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Dialogue With a Saudi Muslim James Arlandson and Soliman al-Buthe

On April 3, 2005 Mr. Soliman al-Buthe (aka AlBut'hi), a Saudi Wahabi, wrote me a letter in order to open a dialogue. Included was An Open Letter to Congress, in which he explained a gentler and kinder Wahabi movement that began in the eighteenth century by Muhammad ibn 'Abdul al-Wahab, a Hanbalist scholar. Mr. al-Buthe says that Wahabism is a fundamentalist reform movement that seeks to return to a purer Islam. This movement is no threat to America or the world.

After a series of emails in which he said that he is in contact with Saudi scholars and that I should respond to his ideas, we decided to correspond in the following format:

1. The basis of our dialogue is his Open Letter to Congress (in bold font). The endnotes can be read at the links to the Letter, provided at the fourth step, just below.
2. I (JA) will ask questions and seek explanations in each section of his Open Letter to Congress.
3. Mr. al-But'he (SaB) will respond.
4. Finally, I provide a comment, where relevant. I have also asked some scholars and colleagues to contribute their ideas, at this stage. JA: For links to the Letter without our comments and dialogue, readers can go [here](#) or [here](#)

Mr. al-Buthe writes:

We are pleased to engage in this kind of dialogue with people like you. We believe that this kind of exchange of ideas has become a necessity in a world in which relations among peoples are becoming manifold and getting stronger. Only values which are truly universal—in the sense of being acceptable to human beings as human beings—will come to survive. We also believe that that kind of exchange of ideas is possible, and becomes more fruitful if it is based on standards shared by all of humanity. We all believe in reason, in moral values like truthfulness and honesty, in empirical facts, and in preferring what is more beneficial and useful. With people like you we share something more: a belief in God.

It is on shared grounds like these that our dialogue should be based. We will not be able to argue with each other if each of us takes for granted some standards that the other does not accept. On our side, we are Arabs and Muslims with an intellectual history that is different from yours, a history in which your European Enlightenment played no role. We believe in reason and emphatically do not believe that one must be a product of the Enlightenment to be rational or to scrutinize claims that are offered for belief. Humankind has been exercising this skepticism throughout history; if Europeans did do so prior to the Enlightenment perhaps that was because of some situation peculiar to Western religious or intellectual history. In any event, we do not believe that Islam should be judged by Enlightenment or any other standards that are peculiar to a certain civilization at a particular time in its history. If one must resort to Enlightenment standards, one should select only those in which it is sincerely believed that all rational humans will accept.

An Open Letter From a Saudi Wahabi To Members of the 109th U.S. Congress

Author: Soliman AlBut'hi

Dated: 02/03/2005

Dear Members of the 109th U.S. Congress:

With God's Name, Who is the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. Since September 11, 2001, your distinguished body on many occasions has discussed the issue of "Wahabiism" and the threat it perceives to pose to the United States. The desire to ensure the security of one's nation is understood and admirable; however, I believe (along with many of my fellow countrymen) that in pursuing this noble objective, both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its religious teachings and practices have been unfairly misrepresented and maligned. It is in this spirit that I humbly submit this Open Letter to the Members of the 109th Congress.

I believe that in the interest of sound policymaking, I must provide you with our perspective on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and our religious practices in as concise and helpful means possible. My particular concern is that those who have testified before the various committees have included many whose opposition to so-called "Wahabi" doctrines is purely ideological and, more important, not grounded in fact. This only deepens our suspicion that, in attempting

to achieve your aim of national security, Congress is being manipulated by those who seek to further their own agendas even at the expense of the United States' true national interest. And the attacks are not limited to the halls of Congress; unjustified attacks on both the Kingdom and its religion are now being published in your most prestigious media with the purpose that long-term public opinion be turned against Kingdom, its peoples, and religion.

I believe that people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should engage in an honest and candid dialogue with the citizens of the United States and their representatives. In this spirit I have written this letter. I hope to inform its readers and clear up any misunderstandings that they might have regarding the religious teachings in today's Saudi Arabia.

Although I have addressed this letter from a Saudi "Wahabi," I first must point out that nobody in this country's religious mainstream would refer to themselves by this name. Indeed, such a term is often used as a pejorative and is considered offensive; instead, we refer to ourselves simply as Muslims. In the end, I hope that this open letter will be the start of a continuing and fruitful dialogue between our people.

JA: I start off with my own explanation and response to this section of the Open Letter. You write that "unjustified attacks on the Kingdom and on its religion are now being published in your most prestigious media with the purpose that long-term public opinion be turned against Kingdom, its peoples, and religion." You indicated in your email to me that you have read my articles online. I admit that I have critiqued Islam as a religious system, but I do not hold a grudge against the people of Saudi Arabia.

Here is my more specific explanation as to why I critique Islam as a religious system. First, I am a product of the Enlightenment (c. 1600-1800), and personally I have been trained in it. So I am merely following my training. If Islam is to survive in the West, it must undergo close scrutiny and analysis.

SaB: We agree; but the same must apply to Christianity and all other beliefs and ideologies currently advocated in the West.

Second, my own religion, Christianity, has been placed under the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment microscope for the past four hundred years, and Christianity has survived remarkably intact. Therefore, I still have my own religious convictions, and your religion ultimately conflicts with mine, as we shall see below. Hence, I am responding to Muhammad's challenge that he has perfected religion (Sura 5:3) and that the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) have walked in darkness until your prophet came (Sura 5:15-16). I do not believe that his claims are true for these [top ten reasons](#) and for simple [logic](#). So following Enlightenment principles, I will continue my hard-hitting critique of your religion in a fact-based way, not in a mean-spirited way.

SaB: Has it? Many people in the West, even in the US, state otherwise.

1. Your Biblical scholars admit that there are many contradictions in your New Testament, contradictions among the four Gospels as well as within each one of them.
2. They also tell us of the existence of factual mistakes in the Gospels. It is because of this that only a few, called the fundamentalists, still believe that the Bible is the word of God in the literal sense. The majority of "Christians" concede that the Bible was written by ordinary people who were influenced by the prevailing culture of their time. It is because of this that the West does not, as we do, take its holy book's statements seriously.
3. Westerners throw much doubt on the historical authenticity of the Bible. It is certainly not the literal word of Jesus Christ. There is no Bible in the original language of Jesus, and Westerners do not even know who made the first translation of the four Gospels. Indeed, Westerners know almost nothing about the writers of those gospels.
4. The central idea of what is called Christianity today is that Jesus is the son of God. But many Westerners now admit that this concept is full of contradictions (please [see](#) The Nicene Creed and Truth about the Trinity); in those admissions they repeat a premise that the Qur'an posited a long time ago. It is because of this problem that many Christians now reject the idea of Jesus being the son of God. And it appears that it is precisely because of this situation, among other things, that many former Christians are coming into the fold of Islam.

Here are a few examples of such contradictions:

a. You describe God as being the Father of Jesus, but if a Westerner is told that He cannot be a father since He has no spouse (as the Qur'an argues), some retort by saying that, since God can do any thing, why can't He create a child without a mother? Indeed He can; He created Adam without father or mother. But we are not talking here about God as creator; we are talking about Him as being father, and about Jesus as being His only begotten son according to mainstream Christianity. If, then, God a father of Jesus He cannot be his creator, for one does not create rather; a son is begotten by a mother and not created by her or His father.

b. Some Westerners reply by saying: "But you are taking the words father and son literally. We don't mean them to be literal." When, however, the same Westerners are asked to give their non-literal meaning they fall into another contradiction. "... a spiritual in which Jesus was submissive and obedient to God as His Heavenly Father." It is important to understand that through this careful definition of son-ship that Christians agree with the statements in the

Qur'an that God has no partners (a physical wife or physical son); rather, Jesus was the Son of God in the sense that the Qur'an refers to Him as the Word of God and the Spirit of God—in the sense of a spiritual relationship. Son of God is a title reflecting this relationship." (Please [see](#) Why do Christians Call Jesus the Son of God). But Word of God in the Qur'an refers to the word "Be!," as the result of which something comes into existence. The Qur'an emphasizes that fact that Jesus, like any one and any thing else, was created by God, that he is not his child, Qur'an 019: 35-36 "It befits not (the Majesty of God) that He should take to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. When He decrees a thing, He only says to it; Be! And it becomes".

In this sense everything is the Word of God. It is not something peculiar to Jesus. One of our great and famous scholars put it succinctly by saying, "Jesus is not the Be!, but it was by the Be! that he came to be"

c. Western dictionaries tell us that, "In modern English usage, the Son of God is almost always a reference to Jesus Christ, whom Christianity holds to be the son of the Christian God, eternally begotten of God the Father and coeternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit" Does that make any sense to you? If something is begotten, it has a beginning. How can something be eternally beginning?

d. "The virginal conception, by excluding human fatherhood, affirms that Jesus' only father is the heavenly Father and that the Son's being born in time reflects his eternal birth: the Father, who begot the Son in eternity, also begets him in time as a man." (Please [see](#) Pope John Paul II , Eternal Son of God is also Born of Mary; (). Again, does this make any sense at all?

e. Jesus, the son of God, was according to your belief crucified by some human beings. How can some one who is even half-divine be killed?

f. Also, if something has no beginning, is eternal, it cannot have an end, even for seconds. This is a matter of logic.

5. In reviewing Bernard Lewis's book, the *Crisis of Islam*, Robert Louis Wilken has this advice for Christians and Jews:

... but as Western societies abandon traditional patterns of religious life—for example, Sunday as a holy day—and dismantle such traditional institutions as marriage, one wonders whether Christians (and Jews) should join the chorus of those urging Muslims to set out on the path taken by Western Civilization since the Enlightenment. (Please [see](#) Robert Louis Wilken, *Roots of Jihad*, *First Things* 136 (October 2003): 671.);)

6. In a recent article Albert Mohler tells us about some of the things that happened to Christianity after the Enlightenment:

As the 20th century began, this accommodation became increasingly evident as the church acquiesced to a culture of moral individualism.... In the wake of the Enlightenment, criticism of the Bible and the doctrines of evangelical orthodoxy was widespread. Even the most conservative denominations began to show evidence of decreased attention to theological orthodoxy. ... The theological category of sin has been replaced, in many circles, with the psychological concept of therapy... Sex is on the loose. Shame days are over... Homosexuality is not condemned, even though it is clearly condemned in the Bible. To the contrary, homosexuals get a special caucus at the denominational assembly and their own publications and special rights. (Please [see](#) The Disappearance of Church Discipline—How Can We Recover? Part One;)

Greetings. I am finally getting back to you after a long time. I have been occupied with posting articles on various issues concerning Islam.

I must admit that when I got your response in Part One to my questions, I was a little disappointed. Your Open Letter to Congress has nothing to do with abstract theology, so I decided to dialogue with you. Most people want to know how to live to the fullest. They really do not care about these doctrinal disputes or differences.

However, I now attempt to reply to your theological questions and assertions, following your sequence of points.

Points 1-3

Is the Bible reliable and accurate?

Your first three points call into question the reliability and authenticity of the Bible. You say that Bible scholars admit that there are contradictions in it. You link to "Sullivan County." I am not sure who the webmaster is, but he does not seem to be a reputable scholar. In any case, these harsh critics of the Bible exist. This is the unpleasant part of the Enlightenment. When or if an equally demanding Enlightenment hits Islamic countries, the Quran will undergo such [criticism](#) (see the very next section). However, I can find equally reputable scholars who say that the Bible is reliable and accurate.

