



Who is Allah in Islam?

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I. ALLAH IN THE THOUGHTS AND LIVES OF MUSLIMS

1. The World-wide Worship of Islam

A Muslim's relationship to Allah can clearly be seen in the five daily prayers, which belong to the indispensable pillars of Islam. In the course of this liturgy, a Muslim will prostrate himself before Allah up to 34 times a day. Anyone who has seen a Muslim prostrating is impressed. The curve of his bent back during prayer is the best commentary on the word "**ISLAM**" which translated means **surrender, submission or subjugation**. These words sound very pious and describe the total submission of a Muslim to Allah.

Any observer who considers this will realise that anyone who prostrates himself before Allah 34 times a day in worship is not a free or person. He is no longer himself because his entire way of living and thinking is fully guided and influenced by Allah. In fact, the Arabic words for a religious service, place of worship and worshipper are derived from the word for slaves. According to Islam, everyone is a slave to Allah. No one is free. No one lives for himself. Everyone belongs to his Creator and was created to worship and to serve perpetually and unconditionally.

If it were possible to take a spaceship and fly high above the earth and observe mankind with a powerful telescope, we could see the prayer ritual of Islam sweeping across our globe like a mighty wave five times a day as millions of Muslims bow to the ground in worship.

At dawn, as soon as one can distinguish between a white and a black thread, the prayer of the Muslim begins in the Philippines. The first wave of worship surges over Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, then Iran and Turkey. Finally it reaches Europe, at which time the second wave of worship begins at noon for the Muslims in China. This new wave will have reached India and the 45 million Muslims in Central Asia just as a third wave will have started at 3 p.m. for afternoon prayers in the Far East. These three waves of worship follow each other successively, moulding and determining life under the Islamic culture. At this time, as dawn is breaking on the east coast of America with its morning prayer, Muslims in the Nile Valley are bowing down in the heat of their noon prayer and in Pakistan men are gathering in their mosques for afternoon prayer. When the final wave of the Muslim night prayer begins in the Far East two hours after sunset, simultaneously the rays of the setting sun touch the worshippers in the Ganges Delta, while pilgrims in Mecca bow down for afternoon prayer before the black stone in the Ka'ba. At that moment the second prayer wave has already reached faithful Muslims in the high Atlas Mountains in Morocco, while the first waves breaks with the early morning dawn in the Rocky Mountains of America.

These five prayer waves unite millions of Muslims in worship of their God. **Islam is a religion of adoration and worship**. Many Muslims pray earnestly and with great reverence, disciplining themselves by repeating their liturgical prayers 17 times a day.

Very early in the morning, the muezzins call from the minarets of the mosques, often through loudspeakers, over the roofs of the houses to all the people: "Arise to prayer! Arise to success! Prayer is better than sleep!"

Unless Christians rethink their prayer practices and discipline themselves into regular and intensive prayer for Muslims, they should not be astonished that Islam defies the attempts of mission societies and rises to challenge a tired Christianity.

The call from the minaret includes a significant sentence: "Arise to success!" Everyone who serves Allah hopes to receive a reward from him. Those who perform the prayers expect to receive earthly and heavenly blessings. Devotion to Allah and obedience to his commands deserve many gifts including salvation. Muslims do not thank Allah because he has already saved them through grace. On the contrary, they feel they must pray and keep the law in order to have the goodwill of Allah bestowed upon them. So Islam is a **religion based on self-righteousness** in which everyone tries to accumulate good deeds and so establish his own salvation by good works.

Prayer in Islam is not a voluntary service, but rather a compulsion, an obligation and a law. In Saudi Arabia one can sometimes observe policemen during the prayer times forcing passers-by into the mosques, so that the wrath of Allah may not descend on the country because of neglected prayer. Islam is a **religion under the law** of Allah. All facets of life are specifically controlled by a multitude of regulations. Allah is the centre of everything.

There is a deep longing for purity in Islam. Before each prayer time, every Muslim must follow a compulsory ablution - the washing of hands, arms, feet, mouth, face and even hair. Everyone must be clean before entering Allah's presence to pray. Anyone who does not follow the exact cleansing procedure is considered to have nullified his prayers. Christians know that such outward rituals do not cleanse the heart or the mind. But the five-times-daily ablutions in Islam testify to a deep longing for purity on the part of those who pray.

