

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Who is God?

Some time ago, in an article by Mark O'Keefe, he posed the question "Do all religious paths lead to the same God?" The article was sparked by President Bush's statement upon being asked whether or not Christians or Judeo-Christians worship the same God as the Muslims, and vice-a-versa. To the shock of most Muslims, and of course to Conservative Christians nationwide, he said "I believe we worship the same God." Whether he made this comment then for political reasons or he regards this to be the absolute truth I leave to the eye of the beholder.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission said to that comment, "There is one God and his name is Jehovah and his only begotten son is Jesus Christ of the seed of Abraham and Isaac, whose mother was the Jewish virgin, Mary...Jesus, our savior, has made it clear that we must know his father through faith in him and him alone."

Reverend Ted Haggard, pastor and president of the National Association of Evangelicals in Colorado Springs,

Colorado had said, "The Christian God encourages freedom, love, forgiveness, prosperity and health while the Muslim God appears to value the opposite."

If they so vehemently disagree with Bush's comment then who are we worshipping? This association of worshipping a different God has been going around since the Crusades. People were actually murdered for not worshipping the same God as another tribe or empire. As the Sultans of Middle Eastern countries spread their propaganda of opposing the infidel Crusaders, the Kings of Europe who initiated the wars also wrote of the infidel Muslims. By definition an infidel is one who doesn't have a particular religious belief although when we open the dictionary the first definition we would get is "an unbeliever with respect to a particular religion, particularly Christianity and Islam." But, this is not about who is the infidel. This is about who God is?

Relating back to the comments that were made by Mr. Land and Mr. Haggard I want to go to the origin of their argument. Dr Robert Morey wrote a

book called *Allah: Demonic or Divine*. In the book, he makes the claim that the Muslims do not worship the God of the Bible, but the God of pre-Islamic Arabia. Allah, the Moon God. Archeological digs throughout the Middle East and Eastern Europe, particularly in Palestine, indicate that the Arabs along with the pre-Christian Byzantines worshipped the moon, or a moon god. He relates this to the Crescent moon that has somehow become synonymous with Islam and the crescent's appearances on the top of minarets and on the domes of masjids (mosques). The theory is, plainly and without a lengthy explanation of the book, the Muslims worship the moon not the God of the Universe or at least not the God they have come to understand.

We obviously don't worship the moon as God says in the Quran:

Among His proofs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate before the sun, nor the moon; you shall fall prostrate before the God who created them, if you truly worship Him alone (41: 37)

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When he saw the moon rising, he said, "Maybe this is my Lord!" When it disappeared, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will be with the strayers. (6:77)

But, this is not about proving them wrong, but rather using this article and taking a step back and posing the question "Who is God?"

Linguistically we know who God is, but the words which we use I don't believe get much thought. To each attribute of God there is its root meaning and at times we don't even think about those meanings. As children and even into our adulthood and throughout maturity God is marketed to us, in a bid to buy whose version of God is the best or better. The whole concept: "My God is bigger than yours."

When I was a Catholic I could remember seeing images of a blonde haired blue eyed man on statues and paintings and being told this is God. We see television Evangelists preaching that the only way to God is through His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, and if you don't accept that, simply put, you are going to hell. I have attended debates and read apologetics of the equality of humans but at the same time they say that my way is the only way or my God is the only God.

Growing up I got to see different faiths by those who knocked on the door. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Baptists all would knock on the door and ask if we had received the truth today and were telling us who God is, and my way or the highway. When I began studying Islam, it appealed to me because of the lack of a clergy and one was given the freedom to learn and understand at his own consequence.

It wasn't long until I was told how to follow and who to follow and that there was in fact an Islamic clergy in Saudi Arabia. Above all, I was told

that God's literal name is Allah. I didn't give it much thought and I came to understand it the same way, which is until I came into the path of submission to God alone. I had come to understand that Jesus is not God, and even that Allah is not God, nor is "God" God, but rather these are meanings. Of course Jesus being God is idolatrous so we can immediately eradicate that from the understanding. Allah is the name for God in Arabic or literally "The God."

Who is God in the Quran?