For example, these two high-level scholars from an earlier generation, F. F. Bruce, citing Sir Frederic Kenyon, conclude the following:

To sum up, we may quote the verdict of the late Sir Frederic Kenyon, a scholar whose authority to make pronouncements on ancient MSS [manuscripts] was second to none:

"The interval then between the data of original composition and the earliest extant evidence become so small to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scripture have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." ([Source](#))

These next two current scholars reach the same conclusion:

The overwhelming majority of the text of the Greek New Testament is firmly established. Where uncertainties remain, in no case is any doctrinal matter at issue. (D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005, p. 30)

Is the Quran pure and uncorrupted?

By criticizing the Bible, you allow me to challenge the Quran. Muslims believe that it reached earth from Allah in an uncorrupted state and remained that way. However, plain facts contradict this belief. Here are only four examples.

First, this hadith from Bukhari (a highly reliable collector and editor of hadith) says that Uthman burned different versions of the Quran.

. . . Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. ([Bukhari](#))

It is one thing to prepare the final version (if one exists of the Quran), but burning alternate versions? This is wrong.

Second, this hadith says that the Quran was recited seven different ways:

Allah's Apostle said, "Gabriel recited the Qur'an to me in one way. Then I requested him (to read it in another way), and continued asking him to recite it in other ways, and he recited it in several ways till he ultimately recited it in seven different ways." ([Bukhari](#) ; and see the longer hadith below this one.)

Would these seven recitations produce different version of the Quran? Other hadiths (see the linked articles, below) reveal that four different reciters spoke the Quran in different versions. Is this why Uthman was so anxious to burn the different versions? For more information see this [article](#) and [this one](#).

Third, a sound hadith from Sahih Muslim says that an entire sura (chapter), which had over a hundred verses, is missing from the Quran.

. . . We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) Bara'at [Sura 9, which has 129 verses]. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it:" If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust." (Muslim no. [2286](#); see the four hadiths above this one)

Fourth and finally, this is an interesting modern discovery: a "buried" version of the Quran, found in 1972, during the restoration of the Great Mosque of Sana'a, in Yemen.

Since the early 1980s more than 15,000 sheets of the Yemeni Korans have painstakingly been flattened, cleaned, treated, sorted, and assembled; they now sit ("preserved for another thousand years," Puin says) in Yemen's House of Manuscripts, awaiting detailed examination. That is something the Yemeni authorities have seemed reluctant to allow, however. "They want to keep this thing low-profile, as we do too, although for different reasons," Puin explains. "They don't want attention drawn to the fact that there are Germans and others working on the Korans. They don't want it made public that there is work being done at all, since the Muslim position is that everything that needs to be said about the Koran's history was said a thousand years ago." ([Source](#))

Why won't the authorities allow its publication? What are they hiding?

Please see this [webpage](#) that has many links to articles and hadiths on the corruptibility of the Quran. I wrote this [article](#) explaining that Muhammad borrows from the apocryphal gospels about events in young Mary's life (and, by analogy, in young Jesus' life) even though the Prophet of Islam claims explicitly that he received specific information from revelation alone (Sura 3:44). It is true that a few New Testament authors borrow a line or two from non-Christian Greek poets, but they never claimed that they got this information only from Gabriel or only from a [heightened state of inspiration](#).

Does culture influence sacred texts?

Next, you say in point no. 2 that "the Bible was written by ordinary people who were influenced by the prevailing culture of their time." Apparently, you believe that this is abnormal and calls into question the reliability of the Bible, as if culture taints it. You seem to imply that the Quran was not influenced by its prevailing seventh-century culture in Arabia. In reply, however, by criticizing the Bible in this way, I am permitted to point out the obvious about the Quran. The implication that the Quran has not been influenced by culture is simply not true. For example, Sura 5:38 says that the male or female thief should have his or her hand cut off. Ibn Kathir, a respected classical commentator, says the following about the gruesome punishment and its cultural

origins:

Allah commands and decrees that the hand of the thief, male or female be cut off. During the time of Jahiliyyah [ignorance before Islam], this was also the punishment for the thief, and Islam upheld this punishment. (*Tafir Ibn Kathir* (abridged), translated and edited by Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, Darussalam, 2000, vol. 3, p. 172)

So it seems, after all, that the Quran does not rise above its own culture, but retains a severe punishment.

Also, Muhammad raided Meccan caravans. He was following his culture, which engaged in this practice all the time. The Quran in the Medinan suras that often call for war reflects Muhammad's Sunnah, which in turn reflects seventh-century Arabia (see Sura 8 in its entirety, which deals with the Battle of Badr, merely another raid, but on a larger scale).

Point 4a-f

In these subpoints you ask a flurry of questions and throw in many terms and concepts. So this section of my reply is the longest.

What does "begetting" mean?

Your challenges about this term rest on old ideas, not modern research. The Greek word at issue (see for example John 3:16) is *monogenês*. Traditionally, this has been translated as "only begotten." However, new lexical research in the twentieth century on this word in the ancient Greek world concludes that the second half of the word (*genês*) does not mean "beget," but "class" or "kind." Now when we add *mon* back to *-genês*, the word most accurately means "one of a kind" or "unique" or "in a class by itself or himself."

In relation to the Sonship of Jesus, the most accurate meaning reads: "one-of-a-kind Son" or "unique Son" or "the Son in a class by himself." This is why the translation called the New International Version (NIV) has in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only [*monogenês*] Son." The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) has for the same verse . . . "only [*monogenês*] Son." And the margin of the New American Standard Bible (NASB) reads: "unique, only one of His kind" for the same Greek word.

Thus, the notion of "begetting" is removed from the Sonship of Jesus, and so are the complications that you raise. Jesus is the one-of-a-kind Son who is in a class all by himself. He is not begotten, except possibly in the context of his resurrection and exaltation after his ascension, where the Greek verb is used (see Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, 5:5). These verses quote Psalm 2:7, which describe a coronation, an apt analogy to the ascension of Christ. In any case, the New Testament teaches that he has lived eternally with the Father, without beginning. This is simple. This brings us back directly to the inspired New Testament, without having to appeal to and depend on later human opinions.

Source: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 2000), pp. 1233-34.

See this [webpage](#) that links to other articles on the issue of "begotten."

However, you seem to question the theology of some theologians and Christians ("mainstream Christians" is your wording). Perhaps you mean those in early church Councils (e.g. Nicea in AD 325), such as Athanasius, (d. 373), or more recently, the late Pope John Paul II (your point no. 4d); the members of the Council of Nicea seem to have understood *monogenês* as containing the idea of "begotten." Therefore, I attempt now to explain the term in three steps, assuming, only for the sake of discussion, that concept "begotten" really is contained in the Greek word.

First, words may take on different meanings and nuances in different contexts. For example, the word "apology" in one context means an expression of remorse or regret, or an admission of error. Thus, "I offer an apology for offending you." But in another context "apology" can mean defense. "I offer an apology of my religion." These two meanings (admission of errors vs. defense against errors) go in opposite directions, or at least they stand far apart from each other. This shows how fluid language and even one word can be, from one context to the next.

Second, this fluidity can be applied to "begotten." It can have different meanings or nuances, depending on the context. Down here on earth, "begotten" has a temporal meaning. A man begets a son, who has a beginning. However, in the eternal realm, where God lives, the word takes on the quality of eternity. This means that the Father's begetting of the Son of God does not have a beginning. This unique relationship between Father and Son has always existed from eternity past and will exist into eternity future, according to the full teaching of the New Testament.

Third, you require me to explain the words of a much greater Christian and theologian than myself-Pope John Paul II. You quote him in your point no. 4d, and ask me if his words make sense to me. They do, and here is my explanation, tentatively.

You quote Pope John Paul II as follows:

"The virginal conception, by excluding human fatherhood, affirms that Jesus' only father is the heavenly Father and that the Son's being born in time reflects his eternal birth: the Father, who begot the Son in eternity, also begets him in time as a man."

If I understand this great man of God, he seems to create an analogy. (Note the word "reflects," as in Idea A reflects or is similar to Idea B.) It compares the Father-Son relationship in the eternal realm (heaven) and this same relationship in the temporal realm (earth). The eternal "begetting" without beginning "reflects" the earthly "begetting" when Jesus takes on his humanity, by the Spirit of God, in the womb of Mary. In both contexts, the Father begets the Son. But all analogies are imperfect, so we should not take this one too far. Essential doctrines should not be based on them. It seems merely that the Pope discusses the Father-Son relationship in its unique and one-of-a-kind mode because it existed in heaven before Jesus was born of Mary, and it still exists in heaven after Jesus' ascension back into heaven after his resurrection.

These two realms (heaven and earth) resolve the alleged contradictions that you raise in the word "begetting." On earth it has a beginning. In heaven it does not have a beginning, but it is eternal, in the unique and eternal Father-Son relationship, according to the full teaching of the New Testament.

But please note: This quick comment on the late Pope's ideas is only tentative, not authoritative.

However, I believe that the idea of "begetting" is excluded from *monogen*'s, so for me the complexities do not exist. Jesus is the eternal Son of God without beginning. He has always existed alongside the Father, sharing the same substance, essence, and being.

See my [article](#) on the Trinity, which links to many other articles.

Does the Quran have a mysterious mother?

Now let's throw a challenge about the Quran at you and your fellow scholars. By criticizing Christian doctrine, you allow me to challenge Islamic doctrine. What happens if we take a literal reading of some passages about Allah and the Quran? Does the Quran have a mysterious mother? I have edited this excerpt from two colleagues at [answeringislam.org](#).

Incidentally, the Saudi authorities have blocked this Christian site from entering the internet in your country. This is odd. If Islam is so awesome and it contains the Final and Best Revelation, then what is your government hiding from your fellow citizens? It seems that they would remain within Islam no matter what this Christian website teaches. The Truth of Islam would keep them in, so competition in the marketplace of ideas should not threaten the Best Religion.

In any case, Sam Shamoun and Jochen Katz write about the assertion in the Quran that Allah must have a wife or consort in order to produce a son or an offspring. They begin:

The Holy Bible often calls Jesus the Son of God and states that God is his Father, titles or expressions denoting a purely spiritual relationship between God and Christ. These terms have absolutely no sexual or carnal overtones whatsoever, i.e. they do not imply that God had sex with a woman (specifically Mary) who then gave birth to Jesus his Son.

The Quran, however, assumes that the only way for God to be the Father of Jesus (or of anyone else) is through sexual procreation, that God can only become a Father by having a wife with whom he has sex. This is the main argument of the Quran against believing that God has a Son.

The Quran emphatically states:

And they make the jinn associates with Allah, while He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters without knowledge; glory be to Him, and highly exalted is He above what they ascribe (to Him). Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! **How could He have a son when He has no consort**, and He (Himself) created everything, and He is the Knower of all things. S. 6:100-101 Shakir

...

The argument looks like this, in modus tollens form [denying the consequent or the "then" clause in premise one]:

- (1) If Allah has a son, then he must have (had sex with) a consort or wife.
- (2) Allah does not have a consort (i.e. this is impossible for whatever reason).
- (3) Therefore the claim that Allah has a son is refuted.

Now let's apply the same (unsound, but valid) logic to the Quran and its mysterious mother. Shamoun and Katz continue

There are several places where the Quran makes mention of the "mother of the book" (*omm al-kitab*), and in one place the Quran even claims that this is where it originated:

God doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book (*ommu alkitab*). S. 13:39 Y. Ali

Verily, we have made it an Arabic Qur'an; haply ye will have some sense. And it is in the Mother of the Book (*ommi alkitab*) with Us,- high and wise. S. 43:3-4 Palmer

The mother of the book which contains the Quran is with God, an important point for our discussion as we shall shortly see. In another place it is said that the Quran's clear verses are actually "the mother of the book"

He it is who has revealed to thee the Book, of which there are some verses that are decisive, they are the mother of the Book (*ommu alkitab*); and others ambiguous; but as for those in whose hearts is perversity, they follow what is ambiguous, and do crave for sedition, craving for (their own) interpretation of it; but none know the interpretation of it except God. But those who are well grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; it is all from our Lord; but none will remember save those who possess minds. S. 3:7 Palmer

Hence, the Quran originates from the mother of the book and its clear verses are the mother of the book, which means that the Quran has at least two mothers!