A sentence in the main prayer for all Muslims - from the al-Fatiha - reads, "Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom thou hast blessed, not of those against whom thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray" (Sura al-Fatiha 1:2,3). This cry expresses the desire for guidance and a total dependence on Allah. It would be wrong, ignorant and arrogant for Christians to deny the faithful intent of Muslims to serve God. On the contrary, their discipline, sincerity and consistency in praying can be an example to many of us. Without a doubt, every true Muslim **desires** to serve God with all his heart. He calls on him in his prayers. He wants to honour him; he fights for him and submits his entire being to him. In the Old Testament we read that God hears every honest prayer - even from a Muslim! (Genesis 21:17; 16:7-14).

2. THE 99 NAMES OF ALLAH

What concept do Muslims have of Allah? Who is he, whom they seek to worship?

In his struggle against heathen polytheism in Mecca and its surroundings, Muhammad waged a merciless campaign against all gods, idols and images. He stubbornly taught: "Allah is One! All other gods are nothing!" He had accepted this basic monotheistic faith of the Jews who were living in the Arabian Peninsula because they had been exiled from their homeland by the Romans. Influenced by them, Muhammad freed the Arab world from idolatry in line with what the Old Testament prophets had demanded (Sura al-Ikhlās 112:1-5).

The first half of the Islamic creed makes a sharp distinction between the Oneness of God and the claims of religions and magical cults which teach that other gods exist besides Allah. Millions of Muslims daily confess, "There is no God but Allah!" This testimony is the very

core of the Islamic faith. Whoever does not assent unconditionally to this dogma is considered by Muslims a godless idolater. Every theological assertion that does not submit to this principle is rejected without question.

Muhammad did not merely testify to the uniqueness of Allah, but also described him with a variety of names. The Islamic theologians have systematised all statements of the Qur'an about Allah, including his attributes and acts, into "the 99 most beautiful names of Allah". The names do not occur in equal frequency in the Qur'an. Several are mentioned a hundred times, others once or twice, and some are found only implicitly as we read between the lines. All Arabic adjectives can be understood as nouns, so that in the Qur'an every attribute of Allah simultaneously expresses one of his names.

Whoever painstakingly attempts to sort through these names of Allah according to their significance and frequency moves closer to the realm of Muhammad's thoughts and ideas.

Allah is the Omniscient One with infinite wisdom. He hears all and sees all. He understands all and encompasses everything.

He is **Omnipotent and his strength is unlimited**, powerful enough to both build up and to destroy.

Therefore, he is the **sublime and exalted one above everything**, great and immeasurable, magnificent and almighty. No one is equal to him.

He is the **living one**, every existing, unending, everlasting, eternal, the first and the last, the one and the only one, the incomparably beautiful one.

Thus he is **praiseworthy** and excellent, the holy one, light and peace. He is the true reality and the foundation of everything.

Allah is the one who created everything out of nothing by the strength of his word. He brought everything into being, and to him we shall all return. He creates life and causes death (Sura al-A`raf 7:44). He will raise the dead and unite the universe.

Therefore, he is the sovereign **lord and king** to whom the universe belongs. He exalts and he abases. He is the defender and the destroyer. He is **the guide and the tempter**. He saves whom he wills and condemns whom he wishes (Suras al-A`raf 7:44, al-Anfal 8:27, al-Nahl 16:35, al-Insan 76:32).

Above all this, he is called **the compassionate and merciful one**, and yet he is also the avenger. He has recorded everything precisely and will be the incorruptible and indisputable witness on the day of judgement. He is the best of all judges and will present each man with an exact bill of reckoning.

His overwhelming authority may open the door to success or hinder the progress of an event. He has everything and everyone in his hand. He opens and closes the doors. Nothing takes place without his will. **He does not need a mediator**. Everything depends directly on him.

He is also **benevolent and patient**, faithful and kind to the Muslims. He is the generous giver of all gifts and abilities. From him alone comes provision for all mankind. He who possesses

everything makes people wealthy and protects all who glorify him. He is favourable to them and will be a guardian over all who worship him.

