scholars are rejecting such notions.”

Another fundamental conviction of the Christian faith is that we are born in a state of sin, that Adam’s sin has affected us. However, many surveys indicate that the vast majority of Americans—including evangelical Christians—believe that we are basically good people. Not many people adhere to the notion that somehow sin is deeply rooted within our very nature from the time of our conception. A Muslim might respond by saying, “We’ve been saying for all these years that humankind is basically good, and now Western people—including Christians—are coming to the same conclusions.”

Also, the Christian faith believes that it is only because of Jesus’ death on the cross that we can have any hope of salvation—our sins have been imputed to Him, and His righteousness has been imputed to us. Islam, on the other hand, claims that all people are responsible for their own actions and for their own salvation. Nobody else can pay for someone’s sin. Theologian C. Stephen Evans wrote a book several years ago called *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* that traces the Enlightenment rejection of orthodox Christianity. He entitles one of the factors in this rejection “Moral Difficulties with the Atonement.” He writes, “Theories of atonement, however, especially the popular forms of ‘substitutionary’ atonement, rather than being the solution, are often seen as part of

the problem. The idea that God forgives human sin by virtue of punishing an innocent figure in our place raises a host of moral difficulties. The Enlightenment emphasized a view of individuals as morally autonomous agents; I am responsible only for my own choices. Such a moral perspective poses many questions for theories of atonement: Why must God punish at all? If punishment is indeed necessary, how can guilt be transferred to someone else? How can the suffering of an innocent person take away my guilt?”⁵

Once again a Muslim would say, “That’s exactly what we’ve been saying for fourteen hundred years. It makes no sense that somebody else could take the punishment for my sins. I am responsible only for my own actions.” Islam in this regard fits very well the thinking of modern Enlightenment people who believe that we are all responsible for ourselves.

Islam has a great appeal to people of all backgrounds because it presents itself as a very rational, intellectual, easy-to-understand faith. Muslims believe Christianity is filled with mysteries and mumbo jumbo that nobody can understand—people simply have to take all of it by faith. But Islam presents itself as a very rational, simple religion—the religion of nature that any child can understand.

In a seminary course I recently taught, I asked the students, “Will somebody explain to me what the doctrine of the Trinity is?” At first not a single person answered. Finally, a woman raised her hand with fear and trembling and said, “Well, the doctrine of the Trinity means that there are three parts in God.”

I said, “Unfortunately, that’s what many people think. But that understanding is ancient heresy.” Many Christians do

not understand the basics of their own faith; they can hardly explain it to others or defend it against somebody who challenges them. And the challenges do not just come from Muslims. The challenges come from people all around us: agnostics, rationalists, Enlightenment thinkers, postmodernists, and Muslims.

Islam also challenges the orthodox Christian view of Jesus Christ. At Easter 1996, *Time Magazine*, *U.S. World and News Report*, and *Newsweek* all had the same cover story: Jesus Christ. The *U.S. News* cover read: "In search of Jesus: who was he? New appraisals of his life and its meaning." *Newsweek's* cover: "Rethinking the resurrection—a new debate about the risen Christ." And *Time's* cover: "The search for Jesus. Some scholars are debunking the Gospels. Now traditionalists are fighting back. What are Christians to believe?"⁶ Many of the articles refer to the Jesus Seminar and other liberal Christian scholars who deny all the fundamentals of the Christian faith with respect to the deity of Christ, His salvific work, and so on.

A Muslim might say, "The Qur'an, God's word to us fourteen hundred years ago, set the record straight. Your own Christian theologians and scholars and pastors and bishops are just now finding out that Jesus never claimed to be divine. He never said the things that you say He said." The Muslim might go on to say, "We didn't start the Jesus Seminar, for example. We didn't start liberal seminaries. Your own conclusions and research have led to what we have been saying all along—that Jesus was not God incarnate, and that many other things that orthodox Christianity has said about Christ are also untrue."

Once again, a Muslim would feel intellectually justified in

rejecting the Gospel. As Christians witness to Muslims, the defensive walls often go up. They say, “No thank you. What you are saying is not true. You had better read your own Christian scholars and see what they are saying.”