Now if the logic of the Quran is true, then this means that the mother of the book has a spouse with whom she has sex. After all, how can she be a mother, or have any children, if she has no husband, no spouse? We can even reword Sura 6:101 in the following manner:

Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! How could She (this unknown mysterious woman) be the Quran's mother if she has no consort.?

But since this mysterious woman does have offspring [the Quran], then she must have a husband, and here is where the real problem lies for Muslims: Since the Quran is believed to be the word of Allah, which makes him the source of the Quran, then this means that Allah is its father and the husband of the Quran's mother! And since Muslims believe that the Quran is the uncreated speech of Allah, then this means that its mother is also uncreated. The Quran cannot exist before its mother which means that if the Quran is eternal then so is its mother, also implying that Allah has always been married! After all, whose wife could the Quran's mother be if Allah is the only other entity that existed before creation?

Again, note the logic behind this:

- (4) If the Quran has a mother, then the Quran must be an offspring.
- (5) But if the Quran is an offspring, then it must have a mother and a father.
- (6) If it has a mother and a father, then they must have had sex to produce the offspring.
- (7) Suras 13:39, 43:3-4, and 3:7 say that the Quran indeed has a mother.
- (8) Therefore, its mother and father must have had sex.
- (9) Hence, the best candidate for the father and the mother of the Quran is Allah and an eternal mysterious mother with whom he had sex.

The readers should be able to see from our brief critique and examination why the Quran's claim that God cannot have children is seriously flawed. If God can have children only through sexual intercourse, by having a wife, then the Quran is in grave trouble [because of] this fallacious logic . . .

The Muslim will obviously contend that the expressions "mother of," "son of" are not being used in a physical, sexual sense, but in a purely metaphorical or spiritual sense, at least in these specific citations. The Muslim may argue that sexual activity is not necessary to be a child or parent in the sense intended by these various Quranic references. These terms can carry a broader range of meaning than merely the physical, carnal one and the context must therefore determine the specific application.

But this explanation only proves that the Quran is wrong and its reasoning is invalid. After all, if it is possible for someone to be a parent or child in a way that doesn't require sexual procreation, then this means it is also possible for God to be a spiritual parent without having to engage in sex or needing a physical wife. This basically means that it doesn't follow from the Quran's premises that God must have a wife or engage in sexual activity in order to be a father or have a son; and since he has no sexual relations and has no wife he cannot, therefore, be a parent.

The Quran's argument against God's Fatherhood or Christ's Sonship is flat out wrong . . .

Here is the correct understanding, in a logically valid chain argument, which the Quran completely misses:

- (10) If God is Spirit (John 4:24), then he did not have to have sex with a consort or a wife to be a Father.
- (11) If Father God did not have to have sex with a consort or wife, then he has a nonphysical, spiritual, and eternal relationship with his offspring.
- 12) The Word of God says that God is Spirit.
- (13) Therefore, he has a nonphysical, spiritual, and eternal relationship with his offspring-the Son of God, the

blessed and holy Lord Jesus.

([Source](#))

My concluding comment on the entire excerpt: This is what happens when we take things too literally. The Quran does not literally have a mother who had sexual relations with Allah; in the same way the eternal Father was not required to have sex to "beget" the eternal Son of God. Don't you think we should get away from an overly literal reading of our holy books, in many areas?

Why do millions of Africans leave Islam and convert to Christianity?

You write in point no. 4 that the complexities about the Sonship of Christ may drive some Christians "into the fold of Islam." In reply, however, this may be true for some people, but I do not believe that most ordinary people are concerned about abstract doctrines. Instead, they want to know how to live in peace, and this is what Islam is all about, isn't it?

This desire to live life without harassment may explain why [six million](#) African Muslims are [leaving](#) Islam and converting to Christianity each year.

To be blunt, Islam is a burdensome, severe, and harsh religion. The evidence for such an assessment? The following legal decrees, policies, and practices demonstrate it. They go outside of mere verbal assertions and mental beliefs and high-minded theology. Every one of them comes from the Quran itself, followed by chapter and verse.

- * Anyone who accuses someone else of sexual sin must bring four witnesses; if not, the accuser gets eighty lashes (24:4);
- * Husbands are a degree above their wives in status (2:228); reliable hadiths [say](#) that the [majority](#) of the inhabitants of hell are women due only because of their "[harshness and ingratitude](#)," not because of their numerical majority around the globe;
- * A male gets a double share of the inheritance over that of a female (4:11);
- * A woman's testimony counts half of a man's testimony because she may "forget" (2:282). Reliable hadiths say this law is based on the "[deficiency of a woman's mind](#)";
- * A wife may remarry her ex-husband if and only if she marries another man, they have sex, and then this second man divorces her (2:230);
- * Muhammad has special marriage privileges (as many women as he desires), which only he enjoys (33:50);
- * A Muslim man may be polygamous with up to four wives (4:3);
- * Muhammad gets twenty percent from his seventy-four raids and wars in ten years in Medina (8:1, 41);
- * Muhammad [bought off](#) converts ([9:60](#));
- * Husbands may hit their wife or wives (4:34);
- * Mature men may marry and consummate their marriage with prepubescent girls (65:4);
- * Slavery is endorsed: Muhammad himself traded in slaves and [owned black slaves](#); and Muslim men may have sex with slave-girls (47:4; 4:24; 23:5-6; 70:29-30);
- * Sexual sinners must be whipped (24:2), and sound hadiths say adulterers and homosexuals must be executed (see below for the punishment inflicted on homosexuals);
- * Critics of Islam and Muslims [may be killed](#) (33:59-61);
- * The Quran endorses the massacre of Jewish men and pubescent boys and the enslavement of the women and children (33:25-27);
- * Jihadists buy status in this life and in the afterlife (4:74; 4:95-96; 9:38-44, 86-87, and 111; 61:10-11);
- * Polytheists in the Arabian Peninsula had to convert or die (9:5);
- * Muhammad is the first to launch his [own Crusade](#) long before Europeans responded with their own (9:29).

This list is all about physical acts here on earth, not about abstract doctrines like "begotten." These acts and legal decrees can be measured and evaluated with our own eyes and sound reason, and how do they come out? Not very well, to say the least.

Further, it may be fairly asked: Did Jesus and his Apostles and the New Testament authors say or do these things? Not even close. Therefore, if a Christian wants to enter into "the fold of Islam," then that is his prerogative. But maybe this list will tell him that abstract doctrines per se do not harm or maim or kill people. But the implementation of this list does exactly that.

If you or the readers suspect that these verses have been taken out of context, you and they may click on the following articles that in turn have long and several supporting articles behind each item on the list:

[Why I don't convert to Islam](#)

[Top ten reasons why Islam is not the religion of peace](#)

[Top ten reasons why Islamic law is bad for all societies](#)

[Top ten rules in the Quran that oppress women.](#)

Does the Old Testament command some severe punishments? Yes, but go [here](#) to find out why they no longer apply in the New Testament.

Can someone even half-divine be killed?

Finally, you ask this question as if the answer is self-evident (point no. 4e). Indeed, this is easy to answer, but not in a way that satisfies Islamic doctrine. I see nothing in divinity that precludes the Ultimate Sacrifice, if and only if the Deity willingly and voluntarily lays down his life.

Jesus himself says that he did not come to earth to be served and pampered:

... The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

In these next two verses he says that he willingly lays down his life.

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-only to take it up again.18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again (John 10:17-18)

Christianity does not put God so far up in heaven that he lives in a silver box or golden cage, isolated. It is risky to assert that God cannot do something. Limiting the limitless Deity is misguided. I believe that the Son of God freely choosing to step down into time and space is the most blessed doctrine in all of Christian theology. He did this out of his good will and his powerful love. I would never give up this miracle and historical reality. It benefits humanity greatly.

Thus, for me, there is nothing inherent in God's nature that blocks him from stepping down into time and space, showing us a better way and redeeming us and offering us the gift of eternal life with him. Nothing inherent in his nature? If someone has a prior belief that God could not do this, then what is his starting point for his belief? The Quran? But the New Testament says that the Incarnation happened. So we have two sacred texts that have competing, irreconcilable doctrines.

How do we break the deadlock? For me, the answer is found not in abstract theology, but in practical matters down here on earth. And the long list of policies taken from the Quran in the previous section and the four linked articles (that support the list) resolve the conflict and answer the debate, for me at least. If Islam and its foundation-the Quran-are harsh and excessive in practical matters, then why should I listen to the Quran in abstract doctrines? I don't listen to it.

Points 5 and 6

Is the Enlightenment perfect?

These two points indicate that there is a negative or a downside to the Enlightenment. You quote Robert Louis Wilken's book review of Bernard Lewis' *Crisis of Islam*. Maybe Islamic countries should avoid the Enlightenment, he says. In reply, no one says that the Enlightenment does not bring a backlash. The movement was huge and diverse. It has a sting in it, perhaps many stings. But I believe that the benefits outweigh the liabilities, especially in politics and plain, everyday life. The above list (see "Why do millions leave Islam") explains how the Enlightenment can help Islam, in practical areas. We do not need revelations from a holy book that was too deeply influenced by his seventh-century Arab culture in its laws and policies. We can use sound reason to figure out, for example, how to divide an inheritance between a male and female, or why husbands should not hit their wives-at any time or in any circumstance, or why marrying and having sex with prepubescent girls is wrong.

Does Islam deal effectively with sexual sinners?

Next, you quote Dr. Albert Mohler, who laments a lack of church discipline and the aggressive homosexual agenda in America.

In reply, though I do not know Dr. Mohler, I have heard him on the radio. He is allowed to preach righteousness to society and influence public policy, especially church policy. But I can guarantee you that he would not advocate executing homosexuals. But the Prophet of Islam did this.

First, the Sunan Abu Dawud says that Ibn Abbas reports the following about early Islam and Muhammad's punishment of homosexuals:

... "If you find anyone doing as Lot's people did, kill the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done" (no. [4447](#)).

The next one below no. 4447 says that an unmarried man who commits sodomy should be stoned to death:

"Ibn Abbas said: if a man who is not married is seized committing sodomy, he will be stoned to death" (no. [4448](#)).

Third and finally, in the hadith collection *Mishkhat al-Masabih*, a compendium that brings together other hadith collections, your Prophet prescribes the punishments of being burned to death and having heavy objects thrown on guilty homosexuals:

Ibn Abbas and Abu Huraira reported God's messenger as saying, "Accursed is he who does what Lot's people did." In a version . . . on the authority of Ibn Abbas it says that Ali had two people burned and that Abu Bakr had a wall thrown down on them. (Trans. James Robson, *Prescribed Punishments*, vol. 1, p. 765)

For more information on Islam's and Christianity's policies on homosexuality, go to this [article](#).

I do not deny that the West has not reached moral perfection. The West indeed has its share of problems. However, you seem to believe that without the Enlightenment of any kind and with Islam's guidance in a society, problems vanish away. However, this [webpage](#) has further links to homosexual activity in Saudi Arabia, the land of the two Holy Mosques (in Mecca and Medina).

