

## [A Western Dhimmi's Unending Propaganda for Islam](#)

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By Jacob Thomas

As we survey the attitude of some Western experts on Islam, we cannot but notice a marked contrast between them and the responses of some leading Eastern Christians who came under Islamic rule, beginning with the 7th century. One is astonished by the way these modern writers handle Islam, doing their utmost to portray it as a religion of peace, that respects the rights of the conquered peoples. They ignore completely the testimony of well-known Christian intellectuals who lived under Islam in those early centuries, and had the courage to describe Islam with utter realism.

It is important to recall that when the Muslim invaders of the Byzantine Empire came into direct contact with Christian and Jewish populations, they initiated a new social order: Jews and Christians, who remained in their respective religions, were classified as *Dhimmis*, i.e. Protected Ones. They had certain privileges and obligations, imposed upon them by their conquerors. They were not to propagate their religious faith, respect the Muslim governors, and pay the *Jizya* tax.

The vast majority of the populations of Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia, remained in their faith. While they had to keep a low profile, some of their teachers and intellectuals gave a strong defence of their faith, thus engaging in what is known as apologetics. For example, during the Umayyad Caliphate that had its center in Damascus, Syria, a prominent Christian theologian, John of Damascus (676-754), wrote a book entitled *Heresies. How They Began and Whence They Drew Their Origin*. His critique of Islam, or "*the heresy of the Ishmaelites,*" illustrates his courage while he lived in close contact with the Umayyad caliph. A few quotations from this book will help us to understand the way Eastern Christians responded to the claims of Islam as God's final revelation to mankind.

*"As has been related, this Mohammed wrote many ridiculous books, to each one of which he set a title. For example, there is the book On Woman, [109] in which he plainly makes legal provision for taking four wives and, if it be possible, a thousand concubines—as many as one can maintain, besides the four wives. He also made it legal to put away whichever wife one might wish, and, should one so wish, to take to oneself another in the same way. Mohammed had a friend named Zeid. This man had a beautiful wife with whom Mohammed fell in love. Once, when they were sitting together, Mohammed said: 'Oh, by the way, God has commanded me to take your wife.' The other answered: 'You are an apostle. Do as God has told you and take my wife.' Rather—to tell the story over from the beginning—he said to him: 'God has given me the command that you put away your wife.' And he put her away. Then several days later: 'Now,' he said, 'God has commanded me to take her.' Then, after he had taken her and committed adultery with her, he made this law: 'Let him who will put away his wife. And if, after having put her*

*away, he should return to her, let another marry her. For it is not lawful to take her unless she have been married by another. Furthermore, if a brother puts away his wife, let his brother marry her, should he so wish.”*

Quotation is from Writings, by St John of Damascus, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 37 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), pp. 153-160.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08459b.htm>

Another Christian theologian, who lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, wrote “ **THE APOLOGY OF AL KINDY.** ” Al-Kindy composed his work in defence of Christianity against Islam, around 830 A. D., at the Court of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-MÂMÛN, in Baghdad. Consult the following website for detailed information about this book:

<http://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Al-Kindi/index.htm#contents>

A note of explanation is needed regarding the intellectual climate that obtained in Baghdad during the 9th century. A reform movement was in progress at the time. Those active in the movement were known as the *Mu'tazilites*. They reacted against the excesses of Islamic theology that advocated fatalism, and a rigid type of legalism. Three caliphs were won to their side among them was Al- MÂMÛN, a son of Harun al-Rashid. He championed the doctrine of the historical nature of the Qur'an, over against the ultra orthodox *Imam Hanbal*, who taught that the Qur'an was eternal, thus uncreated.

In the early days of Islam, Al Kindy had the freedom and courage to write a classic work in defence of Christianity over against Islam. Unfortunately, the *Mu'tazilites* were not successful in modernizing Islam, and after the rehabilitation of Imam Hanbal, strict orthodoxy became the rule. Eventually, another Muslim theologian, Al-Ghazzali (died in 1111) is credited with the closing the door of *Ijtihad\**.

In contrast with the bold works of those Christian theologians such as *John of Damascus* and *Al-Kindy*, some Western scholars who teach Islam in well-known universities, have followed the very opposite way of dealing with this subject. In this article, I would like to single out Professor John Esposito, of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., as an example of an *ardent Western apologist for Islam*. In recent years, he has been vociferous in his defence of Islam, both in his speeches as well as in his writings.

In this article, I highlight an event that took place on 5 and 6 June, 2004, at BookExpo America that was held at **McCormick Place Convention Center** in Chicago. One of the panels dealt with “*Understanding Islam: How Books Can Foster Dialogue in a Faith-*

*fractured World.*” It was telecast twice on Saturday, 5 June, on a cable TV station, C-SPAN2. One of the speakers was John Esposito. He began by giving an account of the status of books on Islam during the second half of the twentieth century. The Islamic revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran (1979) gave a great boost to the publication of many new titles on Islam in the West.