He acknowledges those who repent, and forgives because he is the **forgiving one**. He is gracious toward the Muslims and establishes a good relationship with them. But no Muslim can be certain whether the good attributes of Allah are directed toward him personally, or whether Allah's harsh and devastating side will eventually strike him. Often, the names of Allah are merely ascribed to him by believers in wishful thinking rather than as certainties. His more oppressive and frightening attributes create fear in people and drive them to do everything possible to keep the law. Poverty and illness are regarded as signs of Allah's wrath for their hidden sins. By the same token, riches, success and people's esteem in the Muslim society are taken as indications of favour from the One who alone makes rich, and who honours his worshippers with blessings. Some Muslims today say, "Because we have remained faithful to Allah for 1,300 years, he has rewarded us with the oil."

When we turn away from all such confusing and frustrating names of Allah and ask an ordinary Muslim, "Tell me, who is your God? What do you think and feel, when you hear the name of Allah?" He may possibly smile, spread out his arms and only say "**ALLAH!**" This means: Allah cannot be proved or described. One can only sense him and know about his existence. And then perhaps he may confirm this intuitive understanding with the phrase, "**Allahu akbar!**"

In this statement we have the abridged form of the Islamic creed, which is on the lips of millions many times a day. With this testimony Khomeini's revolutionary guards ran blindly into mine fields knowing they will be torn to shreds. From the loudspeakers of the minarets these words are repeated forty times a day over shops, homes, schools, factories and government buildings. Yet this phrase is not complete in itself, but is only a portion of a sentence. It does not mean, as it is sometimes translated, "Allah is great" or "Allah is the greatest." Its literal meaning is "Allah is greater!" Every listener should then, albeit unconsciously, complete the thought: Allah is wiser than all philosophers, more beautiful than the most fascinating view, stronger than all atomic and hydrogen bombs together, and greater than anything we know. **Allah is the unique, unexplorable and inexplicable one - the remote, vast and unknown God.** Everything we may think about him is incomplete, if not wrong. Allah cannot be comprehended. He comprehends us. We are slaves who have only the privilege to worship him in fear.

Islam stands for a renunciation of the rationalism that prevails in Europe and America. For a long time it was one of the characteristics of Islamic theology that Allah could not be described philosophically. There was not even a desire to comprehend him and to fathom his being (Sura al-Ra`d 13:13).

Understanding this brings us to a crucial statement, expressed by the Islamic theologian al-Ghazali. He had meditated a great deal on "the 99 excellent names of God". He wrote that these names can mean everything and yet nothing. One name of Allah can negate another and the content of one may be included in the next. No one can understand Allah. Devout believers therefore can only worship this unknown, superdimensional God and live before him in fear and reverence, observing all his laws in strict obedience.

3. Islam - A theocentric culture

What are the practical consequences in the daily life of a Muslim under such a concept?

The image of a great, all-embracing Lord has conditioned the daily life of Muslims - in the home, in education, at work and in politics. The old saying is still true, "Show me your God and I will explain to you why you live as you do." So Genesis 1:27 tells us, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him." This means that the concept of God in a religion is the pattern and measure of the culture associated with it.

In Islam, the **father in the family** is not primarily an equal partner with his wife, who together give shape to marriage and family life. The man is more the patriarch in the house, who holds all rights and authority in his hands. The children legally belong to him alone. He is the one who supplies provisions and clothes, and he grants no one an insight into his financial situation. His wife is not necessarily a life-time companion with equal rights, but is often just a means of satisfying his physical desires. Sometimes she is regarded merely as a baby factory. There are exceptions, of course, where noble and sensitive Arabs open themselves to the influence of the world-wide humanism or where some resolute wives exert control over their husbands. Christendom has also influenced Arab customs to some extent. But in general, it is obvious that **Islam is a man's world** where women must stay in the background. This can be seen in the mosques, coffee bars, or in public life. Khomeini in particular used the resurgence of Islam to reduce women to medieval subjection.

Sometimes a father says, "I have one child and three daughters," when he explains that he has one son and three daughters. The dominance of the masculine over the feminine can be found in all aspects of life. The male is the ruler and in a figurative sense he is even called "lord of the house".

In **schools**, until a few years ago, the teacher gave instruction like a patriarch, ruling over his pupils and forcing the lessons down their throats. The material had to be gulped down and memorised, but it remained undigested and generally misunderstood. The daily class schedule started with listening to the recitation of the memorised lessons. There was punishment for anyone who could not fully repeat the subject matter.