To cite only one example from that webpage, on April 7, 2005, it was [reported](#) that Saudi Arabia sentenced more than 100 men to prison or flogging for "gay conduct."

On or about March 26, a Jeddah court, meeting in a closed session in which defense attorneys were excluded, sentenced 31 of the men to prison for six months to one year, and to 200 lashes each, for unreported offenses. Four other men received two years' imprisonment and 2,000 lashes. Police released more than 70 of the men not long after their initial arrest; reports in the Saudi press suggested that personal contacts with the government had intervened on their behalf. However, on April 3, police summoned the 70 men back to a local police station and informed them that they had been sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

Is whipping and imprisoning and executing sinners in order to force and impose external righteousness the best policy? "If only we could catch and punish more sinners, then we could teach them a lesson! Then the others will straighten up! We could eliminate the problem! In fact, let's kill them after a judge orders their execution!" This seems to be the yearning of many Muslims whose ideas I read online or in print media. However, people need to change from the inside out. Forcing holiness on to people does not work in the long run and for everybody.

Conclusion

Mr. Al-Buthe, please consider this. You may believe that Saudi Arabia does not want nor need all of the Enlightenment (even Islam's own version-today-not a thousand years ago), but the long list of practical policies (see "Why do millions leave Islam," above) tells me two things:

(1) The Quran absorbed too much of its culture. If it improved on seventh-century Arabia, then it did not go far enough for a religion that claims universality.

(2) When a religion (church or mosque) becomes the government, it tends to oppress people. It is better to let people live in freedom, even if they abuse it. That is the lesson of history in the West. I admit that the West has gone too far in decadence, but if we cannot strike the perfect balance between freedom and limitations, then surely you agree that freedom is better than repression, don't you? Then the citizens of your country can breathe the fresh air of liberty without being harassed by [religious police](#). The power and winsomeness of Islam would surely keep them on the straight and narrow.

From the Open Letter to Congress (continued):

History

Muslims believe that Islam is God's final revelation to all of mankind sent via the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet was born in 570 CE in Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia. This message of Islam was sent as a continuation of the message sent to all God's Prophets and Messengers. The essence of that message is to worship God alone and do good to one's fellow man. It is a message that should resonate strongly with Christians, for indeed the Bible reports that Jesus himself said, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only." At the time that Islam was revealed, the Arabs were steeped in paganism, idolatry, and infanticide. As one of the companions of Muhammad had explained to the Christian ruler of Abyssinia: "We were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols and eating the flesh of dead animals; committing all sorts of abomination and shameful deeds; breaking the ties of kinship; treating guests badly; and the strong among us exploited the weak."

The companion then described what God had commanded His Prophet and Muslims to "to worship Allah alone and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship besides Allah. He commanded us to speak the truth, to honor our promises, to be kind to our relations; to be helpful to our neighbors; to cease all forbidden acts, to abstain from bloodshed; to avoid obscenities and false witness; not to appropriate an orphan's property nor slander chaste women; He ordered us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with him; to uphold prayer; to give alms and fast in the month of Ramadan." This message of Islam spread throughout Arabia and then throughout the

world, has been embraced by people of all cultures and societies, and has brought forth one of the great civilizations of human history.

JA: I will skip over the second paragraph that discusses Islam's transformation of the Arabian Peninsula and instead ask two questions about the first paragraph in this section.

1. You say that Islam is the final revelation for humankind. Does it ultimately complete and fulfill Christianity (Sura 5:15-16)?

SaB: Yes, indeed it does. But the Christianity that it completes and fulfills is the true Message with which Jesus came. The verses you quoted state that the first thing that Islam does to that message is to present it as it truly was.

JA: 2. Since Islam is the continuation of religions, is it the will of Allah that Islam must [spread around the world](#) (Suras 61:9, 48:28, 9:33)?

SaB: Yes, indeed;

a. Islam sees itself, as does contemporary Christianity, as the only means by which mankind can be saved. As such, all Muslims are inspired by concern for their brothers in humanity to spread this soul-saving message.

b. The requirement that Muslims spread their faith through argumentation and reason is what God asserts in Qur'an 061:009 "He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much polytheists may be averse." This is what is happening in the world today; it is a simple fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, including in the U.S.A.

c. We believe that Islam speaks for itself, that our charity and kindness and peace will bring people to Islam. It is in fact forbidden even to attempt to force anyone to Islam. The Qur'an tells us that there is no compulsion in religion. Why? Because Islam is based on a faith that can only reside in the heart, and it is futile to force one to have that kind of faith. Recent events have "forced" people to learn more about our religion, and this is the reason you and others have questions, which is good. But the perpetrators who caused those events were not acting as Muslims. Their actions are completely forbidden.

d. You believe as I do that our Creator is wise, generous and all-knowing. It is He, we all believe, who is providing us with every thing that we need for the maintenance of our biological life. But the Creator knows that it is more in virtue of our souls than our bodies, that we are the human beings we are. He would not therefore neglect to provide us with what we need for the welfare of our souls. This is why He has been sending messengers to us to convey messages from Him that give us guidance on how to lead a life acceptable to Him, and leading such a life makes us happy. When God sends a message He must ensure that it be available to all who are interested in it and that it be understood by them. Where is this message now? Muslims are the only people who even claim that they are in possession of such a message. They have historical evidence that the Qur'an that they are now reading is the same precise words that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Neither the Jews nor the Christians can make such a claim, a fact that some biblical scholars admit.

JA: My comments on this part of our dialogue come in five numbered points.

(1) You write in answer to my first question on Islam fulfilling Christianity:

Yes, indeed it does. But the Christianity that it completes and fulfills is the true Message with which Jesus came. The verses you quoted [Sura 5:15-16] state that the first thing that Islam does to that message is to present it as it truly was.

Does Islam present the message of Jesus "as it truly was"? This implies that the Quran corrects the New Testament, a common belief among Muslims. As we shall see in my fifth point and in the Conclusion, below, the Quran itself is in need of correction-in fact, the list in this section, below, demonstrates this.

In your second paragraph of your Open Letter, you list some positive things that the Quran commands, such as speaking the truth, honoring promises, being kind to relations, being helpful to neighbors, abstaining from bloodshed, avoiding obscenities and false witness, neither appropriating an orphan's property nor slandering chaste women, and so on.

I acknowledge that many items on your list help society. Those positive commands are good, but they are all found in Christian ethics, so the Quran does not bring anything new in this regard. They are not areas of disagreement between us. However, one of the main reasons why I have written my articles is to expose all of Islam to unsuspecting Westerners and others. To withhold valuable information that clarifies all aspects of "the final revelation" is wrong. But this is what I find Muslims frequently doing, as I read their articles online or in the print media-leaving out the unpleasant and violent parts of the Sunnah and the Quran.

I do not believe that Islam completes and fulfills Christianity. I have clarified and slightly expanded the list from Part Two.

* Anyone who accuses someone else of sexual sin must bring four witnesses; if not, the accuser gets eighty lashes (24:4);

* Husbands are a degree above their wives in status (2:228); reliable hadiths [say](#) that the [majority](#) of the inhabitants of hell

are women due only because of their "[harshness and ingratitude](#)," not because of their numerical majority around the globe;

- * A male gets a double share of the inheritance over that of a female (4:11);
- * A woman's testimony counts half of a man's testimony because she may "forget" (2:282). Reliable hadiths say this law is based on the "[deficiency of a woman's mind](#)";
- * To get a valid and legal divorce, a husband merely needs to repeat "I divorce you" three times in quick succession (2:229). This verse is baffling because it does not explicitly say "three times," but Islamic law interprets it in that way.
- * A wife may remarry her ex-husband if and only if she marries another man, they have sex, and then this second man divorces her (2:230);
- * Muhammad has special marriage privileges (as many women as he desires), which only he enjoys (33:50);
- * A Muslim man may be polygamous with up to four wives (4:3);
- * Muhammad gets twenty percent from his seventy-four raids and wars in ten years in Medina (8:1, 41);
- * Muhammad [bought off](#) converts (9:60);
- * Husbands may hit their wife or wives (4:34);
- * Mature men may marry and consummate their marriage with prepubescent girls (65:4);
- * Slavery is endorsed: Muhammad himself [traded](#) in slaves and [owned black slaves](#); and male slave-owners may have sex with slave-girls (4:24; 47:4; 23:5-6; 70:29-30);
- * Sexual sinners must be whipped a hundred times (24:2), and sound hadiths say adulterers and homosexuals must be executed;
- * Critics of Islam and Muslims [may be killed](#) (33:59-61);
- * The Quran endorses and celebrates the massacre of Jewish men and pubescent boys and the enslavement of the women and children (33:25-27);
- * Jihadists buy status from Allah in this life and in the afterlife (4:74; 4:95-96; 9:38-44, 86-87, and 111; 61:10-11);
- * Polytheists in the Arabian Peninsula had to convert or die or leave (9:5-6);* Muhammad is the [first to launch his own Crusade](#) long before Europeans responded with their own (9:29).
- * He forces Jews and Christians to convert or fight and die or pay a tax, with willing submission or subjugation (9:29).

This list balances out your positive one in the second paragraph of your Open Letter. It is one thing for the Quran to preach those positive rules to seventh-century Arabs, whom (you believe) needed them. But you also say that the Quran is God's final revelation to all of humanity, even though other holy books teach right social behavior. So do we really need the Quran, when it is filled with such dubious and violent verses that Muslim missionaries would like to implement around the globe?

Your Prophet suffers from the disadvantage of coming six hundred years after Jesus, who showed us a better way and ushered in a new era of salvation, an era that does not oppress people and force holiness and religious conformity on them from the outside in. Therefore, objectively speaking, if Islam and the Quran complete and fulfill Christianity and the New Testament, then the later religion (Islam) and text (the Quran) have dragged my religion and sacred text backwards by at least two thousands of years, before Jesus came.

If you or the readers suspect that these verses have been taken out of context, you and they may click on the following articles that in turn have long and several supporting articles behind each item on the list:

[Why I don't convert to Islam](#); [Top ten reasons why Islam is not the religion of peace](#); [Top ten reasons why Islamic law is bad for all societies](#); [Top ten rules in the Quran that oppress women](#).

This [article](#) provides more evidence that Islam does not improve on Christianity.

The first strategy that Muslim apologists use to reply to such excesses in the Quran is to remind Christians about the severe commands in the Old Testament. However, we Christians [revere and benefit](#) from this older sacred text, when we read it correctly. But we also believe that Jesus Christ [fulfilled](#) it, so we no longer have to live under the Old Law. Therefore, Muslim apologists no longer need to cite it to score polemical points.

The second strategy of Muslim polemicists is to show the "horrible" life and the crime rates in the US (and the whole West) because western freedoms (supposedly) do not work. Then they assert that Islamic law is the best solution. We humans need it for our own good, even though it is so severe.

In reply, however, this line [graph](#) on a short page at the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that violent crimes (e.g. homicide, rape, assaults, robbery) in America have decreased dramatically since 1994 to 2003. Next, this line [graph](#) also found at the BJS depicts a dramatic drop in property crime (burglary, theft, and car theft) from 1994, though the rate has leveled off since 2002.

But what is the point of placing these two line graphs below this list? To boast that America has reached sinless perfection and has no room for improvement? No. Maybe the crime rate will increase (God forbid) in the next decade (or go down). The point is this: though many factors contribute to a drop in crime rates (or their rise), it is possible to see such a decrease without Islamic law. This means, therefore, that it is not needed to improve any society. Other, less brutal, methods can be applied in order to lower crime and enhance the quality of life.

(2) You say in Point a:

Islam sees itself, as does contemporary Christianity, as the only means by which mankind can be saved. As such, all Muslims are inspired by concern for their brothers in humanity to spread this soul-saving message.