The orthodox Christian view of the Bible is under attack from Western scholars. As the *Time* headline noted, “Some scholars are debunking the Gospels.” A Muslim might say, “Your own scholars are saying that the Bible has been corrupted.” Most professors in major American universities believe that the Bible had many hands involved in editing and revising it, putting it together to promote a particular agenda and point of view. Some Muslims see this as supporting their view that both the Old and the New Testaments have been corrupted. Members of the Jesus Seminar vote on the supposed authenticity of Jesus’ sayings. I heard that there was only one sentence in the entire Gospel of John that they could agree was actually said by Christ. Everything else in John that was attributed to Christ was supposedly added later. A Muslim might say, “Even Christian scholars say that your Bible has been tampered with. It is no longer the pure Word of God, as the Qur’an is. And therefore, you should no longer believe it.”

Thus, Islam challenges the Christian view of the Bible, of God, of humankind, and of Christ. It is crucial for Christians to know what we believe and why we believe it. You may never meet a Muslim, but these questions and these issues are raised not just by Muslims but by many people from different walks of life. As Christians we need to be better equipped to explain and defend our own faith.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY ON SCRIPTURE

Saleeb: The Muslim viewpoint on scripture is this: because man is prone to being led astray, God has sent prophets throughout history, and these prophets have brought revelations from God. According to Islamic belief, all revelations from God previous to the Qur'an have been either lost or tampered with and corrupted. Thus they are no longer authentic or reliable and therefore no longer authoritative.

The Qur'an, according to Muslims, is God's final word to humanity and is the only authentic, authoritative, and reliable information from God because it is the only information that has not been tampered with and corrupted.

However, the situation is not quite this simple. Although this Islamic view is what Muslim theologians and apologists claim, the Qur'an itself gives us a very different picture. In fact, the Qur'an has many complimentary things to say about the previous Scriptures. Sura (chapter) 5:44, for example, says, "It was We [Allah] who revealed the Law to Moses: therein

was guidance and light.”¹ It goes on to say, “And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light” (v. 46). My favorite verse in the whole Qur’an is Sura 5:68: “Say, O People of the Book! [Jews and Christians] Ye have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.”

In the Qur’an Allah tells Muhammad, “If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee” (Sura 10:94). Sura 29:46 says, “And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better.” Later in that verse we read, “But say [to the People of the Book], ‘We believe in the Revelation [the Qur’an] which has come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).’”

Muhammad very much wanted to say to the Jews and Christians, “Listen, I am a monotheist. I am a prophet like Moses and Jesus. We are all alike. We worship the same God. My Qur’an is basically in confirmation of the previous Scriptures. We all agree on the essentials. The Qur’an is the final word from God, but the Law and the Gospel were also guidance and light and revelation and mercy from God to humanity.” However, since Muhammad himself was not very well educated, he did not have firsthand knowledge about the Christian and the Jewish Scriptures. Later in Islamic history, as Muslims came into contact with Jewish and Christian communities and began to read the Bible, they realized that

the Old and New Testaments contradict the Qur'an on very serious issues.

So Muslims had to come up with a theory to explain this situation. On the one hand, the Qur'an says that the previous Scriptures are the Word of God, and, according to the Qur'an, "No one can change the Word of God." On the other hand, the Scriptures from the Christians and Jews do not agree with the teachings of the Qur'an. What is the solution? The doctrine of *tahrif*, the Arabic word for corruption, claims that the Jews and Christians have corrupted their Scriptures, and that is why their Bible no longer agrees with the teachings of the Qur'an. And some Muslims say, "Your own scholars say the same thing: that Moses didn't write the Torah, that Jesus didn't say these things. These were all fabricated and put in the mouths of people like Christ and other folks."

Sproul: You once mentioned to me that the Qur'an speaks of Jesus' virgin birth, that Muhammad had talked about Christ's miracles, and about His being a wonderful prophet. I asked you, "Where did Muhammad get that information?" Your response was that Muslims believe Muhammad was getting separate, independent, divine revelation about these facts of Jesus' life.