According to Esposito, “Islam and Muslims were almost invisible in the 1960s both in Europe and in America, but nowadays, Islam has become the second largest religion in those areas as well as in the rest of the world. Esposito deplored the fact that in the West, the media does not do a fair job in depicting Islam. This has continued to be the case even after the tragic events of 9/11.” While several books and magazine articles on Islam have appeared lately, most of them remain deficient, according to Esposito, as their emphasis is not so much on “*know Islam*” but on “*know the threat*” of Islam, or of “*Islamic radicalism.*”

In attempting to understand “what makes John Esposito tick,” I came to realize that the key is to be found in an often repeated theme during his presentation at McCormick Place Convention Center: “*The transcendent and the dark side of religion exist in all religions.*” This is the basic *motif* or *impulse* that he finds in all religions, regardless of their sacred texts and histories. Actually, this reveals Esposito as having joined the ranks of such well-known Western pluralist theologians as John Hick, W. C. Smith, and Paul Knitter. His pluralist theology allows him to posit *equivalence between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. The noble and uplifting element in these theistic faiths is to be located in the transcendence they proclaim. *However, all three have their dark side, which must be confessed and deplored.*

Professor Esposito was impatient with the question that is put to him so often, as to *whether Islam is a religion of peace.* “*How come we keep on asking the same question, [about violence in Islam,] and don’t ask the same question about Christianity and Judaism. Jews and Christians have engaged in acts of violence. All of us have the transcendent and the dark side.*”

Esposito related how he gave his students at Georgetown selections from the Qur’an regarding violence as well as selections from the Hebrew Bible that dealt with the same subject. Having deliberately chosen those texts out of context, his students would naturally arrive at the same conclusion, that both Islam and Judaism taught and endorsed violence.

He then told of his recent participation at a meeting in London, England, where the subject of Islam and its compatibility with democracy were debated. He deplored the fact that during the conference, several people quoted out of context, certain parts of the Qur’an that dealt with violence. At this point, he became rather emotional and declared that “*we have our own theology of hate. In mainstream Christianity and Judaism, we tend to be intolerant; we adhere to an exclusivist theology, of us versus them.*”

John Esposito’s presentation was a *panegyric*\*\* of Islam throughout its 1400 year

history. His own brand of pluralist theology places his position outside the mainstream of the historic Christian faith, in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions. It is a secular, postmodern, and Western construct that seeks to paint all religions with the same brush; in his case, the existence of that same “*transcendent and the dark side*” essence in every religion.

As a Christian, I encounter no problem with respect to those parts of Old Testament history which narrate the conquest of Canaan for example. They do tell of warfare and conquest, but that was a specific phase in Sacred History. **That part of Biblical history is not normative for this New Testament age.** There is no mandate for the Church to resort to conquest or “violence” in its fulfillment of Christ’s commission. In fact, during the first 300 years of the history of Christianity, it spread through *kerygma* (preaching), *didache* (teaching), and *marturia* (testimony). And, as many witnesses sealed their testimony with their blood, the Greek word *martur* acquired a new meaning: that of a witness who dies for his or her faith in Christ.

John Esposito fails to represent Islam objectively, in the light of its sacred texts and its 1400 years history. As long as he selectively tells the story of Islam, ignoring the fact that it spread primarily through its *futuhat* (conquests), and remains silent about the devastating effects of *dhimmitude* on the native populations of the conquered lands, his claim to tell a true story of this world religion cannot be left unchallenged.

Toward the end of his presentation, John Esposito got animated when he challenged the audience to be careful when they read certain (unnamed) authors who do not give any references to some of their statements, such as the claim that a great number of mosques in the West are funded by Saudi Arabia!

Had I been in the audience, I would have reminded Professor Esposito that many Internet sources on Islam and the Middle East, such as MEMRI, do a good job in properly documenting everything they place on their site. Furthermore, I would have asked him whether there was any Western equivalence to the barbaric Ottoman institution of “*Devshirme*” that deprived thousands of Balkan families of their young boys who were forced to Islamize, and become members of that elite army corps of the *Janissaries*.

I would have asked why to this day, Turkey still denies the genocide of the Armenians that took the lives of 1,500,000 innocent men, women, and children during World War I, within the territory of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

Finally, I would like to pose this question to John Esposito: “*How do you harmonize your apology for Islam with ‘The Apology of Al-Kindy?’ Whose description of Islam is accurate, the one written by a Christian scholar who lived in Baghdad in the 800s, and interacted with the learned caliph, Al-MĀMŪN; or should we accept your sanitized version?*”

I don’t like to delve into the reasons why men like John Esposito decide to become

modern-day apologists for Islam. Neither John of Damascus, nor Al-Kindy, who lived under the regime of *dhimmitude*, gave a rosy picture of the religion of their conquerors. What makes Professor Esposito so different from those giant Arabic-speaking Christian scholars? I leave it to the readers of this article to come up with a convincing answer. In the meantime, I cannot but shake my head about the nauseating propaganda of *Western dhimmis* in the like of John Esposito.

*\*Ijtihad:* The intellectual activity in the interpretation of Islam. Al-Ghazzali is responsible for bringing *Ijtihad* to an end, by advocating the duty of Muslims to stick to the teachings of their early jurists and theologians. Thus, he “*Closed the Door of Ijtihad.*”

*\*\*Panegyric:* A speech dominated by praise of a person or movement.