I asked this question in Part Two of our dialogue: Did Jesus and his Apostles and the New Testament authors say or do these things on that list in my previous point, above? Not even close. The question and answer still stand. This is why I doubt seriously that Islam and the Quran are "the final revelation" for humanity.

For the vast differences between Jesus and Muhammad, taken from the New Testament and the Quran, please read this list, [here](#) and [here](#).

(3) This is my comment on your Point b that says:

b. The requirement that Muslims spread their faith through argumentation and reason is what God asserts in Qur'an 061:009 "He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much polytheists may be averse." This is what is happening in the world today; it is a simple fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, including in the U.S.A.

It is interesting that the translation of Sura 61:9 that you choose reads "conqueror" in the context of Islam prevailing over every religion. This apt translation catches the spirit of the path of Muhammad who either went out on or sent out seventy-four raids, assassination hit squads, skirmishes, and full-scale wars, such as the conquest of Mecca in early AD 630. The Meccan polytheists were "averse" (a word in Sura 61:9) to this conquest, but they were so worn down by your Prophet's raids, conflicts, and battles that they surrendered, but not before Khalid al-Walid killed about two dozen who "resisted" (according to his own report).

Whereas Islam may be spread by reason and argumentation (our dialogue proves this), the path of Muhammad says that Islam is also spread by violent means, and this information should not be withheld.

Next, you repeat the common belief that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. But this belief is simply untrue. (In the West Mormonism may be the fastest.) Regardless, Islam is growing fast in the West, but this is not surprising. The West has been already saturated with Christianity, culturally (not Biblically). So if a new religion sprouts up (at least new to the West in its own countries), then the religion appears to be the fastest growing.

Here is an analogy that may clarify matters, though the specific numbers and the years are made up. Let us imagine that in 1975, 100 million Americans owned cars made in America. But foreign car manufacturers had been selling their cars in the American market. In that same year, let us pretend that one million Americans owned the foreign cars. In 1976, ten million new and additional customers bought American-made cars, but two million new and additional customers chose the foreign models. What are the net increases (assuming that everyone kept their 1975 cars and did not sell them)? The foreign manufacturers doubled their growth, but the American cars, by comparison, did not do as well. Yet the American cars still dominate the domestic market. Thus, in the same way, Islam may be (or may not be) the fastest growing religion in the West, but Islam has a long way to go. Here is the point: the phrase "fastest growing religion" in a Western context can be misleading.

In the rest of the world, the claim that Islam is the fastest growing religion is untrue. In many nations, Christianity is growing by leaps and bounds. China is rapidly becoming more Christian, seeing the conversion of millions each year. In a few decades Sub-Saharan Africa will be mostly Christian. India is being blessed with large Christian meetings.

Some examples follow:

[Six million](#) African Muslims are [leaving](#) Islam and converting to Christianity each year.

This is one large outdoor [meeting](#) in Africa, led by one German evangelist. Only slightly smaller Christian meetings happen often in this continent.

In Pakistan, one Christian woman evangelist [hosted a capacity crowd](#) in a football stadium that holds 100,000 spectators.

This [book](#) spells out the growth of Christianity in China: *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*.

(4) For your Point c, you say:

c. We believe that Islam speaks for itself, that our charity and kindness and peace will bring people to Islam. It is in fact forbidden even to attempt to force anyone to Islam. The Qur'an tells us that there is no compulsion in religion. Why? Because Islam is based on a faith that can only reside in the heart, and it is futile to force one to have that kind of faith, Recent events have "forced" people to learn more about our religion, and this is the reason you and others have questions, which is good. But the perpetrators who caused those events were not acting as Muslims. Their actions are completely forbidden.

First, you assert that it is forbidden "even to attempt to force anyone to Islam." Then you quote from Sura 2:256. In reply, however, if only this tolerance were the complete picture of Islam! Instead, we must balance out the "peace and love" representation with some hard reality. Sura 2 is generally regarded as one of the earliest after Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina in AD 622. He wanted to be accepted by all peoples, particularly Jews, so the verse reflects this desire. The sura has many passages discussing Jewish Scriptures and beliefs and actions. However, there is an unpleasant verse in Sura 9, among many. This sura is the last one to be revealed in its entirety, and many Muslims believe that it abrogates or cancels earlier verses that seem to promote only tolerance. Verse five unveils Muhammad's violent policy against polytheists. They either convert or die or leave (cf. verse 6).

9:5 Then when the Sacred Months (the 1st, 7th, 11th, and 12th months of the Islamic calendar) have passed, then kill the Mushrikun [polytheists] (see . . . 2:105) wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and prepare for them each and every ambush. But if they repent and perform As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat) [prayer], and give Zakat [charity tax], then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Hilali and Khan, their insertions in parentheses, mine in brackets)

So there is compulsion in Islam, after all, which contradicts the earlier Sura 2:256.

Second, you say that "events" (presumably acts of violence, especially on September 11) are completely forbidden in Islam. However, your prophet commissions his followers to wage war on Jews and Christians or the People of the Book or Scripture (= Bible). Sura 9:29 says:

9:29 Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (Hilali and Khan, insertions in parentheses are theirs)

This verse that commands battle is all about theology and practice. It says nothing explicit about a real and physical harm done to Islam. People of the Book had three options: (1) fight and die; (2) convert to Islam; (3) or submit and pay the second-class-citizen jizya tax for the alleged privilege of living under Islam. The third option may not technically force conversions, but it comes as close to force as any policy can. It certainly permits violence and is the opposite of "charity and kindness and peace" bringing people to Islam, which "speaks for itself."

Mr. al-Buthi, the direct connection between terrorist acts today and many violent verses in the Quran is unclear to me. However, I understand how violent radicals appeal to these and many other such verses, especially in Sura 9, to justify their attacks. Violent radicals aside, tolerance is not the only story about the spread of Islam. Sometimes the sword speaks for your religion.

(5) For your Point d, you write:

d. You believe as I do that our Creator is wise, generous and all-knowing. It is He, we all believe, who is providing us with every thing that we need for the maintenance of our biological life. But the Creator knows that it is more in virtue of our souls than our bodies, that we are the human beings we are. He would not therefore neglect to provide us with what we need for the welfare of our souls. This is why He has been sending messengers to us to convey messages from Him that give us guidance on how to lead a life acceptable to Him, and leading such a life makes us happy. When God sends a message He must

ensure that it be available to all who are interested in it and that it be understood by them. Where is this message now? Muslims are the only people who even claim that they are in possession of such a message. They have historical evidence that the Qur'an that they are now reading is the same precise words that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Neither the Jews nor the Christians can make such a claim, a fact that some biblical scholars admit.

If I understand this point correctly, you essentially claim four things. For clarity I label them with letters. (A) You say that the Creator looks out for the welfare of our souls, so he would send us a message that provides guidance; (B) "Muslims are the only people who even claim they are in possession of such a message"; (C) "historical evidence" indicates that "the Quran that [Muslims] are now reading is the same precise words that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad"; and (D) "neither the Jews or Christians can make such a claim" . . .

(A) As for your first claim, I have no quarrel that the Creator cares for our souls, but based on the list in my first reply, I do not believe that the Quran contains entirely that caring and loving message, which "makes us happy" (your words). Let me boil it down in modus tollens (denying the "then" clause), in an if-then argument:

To judge from the list of practical policies and legal decrees taken from the Quran itself in part one of my reply, above:

- (1) If the Quran is God's final message to us, then he must want to abuse us physically, and he hates us.
- (2) But God does not want to abuse us physically, and he loves us.
- (3) Therefore, the Quran is not God's final message to us.

(B) You say that Muslims are the only people who believe that they have a message of love and welfare. Though I am neither a Sikh nor a Latter-Day Saint (Mormon), these two religions have holy books that appear long after the Quran. Nanak, founder of Sikhism, and his successors have the Guru Granth Sahib. And Joseph Smith has the Book of Mormon, believed to be brought down by an angel, as well as the Pearl of Great Price and the Doctrine of Covenants. They believe that God cares for them so much that he sent them their messages or holy books. Also, Christians believe that the New Testament offers the true message of God in a way that the Quran does not. Thus, Muslims are not the "only people who even claim that they are in possession of such a message" of love and welfare from God.

(C) Does "historical evidence" say that the Quran today really is "the same precise words that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad"? I already cited four reasons in Part Two why this is not true, though Muslims are taught this from childhood. I repeat some of the reasons here since our multipart dialogue is so long.

To begin, this hadith (or sacred tradition) from Bukhari (a highly reliable collector and editor of hadith) says that Uthman ordered that different versions of the Quran be burned, throughout the Islamic empire.

. . . *Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.* ([Bukhari](#))

It is one thing to prepare the final version (if one exists of the Quran), but burning alternate versions? He destroyed a rich textual history that the New Testament enjoys. Now scholars cannot cross-check these fragments and manuscripts to establish whether the present-day Quran is the right one.

Next, this is an interesting modern discovery: a "buried" version of the Quran, found in 1972, during the restoration of the Great Mosque of Sana'a, in Yemen.

Since the early 1980s more than 15,000 sheets of the Yemeni Korans have painstakingly been flattened, cleaned, treated, sorted, and assembled; they now sit ("preserved for another thousand years," Puin says) in Yemen's House of Manuscripts, awaiting detailed examination. That is something the Yemeni authorities have seemed reluctant to allow, however. "They want to keep this thing low-profile, as we do too, although for different reasons," Puin explains. "They don't want attention drawn to the fact that there are Germans and others working on the Korans. They don't want it made public that there is work being done at all, since the Muslim position is that everything that needs to be said about the Koran's history was said a thousand years ago." ([Source](#))

I asked in Part Two: "Why won't the authorities allow its publication? What are they hiding?" These questions still stand.

The third and final example comes from the reliable hadith collection Sahih Muslim, which says that an entire

sura, having over a hundred verses, is missing from the Quran.

. . . We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) Bara'at [Sura 9, which has 129 verses]. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust." (Muslim no. [2286](#); see the four hadiths above this one)

Please see this [webpage](#) that has many links to articles and hadiths on the corruption of the Quran. If the Quran really is the precise words revealed to Muhammad, then the long list (see my reply (1), above) says that too many of the words command oppressive policies. So what is the advantage of reading these "precise words" revealed to your prophet?

(D) As for the fourth sub-point, you again challenge the reliability of the New Testament. (I forego a discussion on the Old Testament, though its manuscript traditions are first rate.) It must be admitted-and no reputable scholar attempts to hide the fact-that the manuscripts that make up the New Testament have traveled through time. Therefore, they have received some light bumps and bruises, so to speak (and so do all ancient texts, including the Quran). However, there are thousands of manuscripts, ranging from fragments to partial and to complete books or sections and the entire New Testament. This means that qualified scholars can cross-check and compare them and eliminate any scribal and incidental errors. Thus, these slight historical, textual "wounds" have not altered the essential message of the Four Gospel and the rest of the New Testament. This means, in turn, that the following assessment of these scholars reflects textual reality. I again quote from Part Two, which has more information:

The overwhelming majority of the text of the Greek New Testament is firmly established. Where uncertainties remain, in no case is any doctrinal matter at issue. (D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, An Introduction to the New Testament, 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005, p. 30)

The New Testament manuscripts far outnumber other manuscript traditions of ancient texts, and the chronological gap between the New Testament manuscripts and the events themselves and original writings is much, much shorter. This short [article](#) has a comparative Table.