In many Islamic schools comprehension, individual thinking and development of character are not the main goals of education; rather a passive acceptance and conformity are emphasised. This is closely associated with the concept of thought in the Islamic religion. A Muslim is forbidden to think critically about the Qur'an. He must accept it passively and should memorise all of it. Being thus filled with the spirit of Islam, he instinctively walks in accordance with Allah's law in his daily life. (How many Christians know even *one* of the gospels by heart? Yet many Muslims have mastered the whole of the Qur'an or at least great portions of it.)

Forms of educational instruction and thought patterns in the Islamic world are based upon the picture of Allah given by Muhammad. A person is not guided to become active and responsible, but is directed to submit himself passively to his fate. This is why Muslim emotions often flare up uncontrollably, for their entire education amounts to a submission of will and mind and an integration into an Allah-centred society.

In politics, democracy does not appear to be the best model for the life of a Muslim. Rather Allah, the king and lord over all is the unconscious pattern for many sultans and dictators. The

strong man who swept away corruption with an iron hand, the mighty victor who brought renown, honour and strength to Islam has always been hailed and admired.

In Arab schools one can find children with unusual first names, such as Bismarck, Stalin, de Gaulle and Nasser, because the parents wish and hope that there will be a glorious future for their offspring in the spirit of such historic personalities. It sounds almost macabre when one hears someone in the street of an Arab village saying, "Hitler has not yet paid his school fees." In other words, a father, whose name actually is Hitler, has not yet paid the school fees for his son!

Whether it be kings or dictators, sultans or caliph, the one who held the reins tight with force was admired. Complaisance and compromise mean weakness and incompetence in Islam. It is not surprising that Jamal Abdel Nasser and Ayatollah Khomeini were the dominating figures in the Near East during the last decades. While Nasser attempted to combine an Arab socialism with Islam in order to meet the attack of atheistic communism, Khomeini trod a still more radical path by attempting to establish **the kingdom of Allah on earth** in Shi'ite countries. The ultimate aim of Khomeini's revolution was not merely the removal of the shah or the elimination of Christian, capitalistic or communistic principles from among his people, but the reinstatement of an Islamic theocracy in which Allah prevails and dominates every area of life. This brought a "mullah state" into existence, where, in the name of Allah and Islam, more people were killed in a few years than during the long reign of the shah. Enemies of the Islamic revolution are no longer even regarded as people. Khomeini himself announced, "In Persia no people have been killed so far - only beasts!"

The Islamic spirit cannot tolerate other gods beside Allah. So Islam, in the core of its being, is missionary-minded and will find no rest until all people have become Muslims. This mission-consciousness is based on the Islamic confession of faith which states that "there is no God except Allah". No real peace will reign on earth except through Islam.

In the past, the world, according to the strategy of Islam, was divided into two great areas: The House (territory) of Peace (Dar es-Salam) and the House of War (Dar el-Harb). Peace ostensibly reigned only in countries where Islam had become the **state religion** and where the Sharia, the law of Islam, controlled life. The "House of War", however, encompassed the other nations who had refused to acknowledge Allah. In past months, pamphlets were distributed in a country of the Near East with the heading, "Aslim Taslam!" which means: accept Islam and submit to Allah, then you will not be persecuted, but can live a peaceful life! Mission work in Islam not only means to convince a person intellectually by arguments that Islam is the best religion revealed by Allah; it utilises pressure in all fields at its disposal - economics, politics and even the holy war! The Qur'an commands all followers of Allah to fight for victory in their religion.

We must confess however that Christians, as Crusaders in the Near East, have also left behind them a trail of bloodstained footprints. They have engraved on the historical consciousness of Muslims the image of Christians as aggressive militants. Yet all so-called "holy wars" are in direct conflict with the teaching of Jesus. He said, "Do not resist evil! Put your sword away! Love your enemies!" Christ never commanded his followers to fight in religious wars; rather, he forbade them any demonstration of violence. Muhammad, on the other hand, repeatedly fought in person alongside his fighters until they conquered Mecca and the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. The spread of Islam is based on the sword! **The holy war** in Islam is considered a direct command of Allah and is not merely an interpretation or misinterpretation

of his will by the believers. Therefore, the potential of holy war in Islam still exists. This should not be under- or over-estimated (Sura al-Baqara 2:245).

