

Apologists for Islam Have It Written All Over Them

By Louis Palme



After years of educating non-Muslims about the evils of the Islamic ideology, I have learned to spot ten signs that someone is an apologist for Islam. Some people have been fed half-truths by Muslims and others (including Muslim apologists) are deliberately lying about what they know is a violent and intolerant religion. The best way to illustrate these points is to use *A History of God*, a 1993 best-seller book by British apologist Karen Armstrong, for documented examples. Ms. Armstrong is a former nun who can see nothing wrong with Islam, possibly because she shares with Muhammad a condition of temporal lobe epilepsy. She actually stretches credulity to defend the ideology. I am not singling out Ms. Armstrong – she’s just a convenient example. Most of the same apologetic statements below are made by a whole stable of authors, including John Esposito, Juan Cole, Reza Aslan.

1. **Allah is the same god worshipped by Jews and Christians** (p. 141) -- This is a simplistic rendering of a passage in the early Quran revelations when Muhammad had only a few followers, “Our God and your God is one.” (Surah 29:46). Later, when Muhammad had been rejected by the Jews in Medina, he changed that position to: “Fight against such of those whom the Scriptures were given [i.e., Jews and Christians] as believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day. . . . How perverse [the Jews and Christians] are!” (Surah 9:29)
2. **Islam introduced a just and equitable society to pagan Arabia** (p. 142) -- Here the language itself is deceptive. “Justice” in Islam means that wrongs are punished by Allah’s laws – chopping off hands of petty thieves (Surah 5:38), whipping or stoning

adulterers (Surah 24:2), and mandatory retaliation (2:178). “Equity” is not equality in the Western sense, but rather knowing your place under Sharia Law. For women, it means one-half the inheritance of a man (Surah 4:11), one-half the testimony in court (Surah 2:282), and total subjugation to male superiority (Surahs 2:223 and 4:34). The resulting society was anything but egalitarian. Muhammad received 20% of any pillage by his warriors (Surah 8:41) and all of it if the enemy surrendered without a fight (Surah 59:7). The Quran even had built-in excuses for poverty: “Allah gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases.” (Surah 29:62) “Had Allah bestowed abundance upon His servants, they would have committed much injustice in the land. He gives them what He will in due measure.” (Surah 42:27)

3. **There is no compulsion in Islam** (p. 143) -- This statement is a reflection of an early Surah that stated, “There shall be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error.” (Surah 2:256) This was contradicted by a later revelation, “Are they seeking a religion other than Allah’s, when every soul in the heavens and the earth has submitted to Him, *willingly or by compulsion?*” (Surah 3:83) In Karen Armstrong’s own words, “There were no obligatory doctrines about Allah. . . the Quran is highly suspicious about theological speculation.” Actually, there were some rather absolute decrees in the Quran, the denial of which would constitute apostasy, punishable by death. The Quran partners Muhammad with Allah no fewer than sixty-four times, as in Surah 8:1 – “Obey Allah and his apostle if you are true believers.” The sure way to get to Paradise is to “kill and be killed” (Surah 9:111). The Quran also denies that Jesus was the Son of God (Surah 19:36) or that he was crucified (Surah 4:157).

4. **Islam encourages science and reason** (p. 143) – This is a half-truth based on the early history of Islam when its warriors swept across the Middle East, North Africa, and into Europe in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries. Many of the early converts and subjected peoples (*dhimmis*) were well-educated and contributed greatly to scientific knowledge. They introduced a “Golden Age of Islam.” Unfortunately this age of enlightenment was brought to a close in the Ninth Century when the rational Mu’tazilites were suppressed by the dogmatic Ash’arites. Said one scholar, “Ash’arite dogma insisted on the denial of any connection between cause and effect – and therefore repudiated rational thought.” (*The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, Robert Reilly, pg. 122) This denial of reason is quite specific in Sharia Law’s definition of good and evil:

The basic premise of this school of thought is that the *good* of the acts of those morally responsible is what the Lawgiver (syn. Allah or His messenger) has indicated is good by permitting it or asking it be done. And the *bad* is what the Lawgiver has indicated is bad by asking it not be done. The good is not what reason considers good, nor the bad what reason considers bad. The measure of

good and bad, according to this school of thought, is the Sacred Law, not reason.” (*Reliance of the Traveler*, al-Misri, para. a1.4)

5. **The Quran cannot be fully understood in translation** (p.144) -- Rather than addressing the evil and intolerant passages of the Quran, apologists avoid the issue altogether by saying that the “sacred” Arabic language of the Quran cannot be understood in English (or any other language). It turns out that 80% of Muslims world-wide cannot understand the Quran in its original Arabic. It is like reading Chaucer for English-speaking people. Muslims often memorize passages without truly knowing what the passages say, just as English speakers can memorize this poem from *Alice in Wonderland*:

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

However, the Quran claims to be clear: “This Book, whose verses are perfected and made plain, is a revelation from Him who is wise and all-knowing.”(Surah 11:1) “And We have sent down on thee the Book making clear everything, and as a guidance and a mercy, and as good tidings to those who surrender.” (Surah 16:89 Arberry)

6. **Muhammad may have never uttered the “Satanic Verses.”** (p. 148) -- One of the most devastating scandals about Muhammad was his acknowledgement of the Quraysh gods of al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat. (Salman Rushdie’s 1988 book by that title made him a target for assassination.) Karen Armstrong wrote, “Muhammad had not made any concession to polytheism in the incident of the Satanic Verses – if, that is, it ever happened. . . The sources show that Muhammad absolutely refused to compromise with the Quraysh on the matter of idolatry.” Armstrong insisted that it was never mentioned in the Quran or in Muhammad’s biography by Ibn Ishaq. She was wrong on both counts: The “revised” verses can be found in Surah 53:20, and they are explained as Satanic in numerous Quran footnotes and commentaries, including George Sale’s 1734 translation and Richard Bell’s 1939 translation. Also, the entire incident is recorded on page 165 in Ibn Ishaq’s *The Life of Muhammad*. The original “satanic verse” cited in those sources was, “Have you thought of al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat the third, the other, these are the exalted Gharaniq (high-flying swans) whose *intercession is approved*.”

7. **Islam is tolerant of other religions** (pg. 152) -- Armstrong asserts that the intolerance of Islam is really a misunderstanding. "Muhammad never asked Jews or Christians to convert to his religion of al-Lah unless they particularly wished to do so, because they had received authentic revelations of their own." This is such a gross misrepresentation of Islam it is hard to know where to start. Perhaps one should begin by looking at the recitation of Surah 1 – *Al Fatihah* – which devout Muslims repeat seventeen times a day in their ritual prayers. It demonizes Jews as "those who incurred [Allah's] wrath" and Christians as "those who have gone astray." Surah 3:85 proclaims, "He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will be one of the lost." In the final major Surah of the Quran, Muslims are told, "Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given [i.e., Jews and Christians] as believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and His apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the truth Faith [i.e., Islam] until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued." (Surah 9:29)
8. **War is abhorrent to Muslims and only for self-defense** (pg. 156) -- This half-truth is based on the verse in the Quran that states, "Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it." (Surah 2:216). However, Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad lists thirty-eight raids (*gazwa*) by Muslims, including twenty-seven that Muhammad took part in personally, over a period of nine years, or about one raid every three months. The only defensive fight that was the Battle of the Trench in 627.
9. **The Quran is the uncreated eternal word of God** (pg. 161) -- One way apologists try to fend off any criticism of Islam is to contend that, while the Bible was written by human authors, the Quran contains the verbal word of God transmitted to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. As Karen Armstrong put it, "Their doctrine of the uncreated Quran meant that when it was recited, Muslims could hear the invisible God directly. The Quran represented the presence of God in their very midst." More honest scholars, like Richard Bell in his *Introduction to the Quran*, have concluded, ". . . we must never forget that the main source, after all, is the brooding mind of the Prophet himself, enlightened, as he believed, by the divine guidance which came to him through reflection and meditation." (pg. 172)
10. **"Reason" was rejected by Muslims, not because the Quran contradicted it, but because the Mu'tazili caliph tortured the Ash'arites** (pg. 165) – This "red-herring" apology for the irrationality of Islamic ideology relates to the conflict between the "reason" of the Mu'tazilites and the "absolutism" of Ash'arites, discussed at length in Robert Reilly's book, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*. There was a brief period of strict

enforcement of reason, from 833 to 848, in which a few people were put to death. Here is Karen Armstrong's conclusion: ". . . when the caliph [al-Mamun] began to torture the Traditionalists [i.e., the Ash'arites] in order to impose the Mu'tazili belief, the ordinary folk were horrified by this un-Islamic behavior. . . Reason was not an appropriate tool for exploring the unutterable God." (Actually, torture has perennially been the preferred way of dealing with conflicts in Islam per Surah 5:33.) The Islamic fear of reason, however, existed in the Quran long before this particular incident. Surah 5:101 warns, "Believers, do not ask questions about things which, if made known to you, would only pain you. . . . Other men inquired about them before you, only to disbelieve them thereafter." The Ash'arite absolutism ultimately reached the point where it was an act of apostasy, punishable by death, to believe that things in themselves or by their own nature have any causal influence independent of the will of Allah – such as water boiling at 212° F.

Being aware of these apologists' half-truths and lies will help you get to the real issues – Is there any place for Islam in the 21st Century? What societal benefits have accrued from the teachings of Islam? Why do 70 percent of the conflicts in the world today involve Muslims?