But that is really not much evidence for the inspiration of Muhammad as a prophet—for him to be able to talk about information that was available long before he lived. Usually what authenticates a prophet is when he gives vivid descriptions of things that don't happen until long after he has prophesied them. One of the most astonishing things about the Bible—

this Bible that is supposedly so “corrupt”—is that, centuries before certain events take place, they are predicted, and then they are fulfilled with uncanny accuracy. Some people have calculated the odds against these prophecies being fulfilled fortuitously as being virtually astronomical. One of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of the Bible is the multitude of passages where detailed events that have not yet taken place are predicted—not vague, studied ambiguities about the future, but specific events—and then these predicted events come to pass. A striking example is Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews (Matthew 24). Nobody in Jesus’ day thought this was even remotely possible, yet He gave a detailed prophecy that was indeed fulfilled.

This is why nineteenth-century critics coming out of the Enlightenment, who wanted to discredit the authority of Scripture, attacked predictive prophecy. Their working assumption was that anytime a passage in Scripture seemed to demonstrate the fulfillment of a prophecy, the only way to account for that from a naturalistic perspective was to assume that the text had been written after the fact.

At the turn of the twentieth century, higher critical scholars were somewhat boastful about the so-called assured results of higher criticism, including the conviction that the Gospel of John wasn’t written until the middle of the second century. However, I don’t know any respectable scholar who would argue that today. If you look at the list of so-called assured results at the turn of the twentieth century and compare them to current criticism, you see the egg all over the faces of the crit-

ical scholars who were trying to undermine the authority of the Scripture. They were fighting the contest of naturalism against supernaturalism.

What nineteenth-century liberal Christianity sought to achieve was the revision of Christianity, in fact, the capture of Christianity from its historic significance by repudiating all supernatural elements of the biblical narrative and then salvaging from that a core of ethics that could be preserved to keep the church going. Emil Brunner, the Swiss scholar, wrote a book in the early twentieth century called *Der Mittler*,² in which he observed that the whole effort of nineteenth-century criticism, predominantly German scholarship, was a monument to unbelief. Because their guns were aimed constantly at the Scriptures, those nineteenth-century critics should not be classified as orthodox Christians.

Two of the main targets were the Old Testament and, of course, the Torah, which is so important not only to Christianity but also to Judaism and historically to the Muslim faith. Even though Muhammad didn't know all of its contents, he endorsed it. Thus, three of the great religions had a high view of the Torah. Then came the Graf-Wellhausen theory of the nineteenth century that the Torah was corrupted—that it was written, initially at least, by four different writers, or, according to redaction criticism, edited by four redactors. These critics theorized four sources, J, E, D, and P. The J stands for the Yahweh source, the one who refers to God in the Torah by the name Yahweh. The writer/redactor who refers to God as Elohim is the E source. D is the Deuteronomic source, as in Deuteronomy. P is the priestly source. These critics claim

that, long after the patriarchal period, when the priestly caste emerged and were trying to dignify their political authority by showing their divinely ordained position, they read back into the Torah certain activities that would have given divine sanction to their privileged positions. This view implies not only corruption of the text but also the corruption of the people involved in it. This theory then became even more refined, claiming that there were not only four editors, but four of each—J1, J2, J3, J4; E1, E2, and so forth—and thus sixteen redactors.

William Foxwell Albright, acknowledged as the dean of archeological experts in the twentieth century, became disgusted with where this kind of scholarship was headed. He wrote that these biblical critics ignore the most important criteria for historiography, which is the empirical data of history, and that their interpretation was being completely controlled by secular philosophies. He noted particularly the influence of nineteenth-century Hegelian philosophy. The major buzzword in nineteenth-century philosophy was *evolution*; the assumption of evolutionary philosophy was that everything in this world—not just biology, but all institutions, economics, psychology—goes through a process of evolutionary development from the simple to the complex.