Anyone who wants to understand Islam must change his way of thinking. Islam is not only a religion for the mind, soul and heart of a man, but it presents an **all-encompassing culture**, theocentric society where all facets of life - child rearing, family life, economics, and politics - are focused on Allah. There is no separation between throne and altar, between politics and religion. In fact, mosques are often the starting point for demonstrations and political upheaval. Friday sermons are not confined to the fostering of faith and spiritual life, but often contain strong appeals to stir up the people for political conflicts in the name of Allah.

This is connected with the Islamic portrayal of Allah. Nothing exists outside the sway of his omnipotence. He is absolute in everything. anyone not surrendering voluntarily to this must be brought into subjection either by cunning strategy, economic persuasion or revolutionary force. Islam means subjection to Allah. It demands surrender of all areas of life to his spirit and the Qur'an's control over all thought and conduct.

Bedouin tribes once said to Muhammad, "We believe in Allah!" But he replied, "You have not believed until you say, 'We have submitted!'" (Sura al-Hujurat 49:14).

Islam is a totalitarian religion which cannot compromise with any **"isms"** for any period of time. As the history of Islam unfolded, strong impulses repeatedly flowed out of the Qur'an, which overcame ideas and concepts that penetrated the Islamic culture from Europe, Persia and India, resulting in an all-pervading legalistic religion. The ultimate aim was nothing less than the establishment of **Allah's kingdom on our earth**.

II. ALLAH IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Islam has recovered much ground and expanded in the last ten years, making a substantial thrust into the cultures of Christianity, Hinduism, communism and the African cults. When we, as Christians, meet Muslims and try to understand them, we should not forget that many of them are genuine worshippers, who serve their God with dedication within the limitation of their religion. A Christian should not despise their deep aspirations, but should love and respect every Muslim who sincerely worships Allah.

This, however, does not absolve us of the obligation to seek the truth about Islam. Our respect for Muslims leads us to a pertinent comparison of the Qur'an with the New Testament, which is for us the only standard of truth. If one compares the 99 names of Allah in Islam with the names of God in the Bible, one must acknowledge that the Allah of the Muslims is not in harmony with our God. Therefore, if a Muslim says, "Your God and our God is the same," either he does not understand who Allah and Christ really are, or he intentionally glosses over the deeply rooted differences.

1. Allah - No Trinity

It is unthinkable and impossible for a Muslim to believe in the existence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the New Testament sense. Whoever says that God has a partner, companion or an equal God beside him will, from an Islamic point of view, fall into an unforgivable sin (*like the sin against the Holy Spirit in Christianity*). Consequently, the

Islamic confession of faith declares not just the uniqueness of Allah but at the same time firmly rejects the deity of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

In the Arabic language, the name **Allah** is a study in itself. The word can be understood as a sentence: al-el-hu. "El" is an old Semitic name for God meaning "the strong and mighty". The Islamic name, Allah, corresponds to the Hebrew name Elohim, which can also be understood as a statement: Al-el-hum. Although the Hebrew name Elohim contains the possibility of a plural (hum), the name of Allah (hu) can only be singular. Thus, Allah in Islam is always only one and never a unity of three, even if such a unity was complete in itself. When Christians claim that their Trinity does not mean three different, separated persons, but a unity in a Trinity, Muslims must repudiate this concept. For them Allah is never a triune God, but one person alone.

2. Allah - No Father

In conversations with Muslims and Jews it is important that we scrutinise anew statements of Jesus in the New Testament concerning the name **Father** for God. We find this name mentioned at least 164 times in the gospels. So we can speak in terms of a "theological revolution" that Jesus brought about in answer to the rigid Semitic belief in one God. Christ did not preach about a distant, mighty, unfamiliar God whom no one can know or comprehend, nor did he teach us to have cringing and trembling fear before him as the unapproachable holy Judge. Instead he gently moved the veil from before the God of the Old Testament and revealed him to us as he really is - the Father. He did not teach us to pray to Elohim, Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord almighty or to the holy Trinity, but placed on our lips the loving name - **our Father**. Christ thus shared his own privilege with us, the unworthy ones. Through him we have become children of God, a relationship which Muhammad emphatically rejects (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:18).

