

“Chrislam”

Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?

“[W]e are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” 1 John 5:20b-21

Some Christians naively and mistakenly equate that because Christianity and Islam are monotheistic faiths (belief in one God), Christians and Muslims worship the same God, the synthesis of the two religions being labeled, “Chrislam.”[1] Mega church leader Rick Warren calls the reconciliation King’s Way.[2] To advocates for the synthesis, any differences between the two religions are viewed as superficial. Differences can be overcome by an ecumenical appeal to the “nobler side” of the different religions’ devotees. After all, only the names for God differ. Muslims call Him Allah, while Christians address Him as Lord. The singleness of God is thought of as an ecumenical rallying point, a basis for mutual understanding, if not some kind of unity, between the religions.

In 2009, in a document titled *A Common Word Between Us and You*, scores of Muslim leaders and scholars sought reconciliation with Christians for purpose of mutual understanding and peace between the great monotheistic faiths descended from Abraham; Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[3] In response, numbers of Christian leaders, in a full page advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times*, responded to the Islamic overture for rapprochement with a document titled, *Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You*. The document’s signatories include such well known evangelical and emergent

church leaders as Leith Anderson (President of the National Association of Evangelicals), Bill Hybels (Founder and Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church), Tony Jones (Emergent Village), Brian McLaren (Author, Speaker and Activist), Bob Schuller (The Crystal Cathedral), Rick Warren (Saddleback Church), George Verwer (Operation Mobilization) and Jim Wallis (Sojourners).[4] In a recent translation of the Bible into Arabic, Wycliffe Bible Translators have substituted Allah for God.[5]

Thus, it is evident that Christians, some deliberately, many mistakenly and others naively, equate that because Christianity and Islam are monotheistic faiths (believing in one God), devotees of those different religions worship the same God.

But since “9/11” continuing threats and acts of terrorism committed in the name of Allah against the “Christian” west strategically challenge thoughts of unity. While medieval history reveals a mutant and violent strain of Christianity, a faith far removed from the peaceful non-violence Jesus advocated (Matthew 5:39; 26:51-53), terrorism ought to give Christians pause and cause them to ask, “Is the God of *The Quran* really the same as the God of *The Bible*?” Numbers of Christian scholars have studied the question and conclude that essential differences exist between the way the sacred writings of the two religions portray the essence of God’s being.

Of His being, the New Testament declares, “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8, 16). Love defines the personal and essential nature of God out of which His actions emanate. Loving is not just one divine activity, but rather is the genius and root of all that He does! Because He is love, God creates, rules and judges. In all of this, God loves personally, this heavenly love being mirrored in the most sensitive of human relationships—the earthly love of family. Whether it’s to Israel or the church, God is pictured as either married or

betroted to His people (Isaiah 54:5a; Revelation 19:7; Ephesians 5:25-32). Believers are His “children” and His “sons.” As the Apostle declares, **“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”** [i.e., Papa! Daddy!] (Romans 8:14-15).

In contrast, *The Quran* does not present Allah to be a loving father. Having studied Islam for several years, Marvin Olasky once noted that the “father-son” relationship existing between God and Christians is unknown to Muslims. Islam means “submission,” and the Islamic model of the divine-human relationship is therefore that of “master-servant”.[6] Such a conception of God affects how Muslims view society and the world. The Muslim religion is one of will, not emotion, of action, not affection. Believers are to submit to Allah. A century ago a scholar/missionary to Muslims noted:

The human heart craves a God who loves; a personal God who has close relations with humanity; a living God who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and who hears and answers prayer. Such a God the Koran does not reveal.”[7]

Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952) took this theology one step further by noting that, “A being who is incapable of loving is also incapable of being loved.”[8]

While Allah has servants, he does not have children. Therefore, Islam expects veiled women to submit without equivocation to their husbands and the state. This impersonal theology also demands the same from society and the world at large, and if submission is not yielded, fanatical devotees might then attempt to coerce it. Absent love, all that remains is for Allah to intimidate and demand, dispositions that engender naked fear in human hearts. For the most part, the dynamic between the human and the divine in

Islam appears devoid of compassion—though one of Islam’s 5 pillars is *Zakah* (giving of alms)—and this deficiency can be traced back to the religion’s concept of God. Ideas have consequences, and never more so than when ideas define the essence and genius of God. The God of Christianity is of a wholly different character than Islam, and given that difference, no real theological rapprochement between the two religions is possible.