Open Letter to Congress (continued):

Reform

As with all civilizations, there are periods of flowering and also decay. Two centuries ago, when America was in its infancy, the peoples of Arabia had fallen back into the paganism, ignorance, superstition, illiteracy, and societal oppression - conditions that were quite similar to the pre-Islamic days. At that time a religious scholar, Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab (d. 1762), began the task of religious and societal reform. His main message was that God alone should be worshipped and that Muslims should return to the teachings and practice of the Prophet Muhammad. He was joined in this task by Muhammad Ibn Sa`ud (d. 1765); with these events, the essential concepts underlying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was born.

The modern Saudi state was actually formed some one hundred years after Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab's death. The leading scholars of the Muslim world agreed to the custodianship of the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina by the Saudi state and to the soundness of the religious doctrines on which this state is based. For this reason "Wahhabism" is not a sect outside of main body of Islam; rather, it is merely a reform movement that has been recognized by the majority of Muslims.

JA: I have two questions: 1. You briefly recount the origins of your reform movement. What did the Wahhabi reform movement do to the Shi'ites and their shrines in Kerbala in 1802?

SaB:

The "monotheists" were responsible for the destruction of the domes (graves) in Kerbala and Najaf. They took this action because the domes constituted "shirk" and thus were contrary to sharia, not because they belonged to the Shiites. The monotheists also destroyed many similar symbols of shirk at a number of different sites on the Arabian Peninsula.

JA: 2. You say that "the essential concepts underlying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were born" with the Wahhabi reforms. What are the historical reasons for the image of a sword sitting on the flag of Saudi Arabia?

SaB: First, the flag is officially described as, "Flag, green background, with in white letters the Muslim creed in Arabic: 'There is no god but God: Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' Emblem, a date palm, representing vitality and growth, and two crossed swords, symbolizing justice and strength rooted in

faith."

Second, there is no mention of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab or his particular movement in the Saudi flag or our national symbols. Although some in the West are fixated on this one scholar, we view him as simply one scholar from among a constellation of scholars who helped us to understand our religion.

Third, the sword symbolizes the steadfast character of us as a people, justice, strength and unity. It is not about anger or being a "Wahhabi".

JA: I have only two comments on this part.

(1) One of the purposes of your Open Letter is to show that Wahhabism is kinder and gentler than popular opinion (wrongly) believes. In fact, you do not like the label. You are simply Sunni Muslims who adhere strictly to the Quran and the proper teachings of Islam, especially in the Sunnah.

However, destroying shrines belies your efforts to present a better version of your Islamic monotheism. Let's assume that some Muslim devotees who appeared at the shrines indeed practiced some form of light shirk (associating anything with Allah), according to the strict purists. Then religious freedom is still better than repression, regardless of what an ancient sharia rule may decree, written centuries ago.

Next, you say that the destruction of the shrines was "not because they belonged to the Shiites." However, James Wynbrandt in *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia* (Checkmark Books, 2004), p. 135, says that humans, the Shi'ites, were slaughtered along with the destruction of their shrines.

With peace prevailing along the border between the Hijaz and Najd . . . [in] March 1802 Karbala's citizens were slaughtered and its sacred places destroyed, including the great dome of Husayn.

Normally, it would be only fair to point out early American abuses. (Read about the Trail of Tears [here](#), which says the government forcibly removed an Indian tribe in the early nineteenth century.) But this short news [report](#) in 2001 connects the Saudi government to the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. So the intolerance continues today, throughout the Islamic world, not just in or near Saudi Arabia.

Here is the hard-learned lesson of history in the West. A few Christian reformers in the sixteenth century sometimes destroyed things in their zeal, but now this is generally viewed as misguided. If a Christian performed a ritual that a zealous reformer did not like, such as praying to a saint or burning incense before a statue, then the reformer should have let freedom reign, however much he disliked the ritual. He should not have destroyed the statue nor harassed the devotee. The ritual does not harm anyone else physically or materially. The zealous reformer may proclaim by words alone his version of Christianity and godly purity, but he should not destroy things or whip or imprison people for (perceived) violations of religious rituals or theology.

Further, after the Puritans (note the word "pure" in Puritan) crossed the Atlantic and reached the shores of America in the seventeenth century, they were sometimes intolerant. They physically punished people who sinned. They forced external holiness and conformity on to people. Eventually, however, the Founders of our nation took a more tolerant path in the eighteenth century. People are now allowed to worship as they want. Thus, the Founders progressed. They showed wisdom. They were right.

If Saudi Arabia is compatible with modernity, as you say in your Open Letter, then is not religious freedom essential? This is true, no matter how distasteful the rituals performed by another Muslim or a member of another religion may be, according to a strict Muslim purist.

If you distrust the West about its "hard-learned lesson" on religious freedom, then do not be surprised if the West distrusts your Open Letter to a western government when the Letter says that Saudi Arabia is compatible with modernity.

Fortunately, this [report](#) says that the Saudi government may be relaxing its opposition to Sufism after September 11. But before that date:

When the al-Saud family that would later come to rule Saudi Arabia took over Hejaz [western region] in the 1920s, the Wahhabis banned mawlid [celebrations of birth and life of Muhammad] as a form of heresy and destroyed the historic shrines of Khadija, Fatima and the prophet's companions, fearing they would lead to idolatry and polytheism.

The article shows a photo of Salman al-Odah, a strict and popular Saudi cleric (according to the report), accepting an invitation from Sufi cleric Abdallah Fadaaq. Expanding tolerance is a positive development. But

will this expansion include other Muslim sects and even other religions?

(2) As for the Islamic confession of faith (the Shahadah) and the sword sitting on your flag, I thought of this hadith from Sahih Bukhari. It says that the Prophet of Islam has been ordered to fight (= the sword on the flag?) until people acknowledge that Allah is the right deity and Muhammad is his messenger (= the Shahadah on the flag?). The people must also give the messenger their money. If they do these things, then their lives and property are kept safe.

Allah's Apostle said: *"I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Apostle, and offer the prayers perfectly and give the obligatory charity, so if they perform that, then they save their lives and property from me except for Islamic laws and then their reckoning (accounts) will be done by Allah."* ([Bukhari](#) ; see a parallel hadith [here](#))

Does this hadith and its parallel, plus Suras 9:5 and 9:29 (quoted above), capture the essence of the words and the sword on the flag?

Conclusion

Mr. al-Buthi, let's step back and look at the big picture seen in the overarching mission of Jesus and Muhammad. I choose this topic to conclude with, because you believe that Islam presents the message of Jesus as it "truly was."

You assert in your Open Letter to Congress that Muhammad was called to lead people towards a new law that superceded the paganism of Arabia in the seventh century. Implied in this belief is that he was another lawgiver, like Moses (except your Prophet's laws are fuller and more complete). He intended to establish a new order here on earth. In contrast, it is often believed among Muslims that Jesus was a spiritual leader whose kingdom was not of this earth. He was not a new lawgiver. He was "heavenly minded."

In reply, however, part of this is true. Jesus said that he was a king, but his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36-37). But the more I study Islam, the happier I am that he never made specific pronouncements on many policies, such as "Cut off the hands of thieves! Divide the inheritance to give men a double portion over that of women! Women's testimony counts half of men's! Whip sexual sinners one hundred times! Husbands may hit their wife or wives! Crucify highway robbers, or cut off their alternate hand and foot! I shall fight you until you acknowledge me as Lord, pray my way, and give me a 'charity' tax! My harsh decrees will make you happy, in the end! If only you could see this!"

His silence on such legal decrees and violent policies does not imply that we should interpret his message in dubious ways, for that would violate his entire ministry. He honored and gave dignity to people, especially to sinners. But he loved them too much to leave them unchanged from the inside out. Rather, his silence means that we can use our sound reason to figure things out, such as how to divide an inheritance, or why women's testimony counts equally as men's testimony.

Nor, especially, do we need revelations in a bygone and culture-bound holy book that commands that we should carry out these harsh decrees and laws.

Mr. al-Buthi, you and millions of Muslims believe that the Quran is the final revelation to all of humanity, but I disagree.

For me, down-to-earth reality in the messages and practices of Jesus and Muhammad breaks the deadlock between the competing abstract claims and doctrines of Christianity and Islam.

Some of Christ's positive pronouncements and policies have been explored [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Compatibility with Modernity

Like all developing nations, Saudi Arabia faces many challenges. We have social, economic, and political issues that need to be addressed. Our religious teachings, however, are not against modernity, progress, or development. Rather, this religious movement has led to a general renaissance in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic world as a whole. In just 70 years, Saudi Arabia has developed a nationwide education system consisting of eight universities, 100 colleges, and 26,000 schools that provide free education to over 5,000,000 students. The teacher-student ratio of 1:12.5 is among the lowest in the world, with over one quarter of the annual state budget allocated to education. There are currently 320 hospitals in the Kingdom consisting of 46,048 beds. In the face of these facts it is difficult to understand how our religious beliefs could possibly be inherently anti-progress and anti-modernity. Although we have much to improve, the achievements of the Kingdom thus far demonstrate that a modern society can be built

upon core teachings and that progress is not hindered by an adherence to Islamic law.

JA (2005): My sincere congratulations on the development of your schools, colleges, and universities, and especially the number of hospitals. This seems positive.

1. Do you know which percentage of students specialize in religious education, such as Islamic Studies, at the universities? Is it thirty percent?

SaB (2005):

I have not been able to find any official statistics on this matter. We do not teach purely religious studies in the narrow sense of the word even in our "Islamic universities."

These universities offer courses on all the social sciences, on computer science, on foreign languages like English, and so on. Remember, however, that we are not a secular country. Because our religion forms the basis of our life, we teach it in schools and offer courses on it even to students who specialize in disciplines like medicine and engineering.

If you are asking this question because you believe in the myth of the linkage between terrorism and Islamic studies, we refer you to the recent article "[The Myth of the Madrassa](#)" written by Peter Bergen and Swati Pabdey. (Please see [The Myth of the Madrassa](#))

JA (2006): The reason I ask about the percentage of students who choose Islamic Studies or other religious majors is the high unemployment and crime rates in your country. John R. Bradbury worked as a journalist in Saudi Arabia for more than two years, writing for various western publications. In his [book](#) *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*, he provides statistics for the rise. He writes:

The statistics available are breathtaking. A 2003 report by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, for example, said that crime among young jobless Saudis rose 320 percent between 1990 and 1996, and is expected to increase an additional 136 percent by 2005. More than 60 percent of Saudis are under 21, and the kingdom's population growth rate is roughly 4 percent-one of the highest in the world . . . (p. 142)

Thus, the crime rate increases, despite the harsh punishments your legal system regularly metes out, such as chopping off heads. Bradbury recounts some episodes of public beheadings. In 2003, for example, more than 50 took place for everyone to see (p. 144). Academic programs covering economics and the social sciences may help the problem of crime. I read, above, and elsewhere that you have such programs, so this is good.

We have asked a friend and colleague, originally from Saudi Arabia, to comment on our dialogue. He adds:

The Saudi Government will allow westerners who are converts to attend the Islamic University in Mecca or Medina to earn a degree for Islamic studies. The only reason they allow them to do so is to help them become Imams and to use them to convert others to Islam. They would have never allowed any westerner who is not Muslim to attend these Islamic universities because they are in holy places / cities and only Muslims are allowed access to these places.

These days, from my conversations with my family and friends, the Saudi government is not allowing any non-Saudis to attend their universities, period. They may have some very little exceptions – but never for medicine or engineering. This process is part of what the government of Saudi Arabia calls Saudization. Also, non-Saudis are not allowed to own any property (e.g. land or homes) or businesses. They must have the property or the business in a Saudi partner's name, who is called a sponsor.