Anyone who takes the time to check the context of the occasions when Christ used the name "God" and compares it with the occasions when he used the name "Father" will be in for a surprise. When Jesus spoke to outsiders, demons or his enemies, he spoke of the hidden God, the great and powerful Lord, by whom all creatures were created. But when Jesus prayed or talked in the intimate circle of his followers, he revealed to them the innermost secret of God - his Fatherhood. For this claim Jesus was convicted of blasphemy when the high priest Caiaphas asked him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Caiaphas was unable and unwilling to name God "Father" because to the Jews it would have been slanderous talk. Therefore, he asked Jesus if he considered himself to be the "Son of God", implying the Fatherhood of God. Christ confirmed the validity of his confession. His first words on the cross were, "*Father*, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." But as the Father veiled his face in his function as a punishing Judge the Son cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet the crucified One held on to the reality of God's Fatherhood in the midst of his suffering and died with the words: "**Father**, into your hands I commit my spirit."

The name Father, the revelation of God's innermost reality, is an indispensable element of the Christian faith. God has bound himself to us in the New Testament as our eternal Father. John stated, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1).

One of the reasons Islam has rejected the Holy Trinity along with the Fatherhood of God is because of a complete misunderstanding of its true nature. In Muhammad's day a certain Arab

sect taught that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, Jesus and Mary. Every Christian, together with Muhammad, will refute this error. It is regrettable that the birth of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary is understood not spiritually but carnally, in Islam. For a Muslim it is blasphemy to think or say that Allah had a son through Mary. God's spiritual Fatherhood remains incomprehensible to their minds. For them, Allah is the exalted, distant and mysterious God. They do not know and appreciate the nearness of God, who in his love as our Father revealed himself in Christ.

3. Allah - No Son!

The Sonship of Christ is another subject that outrages Muslims. They cannot contemplate a second divine person existing beside Allah. This would mean the possibility of conflict within the Godhead. The Son could rebel against his Father at any moment. Only Allah is the powerful one. In the Qur'an he is also called the arrogant and the most crafty of the cunning (Sura al-Hashr 59:23 and Al Imran 3:54). Christ's meekness and gentleness, as well as his self-denial, are regarded as weakness in Islam. It is taken as proof that he is not God when he says, "I am gentle and humble in heart," or "The Son can do nothing of himself," or "The Father is greater than I."

For a Muslim, the mystery of the Holy Trinity remains concealed. The Son continually glorified that Father during his life on earth, just as the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son today. The Father honoured the Son and seated him at the right hand, while the Son left to the Holy Spirit the task of building the Church that he purchased with his blood. Christ's statement, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," sounds like blasphemy in the ear of a Muslim. If this were true, Allah would have no more power in his hands. The spirit of Islam is full of pride. So a Muslim cannot understand the meekness and gentleness of Christ's character.

The existence of a Son of God would also mean an encroachment upon Allah's sovereignty. Allah forgives **whom** he wants, **when** he wants and **where** he wants. He does not need a lamb, a mediator or a cross. Islamic reasoning declares the crucified Christ unnecessary, because Allah does everything alone.

Muhammad's denial of the sonship of Christ includes the rejection of the **historical fact of the crucifixion**. He simply said without hesitation, "they crucified him not" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:157). If Allah would have allowed the crucifixion of Christ, then Muhammad could also have expected a shameful death during the time of his persecution in Mecca. Instead he clung to a powerful Allah, who in sovereign majesty protects his prophets. In Islam the cross of Christ would signify a denial of the omnipotence of Allah.

The contrast between the holiness of God that demands the death of all who are guilty, and his love that longs to save all sinners, is concealed from Islam. Allah does not love sinners (*a principle that is recorded 24 times in the Qur'an, Sura al-Baqara 2:190ff*), but only those who fear him (Sura Al Imran 3:76). For this reason, no Muslim can ever be certain whether Allah has prepared a place for him in paradise or if the gates of hell will stand wide open to receive him.

Islam does not recognise a crucified Son of God. They have no concept of the Lamb of God who was the vicarious sacrifice for mankind. Therefore, no Muslims can perceive redemption; they remain without grace and abide in their sins. The entire second article of our faith is

eliminated by a Muslim. The concept and fact of "being saved through Christ" is non-existent in Islam. The true Saviour is hidden from their eyes.

4. Allah - no Holy Spirit

Islam rejects not only the Father and the Son, but also asserts that the Holy Spirit is not God but a created spirit like angels and demons. The Holy Spirit is taken to be the angel Gabriel who brought messages from God to Mary and Muhammad. The fact that God is spirit and became flesh in Christ and now lives within believers is a hidden mystery to the Sunnites and Shi'ites of Islam. At best, the Sufis, the mystics of Islam, have hoped for and expected the indwelling of Allah in man, but they reject a justifying act through the cross as the only basis for this indwelling.