Meanwhile, Christians should receive God’s love, and by His enabling, extend that love back to their Father, to their brothers and sisters “in Christ” and to other human beings, even those of differing religions (Romans 5:5). But in the meantime, Christians should not pretend that reconciliation between Islam and Christianity can be affected because of this affirmation by the apostle John:

We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This [The demonstrative pronoun “this” refers to its nearest antecedent, Jesus Christ.] is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:20-21)

In contrast to orthodox Christians, no Muslim would ever confess “**Jesus is Lord**” (1 Corinthians 12:3) and worship Him as God (John 20:28). Therefore Muslims, as well as Jews, do not worship the same God as Christians. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ (Phillippians 2:9-11). They do not and will not worship “**the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (Matthew 16:16). To imagine a hypothetical, but straightforward, conversation, a Christian might ask a Jewish or Muslim friend, “Do you worship Jesus Christ?” If the answer is, “No!”—and invariably, if they are informed and devoted to their faiths, “No!” will be the answer—then the Christian will need to respond, “Then we do not worship the same God, for I worship the Lord Jesus Christ.” Scripture records that worship is ascribed equally to the Throne-sitter as to the Lamb

(Revelation 5:11-14; See Hebrews 1:6.).

The best we can do therefore, is peacefully agree to disagree, unless one religion fanatically demands that its devotees can nowise tolerate or abide the others'. As one of Christianity's sacred writings informs its believers, "**As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men** [i.e., those without the Christian faith], **especially unto them who are of the household of faith** [i.e., those within the Christian faith]" (Galatians 6:10).

ENDNOTES

[1] Rob Kerby, "What is 'Chrislam' and who preaches it?" *beliefnet: Inspiration. Spirituality. Faith.*

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/news/2011/10/what-is-chrislam-and-does-anybody-really-preach-it.php>.

[2] Rob Kerby, "Internet spreading new accusations connecting Rick Warren with 'Chrislam'," *beliefnet: Inspiration. Spirituality. Faith.*

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/news/2012/03/internet-spreading-new-accusations-connecting-rick-warren-with-chrislam.php#ixzz1oDUUhV8S>.

[3] *A Common Word Between Us and You* (Jordan: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, January, 2009). A copy of the document is available at: http://www.acommonword.com/downloads/CW-Booklet-Final-v6_8-1-09.pdf.

[4] *Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You*. A copy of the advertisement is available at:

http://www.yale.edu/divinity/news/071118_news_nytimes.pdf. Joe Schimmel of *Good Fight Ministries*, has produced a DVD with the title, *The Submerging Church*. In the presentation, he draws attention to evangelicals and emergents who attempt to merge Christianity and Islam. For a cameo from the video, see <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=9076>.

[5] Michael Carl, "Wycliffe Defends Changing Titles for God,"
WND Faith, February 2,
2012, <http://www.wnd.com/2012/02/wycliffe-defends-changing-titles-for-god/>.

Carl notes: "Involved is the removal of any references to God as 'Father,' to Jesus as the 'Son' or 'the Son of God.' One example of such a change can be seen in an Arabic version of the Gospel of Matthew produced and promoted by Frontiers and SIL [i.e., Wycliffe's Summer Institute of Linguistics]. It changes Matthew 28:19 from this:

'baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'

to this:

'cleanse them by water in the name of Allah, his Messiah and his Holy Spirit'."

[6] Marvin Olasky, "Brutality and dictatorship: How Islam affects society." *World*, Special Issue, November/December, 2001, 19. The whole issue was devoted to the religion of Islam.

[7] S. M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God* (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1905): 111.

[8] Ibid.