The point that this Saudi colleague is making (I believe) is that his (former) nation closes the door on an even exchange of ideas, to help solve his nation's problems. America and other free societies invite hundreds of thousands of students from all countries, cultures, and religions to study in their universities, often providing grants and scholarships for them. They allow business partnerships with foreigners. Why is Saudi Arabia closing itself off from the free and even exchange of ideas and partnerships?

As for the Madrassas and violence, please click on this [report](#), which balances out your positive link.

JA (2005) 2. One of the hallmarks of modernity and progress is women's freedom. Why are not Saudi women allowed to drive cars and to vote?

SaB (2005):

What is modernity? And what is freedom?

Take "modernity," a very vague term. Your references suggest that it merely is the state of being modern.

But what does it mean to be modern?

Apparently "modernity" means whatever happens to be currently popular in the West. The West is modern in many disparate ways. To be "modern" in this sense would require every non-Western society to abandon its culture and live in a constant state of imitation of changing Western norms. We are emphatically against this wholesale adoption of Western modernity as it relates to a promiscuous freedom. We believe that we have much that is good by any rational and moral standards, and we are therefore keen not only to preserve it but also to invite others to it. But at the same time we believe that there is much worldly good in the West, and we are keen to derive benefits from that good. This applies especially to science and technology and anything that helps us to advance in these respects. We do not, however, share Westerners' current beliefs—religious or secular - and strongly oppose many of the West's prevailing values.

Thus we think that there is a significant difference between "modernity" in general and religious/moral modernity. We have shopping malls of chrome and glass and the latest technology; we all use mobile phones which are actually more advanced than those in the West; we drive cars, eat in restaurants, drive through fast food outlets, get our cash from ATMs, and all have computers, satellite televisions, and Bluetooth-enabled devices.

Thus we reject the notion that we must do something simply because it happens to be Westerners' current prevailing cultural prejudice. We are simply not impressed by being told that something is one of the hallmarks of modernity as the West does in the following examples. We evaluate things by being true or false, useful or harmful, suitable or not suitable, and not just because the West counts them among the hallmarks of your modernity.

JA (2006): I am confused about something. You say in your Open Letter, which you initiated to the American Congress, that Saudi Arabia is compatible with modernity (your word). Then, when I bring up the word "modernity," you talk about "cultural prejudice" and the "wholesale adoption of Western modernity as it relates to a promiscuous freedom." No one said anything about adopting the extremes or the vices in the West. I agree that the West has gone too far in that regard. But Saudi Arabia has let the pendulum swing too far to the other extreme-to the far side of repression, such as executing or flogging or imprisoning sexual sinners (read about this excess [here](#) and [here](#))? Does this work? Read below.

SaB (2005): One of the primary aims of Islam is the welfare of the family. Being good to one's parents is mentioned in the Qur'an as second only to worshipping God:

Qur'an 004:36-38 "And worship God. Ascribe no thing as partner to Him. (Show) kindness to parents, and to near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and into the neighbor who is of kin (to you) and the neighbor who is not of kin and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hands possess. Lo! God loves not such as are proud and boastful, who hoard their wealth and enjoin avarice on others, and hide that which God has bestowed upon them of His bounty. For disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom; and (also) those who spend their wealth in order to be seen of men, and believe not in God nor the Last Day. Whoever takes Satan for a comrade, a bad comrade has he."

To protect the family Islam prohibits all kinds of extra-marital sexual relations and has severe punishment for those who commit adultery and fornication. As a consequence, free mixing between men and women is not encouraged. Today some of our learned men thought that it would be advisable for women not to drive cars as this would tempt women to mix easily with men and vice versa. Thus the prohibition on women driving was seen as a precautionary matter; none of the learned men said that it was religiously forbidden for women to

drive cars (please [see Karen Hughes Driving Saudi Arabia - U.S. Relationship](#)). The issue of women driving was never seen in our society as depriving women of a right; this is evidenced by the fact that few Saudi women even want to drive. In the end, this question is all a matter of what is beneficial and what is not in the light of the principles in which Muslim men and women believe.

JA (2006): You report that the reason for prohibiting women from driving cars is to separate the sexes because they may commit sexual sin and be severely punished. In Part Two I have already noted that [homosexuality](#) takes place in Saudi Arabia, so how does one fix that problem? By forbidding men from driving? I am not being facetious. It seems that the reason offered by the religious scholars for prohibiting women does not work entirely. It is a sad fact that humans will commit sexual sin, no matter how much they are smothered by rules and religious police.

Bradbury reports in his book (cited above) that the separation of the sexes creates the (unintended) backlash of men seeking comfort and sexual gratification from other men, and women from other women.

So malls in Jeddah, as well as in Riyadh and Dammam, have predictably become the preferred haunts of another group: male seeking sex with other males. Unlike the boys and girls seeking to mix, they do not have to hide their intentions. Indeed, they stroll certain of the malls and supermarkets openly making passes at each other. They are dressed in variations on Western fashion that would, in America, be considered outrageously queer, but in Saudi Arabia raise eyebrows only among those who insist on "Islamic"-that is, Bedouin-dress at all times. These young men openly cruise, often exchanging comments in loud voices with their friends when a desirable object comes into view. (p. 154)

Additionally, Bradbury reports that gay websites have exploded in Saudi Arabia:

The number of gay-themed Saudi websites especially has exploded in recent years. Some of these sites are blocked by those responsible for censoring the Internet, but software to avoid the blocks is easily purchased in local markets. Most sites exist for one reason only: to facilitate meet-ups. Even gay pornography is freely available to anyone who has a satellite dish in their bedroom, which is to say all middle-class Saudi boys. (p. 155).

He goes on to report that lesbians also seek their own encounters and can easily do so because of the segregation of the sexes (pp. 162-65).

To return to the specific issue of driving, why do women have to be restricted from this privilege completely? Why not permit those who want to drive to enjoy this privilege at least one or two days a week? There is a middle ground somewhere.

Next, it may be true that "few Saudi women even want to drive." But here are the few. This news [report](#) by Faiza Saleh Ambah offers these few a voice. Did Karen Hughes meet with them?

Inside a rented hall on the outskirts of the Saudi capital, women slip on T-shirts over their silk and cotton blouses. "Yes to the empowerment of women," it reads. Nov. 6, 1990, is printed in red under tire tracks.

About 20 women have gathered privately here for their annual reunion to mark their defiance 15 years ago of this conservative kingdom's ban on female drivers

After the protest, thousands of leaflets with their names and their husbands' names – with "whores" and "pimps" scrawled next to them – circulated around the city. They were suspended from jobs, had passports confiscated, and were told not to speak to the press About a year after the protest, they returned to work and received their passports. But they were kept under surveillance and passed over for promotions.

But now, due to the courage of one member of Saudi Arabia's consultative Shura Council, a new reform-minded king, and a society forced into open debate following violence linked to Muslim extremists, the subject is once again taking center stage.

The report continues by saying that most Saudi women view driving as an imitation of the decadent West. Again, this opinion lets the pendulum swing too far to the other extreme of suppression.

Here is a very short [excerpt](#) from an interview with a member of the Saudi Shura Council Muhammad Aal Zulfa, which aired on Al-'Arabiya TV on June 8, 2005. He would let his wife and daughter drive.

This [article](#) says that Bahrain, an island and independent state that is connected to Saudi Arabia by a bridge, provides a "breathing lung" for Saudis because the Islamic island allows people to do as they want. The words "breathing lung" mean that Saudi Arabia suffocates people. On the weekends an average of 40,000 cars line up to cross the bridge.

Surely there is a middle path between decadence and repression.

SaB (2005): As to voting, it was never the practice in our society to resort to voting for choosing our leaders. Over the years we have been very contented with the manner in which our leaders have been chosen. Now that voting has been adopted on a limited level, no one here is saying that there is something in Islam which allows men but not women to vote; indeed, many of our officials are saying that this restriction was only a matter of convenience because of the additional infrastructure that would be required. Many believe that this restriction will be lifted in the future, and perhaps in the very near future. (How many years were American women denied the right to vote? How many years were American Blacks denied the right to vote?)

JA (2006): First, I am encouraged about your statement that there is nothing in Islam which "allows men but not women to vote." But I am unclear about the "infrastructure that would be required." I hope it gets ready for the next elections.

Second, it is true that for about a century and a half America did not allow women to vote, but we have corrected the problem at the beginning of the twentieth century, passing the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919, which opened the door to this basic right. Our nation was one of the first. France did not open the voting booth to women until after the Second World War.

Third, it is true, sadly, that black Americans were disenfranchised. But we have corrected the problem with the Voting Rights Act in 1965. The world awaits Saudi Arabia to correct its problems. This is why, as noted in my first point in this section, that I am encouraged by your words: "Many believe that this restriction will be lifted in the future, and perhaps in the very near future." I hope such freedom happens soon, in the near future.

JA (2005) 3. One of the hallmarks of modernity and progress is an appreciation of science. Sheikh AbdulAziz bin Baz became Chancellor of the Islamic University of Medina in 1968. In 1974, he was appointed president of the Directorate of Religious Research, Islamic Legal Rulings, Islamic Propagation, and Guidance. This prominent cleric, when he was Vice-Chancellor of the Islamic University of Medina, published an article in two newspapers in 1966. In them he claimed that the Qur'an proves that the sun orbits around the earth and not that the earth orbits around the sun.

First, do you know whether he published this article? Second, does his view reflect the view of many conservative Saudis?

SaB (2005): **First**, Islam has no problem with science; it was in the Muslim world that science first flourished, and it was upon that basis that Europeans built their science.

Second, the Sheikh did not mention anything about orbiting. He was only criticizing the belief that the sun is stationary because there is a verse in the Qur'an which says that it "runs." We now know that the whole solar system moves around the Galaxy and that the Galaxy itself is traveling through space. Sheikh Abd-Aziz Ibn Baz was not a scientist, and he did not claim the doctrinal infallibility of a pope; he was simply expressing a view in which he honestly believed. Although he was a great religious teacher, Islam recognizes that no man can have the infallibility popes still today claim. Accordingly, Ibn Baz could not force his view on all Muslims - he didn't even think about trying to start an inquisition against the many who differed with him. In the face of Ibn Baz's statement, what should we Muslims have done - prevented him from expressing a view simply because we believed it erroneous?

Addressing the Western theologians' problems with science, many Christian scholars today emphatically oppose Darwinism and believe that creationism should be taught in school. (Indeed, your President Bush advocates teaching "Intelligent Design" - a poor cousin of creationism - in public schools!) How should those people be answered?

Third, our Sheikhs are only learned *Islamic* scholars; they are not popes whose words on religious topics become part of the religion. The Islamic religion is based on two sources only: the Qur'an and the Sunna (words and deeds of the Prophet).

Fourth, George Washington is said to have been one of those who believed that the earth is flat (please see [Flat Earth Society](#)). But famous Muslim scholars like Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiya who lived centuries before him knew that the earth is spherical.

JA (2006): My comments come in three numbered points. I omit a discussion of your third reply, but my second point alludes to it, on contrasting Christianity today and in the Medieval Age.

(1) For your first point you say:

First, Islam has no problem with science; it was in the Muslim world that science first flourished, and it was upon that basis that Europeans built their science.

This is a common belief in the Muslim world, and even some Westerners perpetuate it. But it needs to be balanced out and clarified.

Alvin J. Schmidt, in *The Great Divide*, pp. 200-01, summarizes his findings in Chapter 8, which covers science. He corrects two popular misconceptions: the West is heavily indebted to Islam; and the church always stood in the way of scientific advancement. Actually, Islam is indebted to its conquered peoples, usually Christians and Jews.