We must state that Muslims do not recognise the Holy Spirit and that he does not dwell within them. Therefore, **they cannot call Christ Lord and do not belong to him** (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 8:9).

A person in whom the Holy Spirit does not dwell has no assurance of answered prayer, no assurance of salvation, and does not know the certain hope of eternal life. Anyone involved in spiritual counselling with Muslims will find in many of them a deeply rooted piety and a great hope in the mercy of Allah. The actual **assurance of salvation**, however, is absent in Islam.

Sometimes a Muslim will say, "Why should the great Allah trouble himself with the billions of two-legged ants on earth that crawl on one another and kill one another? Allah is greater than that he should listen to all our prayers. Certainly he *can* answer prayer when he wants, but he is free to do as he pleases." The certainty that an eternal Father hears every cry of His children is missing in Islam. Personal contact with God is lacking. Muslims are not children of Allah; they are his slaves.

If you ask a Muslim if his sins are forgiven at best you may receive the answer, "If Allah wishes!" No one knows for sure if this is the will of Allah. On the other hand, we as Christians can testify, "Yes, God has forgiven all our sins, because his Son bore our guilt and paid our penalty on the cross." The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, testifies with our spirits and hearts that we are justified and have been received into the family of the house of God (Romans 8:16; Ephesians 2:18-22).

How then can some Christian theologians claim and declare, "Allah in Islam is identical to the God in Judaism and Christianity!"? Do they not realise that the New Testament says, "He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12)? Everyone who does not identify himself with the cross of Christ does not have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

We must confess that when the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a person he cannot know eternal life. No Muslim can be sure that he has eternal life, because he does not accept Christ who is "the life". All that remains for him is judgement and condemnation, while the followers of Christ are delivered from judgement because of his death (John 3:18).

5. Allah - no love

Our inquiry into the Person of God in both religions boils down to a comparison. We know that God is love. Islam acknowledges Allah to be the Merciful One. Perhaps you may ask, "Is not this name, which occurs in the Qur'an more than any other name, equivalent to love? Are not mercy and love the same?" Perhaps an illustration can help to clarify the comparison between these two words. If a groom would say to his bride, "**I have mercy on you** and will marry you," what would her reaction be? She would run away from him! But if he says, "**I love you,**" then the relationship will be as it should be.

Even in his mercy, which is Allah's favourite name in Islam, he remains the Great and Exalted One who at best will condescend a little to help his needy creatures. Even in exercising his mercy he remains distant and impersonal.

Our God, on the other hand, in his love came down to our level in Jesus Christ. He took on the form of a slave and abased himself to the lowest level, bearing our guilt and taking our place in judgement. His self-sacrifice for us sinners means eternal holy love.

We do not have a distant impersonal God, but a Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit, who does not hesitate to save us and make his home within us. In an exaggerated sense we could say, "God, in the earlier meaning of his name, no longer exists since Jesus came to earth. What actually exists is only the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." As a result everyone who does not recognise or accept the Holy Trinity shows that the true God is hidden from him.

You Shall Know them by their Fruits

Since Allah in Islam is fundamentally distinct from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it follows that ethics, culture and way of life in both religions are essentially incompatible with one another.

One of the main principles in Islam is that **all thought is based on law and justice**. The whole of life is influenced by and remains under the law. Sin necessitates expiation. Words similar to the Old Testament are used in the Qur'an, such as, "**An eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth**" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:49; Exodus 21:23,24).

Christ, however, taught a **new law** based on his love, and commanded his disciples, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44).

Because our heavenly Father has unconditionally forgiven all people all their sins through the death of Christ, Christian ethics and principles are thus built upon an unconditional forgiveness toward all people. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). He applied his prayer with the words, "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15).

In Christianity **God's love and unconditional grace** have become the guiding principles of life. In Islam **law and justice** are the basis for all thought and behaviour. The everyday language of Muslims abounds with expressions like, "I am in the right" (literally, "The right is *with* me"), "you are in the wrong" (literally, "The wrong is *upon* you"). There is no flexibility in deciding the right, and compromises are seldom possible. To compromise would be an injustice.