We learn from the Quran who God really is. It is also clear that our God is One and the same:

For each congregation we have decreed rites whereby they commemorate the name of GOD for providing them with the livestock. Your god is one and the same god; you shall all submit to Him. Give good news to the obedient. 22:34

Say, "Call Him God, or call Him Most Gracious; whichever name you use, to Him belongs the best names." 17:110

[59:22] He is the One GOD; there is no other god beside Him. Knower of all secrets and declarations. He is the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. 59:22

[59:23] He is the One GOD; there is no other god beside Him. The King, the Most Sacred, the Peace, the Most Faithful, the Supreme, the Almighty, the Most Powerful, the Most Dignified. GOD be glorified; far above having partners. 59:23

[59:24] He is the One GOD; the Creator, the Initiator, the Designer. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Glorifying Him is everything in the heavens and the earth. He is the Almighty, Most Wise. 59:24

'Best Provider' 5:114, 22:85, ...

'Best Supporter' 3:150

'Best Schemer' 3:54

'Best Judge' 7:87, 10:109, 12:80...

'Most Accurate Reckoner' 6:62

'Best Forgiver' 7:155

Proclaim, "He is the One and only God. The Absolute God. Never did He beget. Nor was He begotten. None equals Him. Sura 112

Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the people. The King of the people. The god of the people. From the evils of sneaky whisperers. Who whisper into the chests of the people. Be they of the jinns, or the people. Sura 114

The agonizing moments through which I have passed during the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God. True, I have always believed in the personality of God. But in the past the idea of a personal God was little more than a metaphysical category that I found theologically and philosophically satisfying. Now it is a living reality that has been validated in the experiences of everyday life.

God has been profoundly real to me in recent years. In the midst of outer dangers I have felt an inner calm. In the midst of lonely days and dreary nights I have heard an inner voice saying, "Lo, I will be with you." When the chains of fear and the manacles of frustration have all but stymied my efforts, I have felt the power of God transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope.

I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power.

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To say that this God is personal is not to make him a finite object beside other objects or attribute to him the limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him. It is certainly true that human personality is limited, but personality as such involves no necessary limitations. It means simply self-consciousness and self-direction. So in the truest sense of the word, God is a living God. As Martin Luther King, Jr. put it "In Him there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart; this God both evokes and answers prayer."

Edward C

They can never fathom the greatness of GOD. The whole earth is within His fist on the Day of Resurrection. In fact, the universes are folded within His right hand. Be He glorified; He is much too high above needing any partners. (39:67)

GOD: there is no other god besides Him, the Living, the Eternal. Never a moment of unawareness or slumber overtakes Him. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. Who could intercede with Him, except in accordance with His will? He knows their past, and their future. No one attains any knowledge, except as He wills. His dominion encompasses the heavens and the earth, and ruling them never burdens Him. He is the Most High, the Great. (2:255)



Who is Ezra (‘Uzair)?

Ezra is mentioned in the Quran in 9:30.

The Jews said, "Ezra is the son of God," while the Christians said, "Jesus is the son of God!" These are blasphemies uttered by their mouths. They thus match the blasphemies of those who have disbelieved in the past. God condemns them. They have surely deviated. (9:30)

Verse 9:30 is the only place where Ezra (‘Uzair) is mentioned in the Quran. According to traditional Islam, Ezra is considered to be one of the messengers of God. However, as we can see from the verse, God does not specifically identify Ezra as messenger. Yet, since it is mentioned in the Quran that he was idolized as Jesus was, it is reasonable to assume that he was a saintly man, if not a messenger. Jews, on the other hand, hold him in very high esteem. The following quote was taken from the Introduction to the Book of Ezra in the Old Testament (The New American Bible for Catholics, World Catholic Press, 1986).

The genealogy of Ezra traces his priesthood back to Aaron, brother of Moses. This was the accepted way of establishing the legality of one's priestly office. He is also called a scribe, well-versed in the law of Moses, indicating Ezra's dedication to the study of Torah, which he sought to make the basic rule of life in the restored community. It was religious and cultic re-

form rather than in political affairs that Ezra made his mark as a postexilic leader. Jewish tradition holds him in great honor; the Talmud even regards him as a second Moses, claiming that the Torah would have been given to Israel through Ezra had not Moses preceded him.

Ezra is sometimes accused of having been a mere legalist who gave excessive attention to the letter of the law. His work, however, should be seen and judged within a specific historical context. He gave to his people cohesion and spiritual unity which prevented disintegration of the small Jewish community. Had it not been for the intransigence of Ezra and those who adopted his ideal, it is doubtful that Judaism would have so effectively resisted Hellenism, then or in later centuries. Ezra set the tone of the postexilic community, and it was characterized by fidelity to the Torah, Judaism's authentic way of life.