Starting off, he concedes that some noteworthy natural philosophers (pre-scientists) lived in the Islamic empire. But they stand on the shoulders of Greeks, who were not completely wrong about some things.

Although Islam produced some noteworthy natural philosophers among the Arabs [Avicenna (980-1037); Averroes (1126-1198); Jabir Ibn Hayyan (c. 760-815); al-Kindi (813-880); and al-Razi, (c. 865-925)], they never attained the intellectual stature of the Greeks . . . In the words of one historian of science, "The legacy of the Islamic world in medicine and natural science is the legacy of Greece, increased by many additions, mostly practical" . . .

Then he points out that the science we know today began in the thirteenth century, long after science stalled under Islam. Also, it was the church that was a major patron of scientific learning. He ends with a short list of groundbreaking western discoveries fostered by Christianity, and bypassing Islam that seems to have bogged down in an exclusive search for religious truth and that seems largely to have ignored scientific truth. Western science was not built on the basis of Islamic "science," a misnomer in the first place, because, as noted, science did not really begin until the thirteenth century. Before then, it may be called a "proto-science," which is built on Greek "proto-science."

Finally, it is well to remember that Muslims discovered no scientific laws, such as Kepler's three laws in astronomy, Newton's law of gravity, Pascal's law of liquid measure, Ohm's law in the field of electricity, Boyle's law in chemistry, Kelvin's absolute zero, Faraday's electromagnetic induction, Dalton's atomic weight, Lavoisier's law of conservation of energy, or Mendel's law pertaining to heredity. Nor did any Muslim discover bacteria, introduce chloroform, inoculate against disease, discover circulation of the blood, introduce antiseptics, or encourage the dissecting of human cadavers. These and other great moments in science were by-products of Christianity's influence, all outside of the context of any Islamic influence and motivation . . .

The next scholar, after quoting Westerners who put down their own western intellectual history and who exalt Islam's history to high heaven, clarifies and balances matters out. He says that Muslims translated insignificant ancient texts and that Christendom already had the important ones. He also says in the fourth paragraph, below, that Islam was caught up in Neoplatonism, a poor reflection of Plato, and what philosophy did exist in Islam rose higher than the Quran. So Islamic philosophers Avicenna and Averroes believed.

So the great rescue of Greek philosophy by translation into Arabic turns out to mean no rescue of Plato and the transmission of Latin translations of Arabic translations of Greek texts of Aristotle, either directly or more often via Syriac or Hebrew, to a Christendom that *already had the Greek texts and had already translated most of them into Latin, with almost all of the work of translation from any of these languages into any other having been done by Christians and Jews and none of it by Muslims.*

But if Islamic scholars did not actually translate ancient Greece's natural philosophy from Greek into Arabic and from Arabic into Latin, did not actually rescue Plato and Aristotle from oblivion, and did not actually ignite the Renaissance with them, didn't they create a vibrant and superior philosophy?

Were not Avicenna and Averroes great? Great they were, and philosophers too, but not exactly Islamic ones.

Islamic philosophy is a misnomer; at least, what we in the West think of as Islamic philosophy is. It is not Islamic in the sense of being rooted in Islam or even in the weaker sense of being melded to it. It is based rather on those vaunted translations from Greek and has a higher allegiance to Neoplatonism than to Islam. It considered philosophy the highest expression of truth, available only to the wisest, and Islam a lower expression suitable for the masses. It believed that the Koran is temporal, not eternal, and that God knows only universals, not particulars. In short, it was in opposition to what we and most Muslims think of as Islam.

([Source](#), emphasis original. This [article](#) by the same scholar also cites Westerners putting down their own tradition and exalting Islam. They praise Islam to dispraise the West. But the article also balances out the picture.)

(2) In your second point you write:

Second, the Sheikh did not mention anything about orbiting. He was only criticizing the belief that the sun is stationary because there is a verse in the Qur'an which says that it "runs." We now know that the whole solar system moves around the Galaxy and that the Galaxy itself is traveling through space. Sheikh Abd-Aziz Ibn Baz was not a scientist, and he did not claim the doctrinal infallibility of a pope; he was simply expressing a view in which he honestly believed.

I have not read Sheikh Ibn Baz's article, but this is an excerpt taken from Sandra Mackey's [The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom](#), p. 98. Her book is generally sympathetic of your country

In an essay written to refute the heresy of the theory of the solar system taught at Riyadh University, [Ibn] Baz said:

Hence I say the Holy Koran, the Prophet's teaching, the majority of Islamic scientists, and the actual fact prove that the sun is running in its orbit, as Almighty God ordained, and that the earth is fixed and stable, spread out by God for his mankind and made a bed and cradle for them, fixed down firmly by mountains, lest it shake.

See a quick [biography](#) of Ibn Baz, which confirms that the Sheikh believed the sun orbits, not the earth. Also see this short entry on [Salafi / Wahhabi literalism](#).

Still under your second point you write:

. . . Although [Sheikh Abd-Aziz Ibn Baz] was a great religious teacher, Islam recognizes that no man can have the infallibility popes still today claim. Accordingly, Ibn Baz could not force his view on all Muslims - he didn't even think about trying to start an inquisition against the many who differed with him. In the face of Ibn Baz's statement, what should we Muslims have done - prevented him from expressing a view simply because we believed it erroneous?

Specifically, you say that Ibn Baz "did not even think about trying to start an inquisition against many who differed with him." If I understand this comment, you may be implying that the popes started inquisitions, and this is worse than Ibn Baz's beliefs. In reply, it is misguided to reference violent events and oppressive policies hundreds of years ago, and even a thousand years ago, that the church committed. Why? Do not critics of Islam point out violence and oppressive policies long ago?

However, Christian authorities *today* do not engage in any inquisitions. Christian leaders *today* do not see this entire era of church history as authoritative, as if we should bring forward *all* of its policies and practices in such matters. The church has reformed. That is, no Protestant pastor or Catholic priest *today* says that we should persecute and abuse and harass Christians or atheists for holding views contrary to the Bible or church teachings, particularly not in scientific disputes. However, Islam persecutes and harasses nonconformist scholars often enough, *today*, not only a thousand or more years ago. (Why? It punished and killed dissenters in its origins, unlike the New Testament and earliest Christianity.) Thus, no one demands, as you say in your last sentence of the excerpt, that Muslims should have prevented the Sheikh from expressing

his conservative views among many strict Quran-believing Muslims or anyone else.

In any case, I am pleased to read your reply that says Saudi universities disagree with the Sheikh and call his view erroneous.

Your final comment in your second point says:

Addressing the Western theologians' problems with science, many Christian scholars today emphatically oppose Darwinism and believe that creationism should be taught in school. (Indeed, your President Bush advocates teaching "Intelligent Design" - a poor cousin of creationism - in public schools!) How should those people be answered?

Your comment here disappoints me. This is one subject on which Christians and Muslims could work together. In any case, you call Intelligent Design "a poor cousin of creationism." Does this imply that strict creationism is the privileged first-born son? It seems that Intelligent Design can only help Islamic theology in the world of modern science, unless you hold to a literal six-day creation.

Next, maybe a few Christian scholars want creationism taught in public schools, but most such scholars prefer that Intelligent Design should be taught alongside evolution. This Jewish scholar, for example, who rejects Intelligent Design, says that it should still be taught in our schools:

Of the many reasons why intelligent design - an argument I reject - ought to be taught alongside evolution in our public schools, perhaps none is more compelling than the ignorance and demagoguery which is evident in our current national debate over the issue. Below are four myths you frequently come across while reading the political literature on the subject, followed by the facts. ([Source](#))

Personally, I do not worry about the issue of teaching Intelligent Design in the public schools, one way or the other.

(3) Finally, your fourth point says:

Fourth, George Washington is said to have been one of those who believed that the earth is flat, but famous Muslim scholars like Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiya who lived centuries before him knew that the earth is spherical.

In reply, it may be true that these two Muslim scholars knew that the earth is spherical, but this was widely known, long before Islam came on the scene.

It was widely known [before Aristotle's time in the fourth century BC] that the earth was spherical, for example from the shadow of the earth which is cast upon the surface of the moon during lunar eclipses . . . (Peter Whitfield, [Landmarks in Western Science](#), p. 33).

In fact, at least one Greek natural philosopher understood that the sun is the center of the cosmos.

A particular fame however is attached to one of [the Hellenistic scientists], Aristarchus of Samos (flourished 280 BC), for his suggestion that the Sun and not the earth was the centre of cosmos . . . But in proposing a moving earth, Aristarchus was violating all accepted wisdom, and indeed the evidence of our own senses. (Whitfield, p. 42)

Also, there is a difference between George Washington and Sheikh Ibn Baz. The former was a general and the first President, who lived in the eighteenth century. The latter was an Islamic scholar who lived in the twentieth century and who, presumably, had access to news reports (if only auditory) about humans landing on the moon. He benefited from advances in astronomy and rocket science in a way that President Washington could not-assuming that he really did believe that the earth was flat.

Finally, you link to information about the Flat Earth Society. We live in a free country, so people may put up any website or form any society that they want, without fear of harassment. But this society is not part of an accredited university or college or research lab recognized by anyone of reputation, nor is it a member of any respectable scientific community or organization. On the other hand, Sheikh Ibn Baz was deeply entrenched in the Saudi religious establishment and in an accredited university.

For challenges to science in the Quran, please go to this [webpage](#). I especially [recommend this scholar](#). The Saudi colleague whom we invited to make comments adds: "It should be mentioned that all of the so-called scientific evidence in the Quran is based on visible evidence we can see with our own eyes, not on divine knowledge." This lengthy [summary](#) of a debate between the scholar previously linked and a Muslim brings out this fact in more detail.

Summary

Mr. al-Buthi, I again quote two paragraphs from Bradbury's book, cited above.

This one describes the astronomical rise in crimes in the land of the Two Holy Mosques, where Islamic punishments are carried out physically and swiftly:

The statistics available are breathtaking. A 2003 report by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, for example, said that crime among young jobless Saudis rose 320 percent between 1990 and 1996, and is expected to increase an additional 136 percent by 2005. More than 60 percent of Saudis are under 21, and the kingdom's population growth rate is roughly 4 percent-one of the highest in the world . . . (p. 142)

The next quotation describes how segregating the two sexes leads to increased homosexual encounters:

So malls in Jeddah, as well as in Riyadh and Dammam, have predictably become the preferred haunts of another group: male seeking sex with other males. Unlike the boys and girls seeking to mix, they do not have to hide their intentions. Indeed, they stroll certain of the malls and supermarkets openly making passes at each other. They are dressed in variations on Western fashion that would, in America, be considered outrageously queer, but in Saudi Arabia raise eyebrows only among those who insist on "Islamic"-that is, Bedouin-dress at all times. These young men openly cruise, often exchanging comments in loud voices with their friends when a desirable object comes into view. (p. 154)

What about the US?

As for crime, in Part Three I cited this line [graph](#) on a short page at the Bureau of Justice Statistics. It shows that violent crimes (e.g. homicide, rape, assaults, robbery) in America have decreased dramatically since 1994 to 2003. Next, this line [graph](#), also found at the BJS, depicts a dramatic drop in property crime (burglary, theft, and car theft) from 1994, though the rate has leveled off since 2002.

I also repeat and answer these questions from Part Three. What is the point of placing these two line graphs here? To boast that America has reached sinless perfection and has no room for improvement? No. Maybe the crime rate will increase (God forbid) in the next decade (or go down). The point is this: though many factors contribute to a drop in crime rates (or their rise), it is possible to see such a decrease without Islamic law. This means, therefore, that it is not needed to improve any society. Other, less brutal, methods can be applied in order to lower crime and enhance the quality of life.

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