

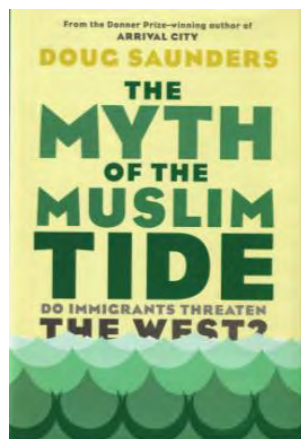
The Myth of the Muslim Tide: Do Immigrants Threaten the West?

by Doug Saunders

Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2012. 199 pages.

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Billed as a ‘powerfully argued and extremely timely debunking of the myth of a tide of Muslim immigration said to be undermining the basic values of Canada, the United States and Europe’ (dust cover), Saunders’ hard hitting and well researched arguments do a *great* job of undermining the arguments often used to incite ‘Islamophobia’ among Westerners. If you, like me, are often surprised by the strong sense of fear and alarm that some Christians have towards Muslim immigrants, then this book could be of service. As one who has spent a good bit of my life living among Muslims, and now a significant amount of time teaching about Islam and Muslims to Christians in the West, I have learned ways of responding to the exaggerations and alarm over Muslim immigration that one sometimes encounters. However, at times I have wished that I could simply recommend a book that deals with the issue and leave it at that. Is *The Myth of the Muslim Tide* that book?



Saunders compellingly argues his case in four sections. In the first section, dubbed ‘Popular Fiction’ (pp. 1-34) he describes the sources of the ‘Muslim tide’ fears and takes on some of its most well-known and prolific activists and authors. He makes short work of the arguments put forth by such popular crusaders against the ‘alarming rise of the influence of Islam in the West’ as Geert Wilders (*Marked for Death: Islam’s War Against the West and Me*), Melanie Philips (*Londonistan*), Christopher Caldwell (*Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West*), Robert Spencer (*The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*), Mark Steyn (*Lights Out: Islam, Free Speech and the Twilight of the West*) Bruce Bawer (*While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within*), Pamela Gellar (of www.AtlasShrugs.com) and Gisele Littman (Bat Ye’or – daughter of the Nile, author of *Eurabia* and other books sounding the alarm of the coming Muslim takeover of Europe). Early on Saunders makes a disclaimer that he is not defending Islam and admits to quite a negative view of Islam, nevertheless he argues that the solution to this sense of alarm over the

arrival of Muslim immigrants in the West does not lie in bashing Islam, but in better understanding the economic and political development of immigrant communities over time (6-7).

In his second section, 'The Facts' (35-111) he takes on the actual facts about population growth, integration and Islamic extremism and violence. In each chapter in this section he states a common claim and then proceeds to respond to it and refute it. Here are some of the claims he effectively shows to be unsupported by the facts: 'The Muslim population in the West is growing fast and will soon become a majority in Europe', 'Islamic belief leads to higher birth rates', 'In the future a lot more immigrants will be Muslim', 'Muslim immigrants are not loyal to their host countries', 'Muslim immigrants want to live apart, in isolated "parallel societies"', 'Muslims want to set up "sharia courts" in Western countries', and 'The growth of Muslim population is accompanied by a growth in Islamic extremism and terrorism'. Overall, I found his refutations of every one of these claims compelling. They suggest a fairly accurate understanding of Islam, but an even more sophisticated understanding of demographics and the politics of immigration.

The most fascinating, and at times sobering, part of the book was part three, 'We've Been Here Before' (113-136), in which he recounts how waves of Irish and Italian Catholic immigrants, and then Eastern European Jews had earlier been feared and reviled in almost identical ways that Muslim immigrants are now raising alarm among some Western writers and opinion shapers. For

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example, the massively expensive Washington-funded 41-volume report of the *Dillingham Commission* (1911) concluded that 'radicalism and criminality were not transient phenomena of immigration, but were inherent in several of the Roman Catholic "races," notably Italians' (124). His description of the fear-mongering and alarm that these earlier waves of 'aliens from another religious worldview' stirred up across broad swaths of North America is both chilling and reassuring. It is chilling because of the tragic hatred and fear that earlier

immigrants stirred up, and reassuring in that all of those earlier fears turned out to be almost entirely ungrounded. He is calling us to learn from the *misrepresentations* of the 'religious other' that we have too often believed so that we can stop fearing Muslim immigrants and instead seek to understand them! Listen to Saunders' conclusion of this historical analysis:

We see it over and over again when a new group of immigrants arrives who are members of a religious minority, usually poor and ill-accustomed to the language and folkways of their new country and the workings of its economy. In response to public alarm at these strange newcomers, writers and politicians

offer the same set of frightened, frightening ideas: *They are different from previous groups. They do not want to integrate. Their religion compels them to impose their values on us. Their reproduction rates will swamp us. They are disloyal and capable of violence.* The similarities between the arguments made about the Catholics, Jews and Muslims are not coincidental; this is the same argument, made for the same reasons, applied to the newest and most alien-seeming group. (136, emphasis in the original)

In his fourth and final section ‘What we Ought to Worry About’ (137-164), Saunders offers some intriguing analysis of how Muslims in the West are coming to understand their own identity. For example, he makes the intriguing observation that when most of the immigrants arrived from countries that are Muslim, their *religious* identity formed merely the background of their lives. But, ‘by the time their Western-born children came of age, they had become Muslims.’ The first wave of immigrants thought of themselves in terms of their ethnic identity, not their religious identity. He suggests that this change happened rather suddenly, beginning in 1979, following the Iranian revolution. It is worth quoting him again here:

Islam may date back fourteen centuries, but Muslim has only occasionally been a preferred label of self-identification. In the last two centuries, it often has been trumped by more modern identities. Until the final years of the twentieth century, it was generally more popular for immigrants to identify themselves by their nationality (Indian, Egyptian) or their ethnicity (Turk, Arab) than by their religion. After all, Islam spanned such a wide range of cultures, races and nationalities that it sometimes seemed meaningless and irrelevant to speak of a “Muslim people.” (140)

He concludes this analysis of immigrants’ understanding of their identity as ‘Muslims’ by suggesting that the ‘retreat into a one-dimensional religious identity’ (143) is a specific response to certain circumstances that could end as easily as it began. Even more intriguingly, he suggests that support for violent jihadist radicalism plummeted in the wake of the Arab Spring. ‘Former jihadist radicals told me that democracy had turned them against violence’ (155). During my visit to Cairo last week, I was privileged to be present for the ‘re-set’ of the Egyptian revolution in which millions of Egyptians demonstrated in the street and called for the resignation of their first Islamist president. My experience in Cairo suggests that Saunders analysis might not be too far wrong. Had I not witnessed firsthand such mammoth opposition to Islamism in Egypt just last week (30 million people took to the streets—said to be the largest peaceful protest demonstrations in human history!), statements like this would have been far harder to swallow (is it truly realistic to envision a de-Islamized Muslim world anytime soon?):

The convulsions we now see taking place in the Muslim world can be understood not as manifestations of a radical otherness, but rather as the classic symptoms of a disorientation characteristic of periods of transition.... Islamism is a moment and not the end of history and that what is discernible on the horizon thereafter is the almost certain eventual development of a de-Islamized Muslim world, as there is already a de-Christianized Christian world and a Buddhist counterpart. Fundamentalism is only a transitory aspect of the weakening of religious belief. (156)

The successful integration of Muslims into the lands and culture of the West is a welcome contrast to the all too often alarmist attitudes encountered among many branches of Evangelicalism.

So, what do I make of Saunders' analysis and arguments? Saunders is not a religious believer of any kind, and sometimes he appears to underrate the power of religious conviction when he downplays the fervour of Muslim radicalism. At times his understanding of Islam feels rather superficial. He appears to be writing as a firm believer in the 'liberal narrative' of the last few generations that assumes that religious belief in general will gradually fade away in the

face of the unstoppable forces of modernization. As a result, his analysis and his prognosis for the future of Muslim communities living in the West is probably overly optimistic.

Is this the book to give to our church friends in the West who are tempted to be alarmed at the rising number of Muslim immigrants in Europe and in Canada in particular? I think it depends on what kind of Christians they are. If your Christian friends only read Christian authors and are unable to learn from secular writers, perhaps a different book would be more appropriate.²² However, this book is a valuable antidote to fear and its analysis is often very compelling. However, were one to accept all of the assumptions out of which he writes, one would probably come away somewhat depressed at the prospects for Christian faith in the West, given the apparent unstoppable forces of modernism sweeping the world in our generation. But, the optimistic vision of the successful integration of Muslims into the lands and culture of the West is a welcome contrast to the all too often alarmist attitudes encountered among many branches of Evangelicalism. I'll let Saunders' last paragraph give you his parting insight on how we might better view this 'Muslim tide' that some think threatens to overwhelm us in the West.

In examining our own recent history along with the fast-shifting cultural realities of these new immigrants, I hope we can begin to see this human tide

²² In that case, you may do better to give them a book like Mike Kuhn's *Fresh Vision for the Muslim World: An Incarnational Alternative* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2009). But I believe that Saunders' book might be good to read along with Kuhn's.

not as a seismic and ruinous tsunami but as a regular, rhythmic movement on our shores, one we've seen before. We should remember that a tide is something that sweeps away, but it is also something that arrives periodically, stirs up the currents, and recedes, leaving a fresher vision of the same landscape. Close to the shore, it may resemble a flood. From a better vantage, we realize it is not a cataclysm or a disturbance but one of the vital cycles of human life.

Reviewed by Don Little

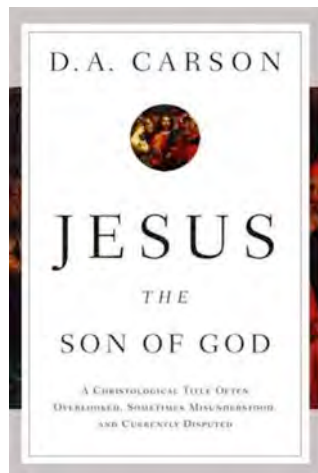
Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed

D.A. Carson

Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012

(117 pages including indexes)

Most Christian missionaries working in the Muslim world are well aware of the turmoil over Bible translations that attempt to communicate the meaning of 'Son of God' without using the literal phrase. Articles defending or attacking a meaning-based approach to this Christological title have appeared in *IJFM* and *St. Francis Magazine*, and disagreement over the practice has been one of the major themes in the Bridging the Divide consultations. D.A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical College, wrote this book to defend a literal translation of Son and Father, but its usefulness goes beyond the debate and is far out of proportion to its length.



To summarize my response, this is an extremely important book for both translators and field workers to understand how the Bible uses Son of God and what it means when used of Jesus. For translators, Carson applies his findings to make a strong case for the importance of a literal 'Son' and 'Father' in translation *in spite of the problems this causes for a Muslim context*, a case that may have influenced parts of the World Evangelical Alliance's (WEA) report on Wycliffe and SIL translation practice issued on 29 April 2013. The continuing significance of the book lies in its exegetical and