These philosophers looked around the rest of the world, outside of Judeo-Christianity, and saw that in antiquity virtually all religions were either animistic or polytheistic. They looked at the notable exception of Judaism, with its ancient Torah affirming monotheism on its first page, and thought, “Wait a minute. This doesn’t fit the pattern of evolutionary his-

tory. Judaism must be like every other religion, going through a gradual stage of development from animism to polytheism to henotheism and finally to monotheism.” Some of the radical critics thought that monotheism came as late as the post-exilic period. Others thought it might have come as early as the eighth-century prophets. However, none of these critics thought there was monotheism in the days of Moses, or in the Torah.

And yet the Torah unambiguously attests to monotheism, so what do you assume if you’re an evolutionary naturalist? Hegelian philosophy assumed that the monotheism could not have been in the original text; it had to have been written back into the text. Monotheism in the time of the Torah would break the mold of natural evolutionary development, which, they believed, applies to all religions as well as to biological organisms. Thus, the theory of biblical literature was determined by a naturalistic philosophy whose worldview was already completely antithetical to the biblical worldview.

Saleeb: And given those assumptions, as you pointed out earlier, Islam itself would be proved false because the Qur’an says that God gave Moses the Torah and monotheism. Muslims like to quote the arguments of critical scholars against the Bible, but they don’t understand that, if these arguments are carried to their logical conclusion, they also cast doubt on the Qur’an.

Sproul: The Jesus Seminar offers a contemporary example of criticism that attacks the Bible. It is what I would call the “journalistic phase of theology.” In other words, the more bizarre the

theory is, the more attention it gets in the media. In theology no less than in politics there is a spectrum of beliefs. We talk about the right and the left, conservatives and liberals, a radical right and a radical left. At the extreme ends of the continuum are the lunatic fringes. In my judgment the Jesus Seminar represents the lunatic fringe of the radical left of biblical criticism. I don't take them seriously. Their scholarship is pseudo-scholarship. Not even the higher critics of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries—including Bultmann on his worst day—ever went as far as the Jesus Seminar does in its rejection of biblical authenticity with its scissors-and-paste methodology of cutting out verses from the Scriptures. The early church heretic Marcion, in his madness, never dreamed of going to the extremes that the members of the Jesus Seminar do. They represent a tiny blip on the radar of historical scholarship, a blip of radical extremism; and they have not, in my judgment, demonstrated enough sober scholarship to warrant giving them much attention.

The Jesus Seminar members adopt naturalistic philosophical assumptions that rule out miracles. The agenda of the nineteenth-century liberals was to get rid of all the miracles, all the supernatural. One of their targets was the virgin birth. It went against normal biological propagation, so they tried to deny that it had occurred. They first reinterpreted the biblical notion of “virgin” (e.g., Isa. 7:14), reducing its meaning to “young woman.” In so doing they showed utter disregard for the immediate context of the birth narratives. Many of them tried to say, “We believe in Jesus; we just don't believe in the virgin birth.”

The Jesus Seminar argues that Jesus was not even born in Bethlehem. Why are they so eager to claim this? There's a simple reason. An Old Testament prophecy predicted that this tiny little village six miles south of Jerusalem would be the birthplace of the Messiah; if they agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, they would have a problem of *vaticinia ex eventu*, that is, trying to explain a predictive prophecy by saying it had to have been written after the fact. Their scholarship is simply dishonest.

I have had to wrestle with these attacks on the authority of Scripture for forty years. And yet I think there is less reason today than at any time in church history to be skeptical about the veracity and integrity of the biblical witness. No book has been subjected to more rigorous scrutiny, more vicious attacks. Abraham Kuyper, a Christian who became prime minister of the Netherlands in 1900 and who founded the Free University of Amsterdam, said that nineteenth-century criticism degenerated into vandalism because it was an all-out attack with no holds barred, and sober scholarship was left in the wake. However, if we look clearly at the historical record and at the attempts to discredit it, no document from antiquity has been manifested more frequently to have authenticity than the Bible, particularly the New Testament.

Saleeb: And because it is authentic and originally from God, it is therefore authoritative. It has not been surpassed by the Qur'an.