Being considered a second Moses, it is possible that some Jews during the time of Ezra or afterwards might have called Ezra the son of God. The Quran teaches us that this was so.

This view of Ezra which has evolved in the Judaic tradition is yet another example of the human tendency to assign ranks to God's messengers. Notice that there are even those who have the arrogance to say that Ezra would have delivered the Torah if he had preceded Moses. In this way they take it upon themselves to judge and make a decision that none but God can make.

This inclination towards ranking God's messengers allows the devil to inject

idolatry into the worship of God alone. Once one allows for the possibility that one messenger is better than another, it means that he is then closer to God than other messengers and believers. From there it is not difficult to make the fatal mistake of assigning superior messengers the rank of God's partner. In the verse immediately following the one in question (9:30) we read:

They have set up their religious leaders and scholars as lords, instead of God. Others deified the Messiah, son of Mary. They were all commanded to worship only one God: there is no god except He. Be He glorified, high above having any partners. (9:31)

The Quran protects us from the dangers of idolatry by teaching us that it is a fundamental trait of the believers that they do not attempt to assign ranks to God's messengers. An example of this teaching is found in the following verse:

The messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They believe in God, His angels, His scripture, and His messengers: We make no distinction among any of His messengers, and they proclaim: We hear, and we obey. Forgive us, our Lord. To You is the ultimate destiny. (2:285)

We pray that we will not fall into this satanic trap of idol worship in the name of honoring God's messengers.

Abdullah and Martha

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Is Islam spread by sword?

The idea that Islam spread by the sword is a myth that is refuted by prominent historians. Since Prophet Muhammad was a messenger of God and lived by the Quran, we have to assume that he followed the Quranic law that Muslims can only wage war in self defense, to practice their faith freely, and remove oppression, but not in order to exert Muslim rule or conquest.

[2:256] There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in GOD has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient.

[8:39] You shall fight them to ward off oppression, and to practice your religion devoted to GOD alone. If they refrain from aggression, then GOD is fully Seer of everything they do.

[2:193] You may also fight them to eliminate oppression, and to worship GOD freely. If they refrain, you shall not aggress; aggression is permitted only against the aggressors.

However, after Muhammad's death, some ambitious Muslim leaders violated the Quran's commandments on waging war and pursued expansionist policies. Yet, what is historically recognized is that Muslim rulers generally never forced their conquered peoples to submit to Islamic law. In exchange for a small tax that guaranteed their protection, religious minori-

ties were left to live their own lives, foster their own communities with their own justice systems.

For example, the Ottoman Empire is known historically to be one of the world's most religiously tolerant empires due to its brilliant *millet* system that meant that different religious/cultural groups had a great degree of autonomy in governing their lives and identities. In fact, most of the conquered people were more than happy to accept Muslim rule because of the tolerance and autonomy it gave them as opposed to the dogmatic and oppressive Christian rule of the time. An example is given below.

In the 15th century the Jews in Spain faced strong pressures to convert to Christianity and many yielded to this pressure and became Christians. In 1492 the king of Spain, Ferdinand, issued an edict to expel from Spain all remaining Jews who did not convert to Christianity.

When the news of expulsion reached the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan Beyazit II issued a decree to welcome the Jews. A significant portion of those expelled thus came to Ottoman Empire and settled mostly in European parts of the Empire. The Turkish Jews are also identified as Sephardic Jews. This derives from the word Sepharad which in Hebrew means Spain.

Islam's clarity and liberating quality, naturally appealed to most of the masses and this is why as a religion it spread like wild fire in such a short period of time.

O. E.

God Willing

22nd

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God willing mark your calendars and make plans for the 2007 Annual Conference of the Submitters.

We set up a web page on the internet to circulate the conference information at

www.masjiduntucson.org/conference/

The registration form and hotel info are now made available through mail to the subscribers of Submitters Perspective. If you have not received them in the mail, please check the availability on the web site or email us at

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God willing, there is also another Submitters conference in London, UK. It is the 1st Annual EMEA Conference presented by the UK Community of Submitters on June 30, 2007 London, UK.

You can pre-register to this conference by e-mail via info@submitters.org.uk if you can make it, God willing.