Consequently, every sin and mistake merits reprisal and punishment. When sin is not propitiated, then justice is not satisfied. We read in the Old Testament that shed blood cries out to heaven (Genesis 4:10). Murder requires retribution and vengeance. In Islam blood revenge is a law of Allah. It would be unjust to forgive a crime or a mistake casually. In the Old Testament forgiveness was possible only through sacrifices and the shedding of blood. The Muslims do not understand the need for sacrifice nor that all demands of justice in God's law have been fulfilled by Jesus, once for all time and for all people. He shed his own holy blood for those who deserve to die. However, since reconciliation with God through Christ is denied in Islam, the principle of blood revenge is perpetuated. As long as unconditional forgiveness is regarded as unjust in Islam, **grace** does not supersede justice, but **justice** overrides grace. Anyone who has been in Islamic countries, the "House of Peace", for a long period of time, knows of endless blood feuds, the revengeful murder of family members for the maintaining of another family's honour.

In the Middle East, wars seldom end in a compromise. The right to land, rivers and wells must be restored intact; if not, those who fought for their rights will have no peace of mind. When the Israelis had given back 99.99% of the Sinai Peninsula to the Egyptians, the Egyptians said, "We demand that every grain of sand is returned to us."

This rights-oriented attitude leads to a kind of war between Islamic tribes and nations that we scarcely comprehend. Iraq and Iran have destroyed one another's oil pumping equipment. Meanwhile, Anwar Sadat made a peace treaty with Israel because of pressure from America and was shot for it. The Lebanese civil war raged for more than ten years. In Syria, the Alawites and the Muslim Brotherhood are destroying one another, and Qaddafi with his billions in oil money intends to conquer Chad and destabilise Morocco. The spirit of Islam is a restless spirit. The Old Testament predictions about Ishmael are being proven true until today. "His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him" (Genesis 16:12).

The sensitive concern of Muslims for justice and law is deeply rooted in their concept of Allah himself. In the Qur'an he commanded Islam to be defended with weapons, to carry out Holy Wars with bloodshed, and to kill every convert who leaves Islam by rejecting Allah and accepting Christ as the Son of God (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:9). The God of Islam is a God of retribution and a judge who is merciless in punishing iniquity. The legalistic reasoning among Muslims comes from Allah himself, as well as from a fanatical pride and the desire for retribution.

The Institution of Marriage

The Muslim attitude toward marriage and **family life** is indicative of further contrasts between Christianity and Islam to a degree where it becomes absurd to speak of the same God being in both religions.

According to Islam, Muhammad received a revelation from Allah, through which he learned that any Muslim can legally marry up to four women (Sura al-Nisa' 4:3). Muslims can also, according to an interpretation of several schools of law, enter into a temporary marriage. For instance, when travelling a Muslim can keep wives in different places or take concubines from among his slaves, just as it pleases him (Sura al-Nisa' 4:3-34).

Of course, today only the rich can afford several wives because a man is bound to give each wife the same amount of food, clothes and presents, as well as give equal gifts to all the

children. If he marries several wives, he must support separate households. The hatred, envy and jealousy that spring from this arrangement can hardly be imagined by an outsider.

In this age of birth control, modern Islamic theologians have arrived at a special interpretation of Sura al-Nisa' 4:3. According to this verse, Allah had intended Muslims to be monogamous from the beginning, because his requirement for men to love all four wives equally cannot be achieved by an husband.

No matter what modern scholars may write, a woman in Islam stands on a lower level than a man. He is responsible to educate her in marriage; he may keep himself from her as a punishment for disobedience and has the right to strike her (Sura al-Nisa' 4:34). The witness of one man at a trial is equal to that of two women (Sura al-Baqara 2:282). Children always belong to the man. Admittedly, a mother has the privilege of caring for the children up to a certain age, but then they must return to the father. According to Islamic understanding, these rules are commands of Allah in the Qur'an.

In most Islamic countries it is very easy for a man to divorce his wife. Should it have been an action carried out in hasty anger, he can remarry her later. Later, if he divorces her a second time, he still has the right to marry her once again. But if he divorces her a third time, he forfeits his legal right to remarry her until she has married another man and has been divorced by him. Then the first man can remarry her (Sura al-Baqara 2:229,230).

We cannot grasp the wretchedness behind such a regulation. The wife is not a partner but a commodity for the man, a means to an end. This is all linked to the fact that in Islam a person is not made in the image of Allah but is only his slave. For this reason the wife also does not stand on the same level as her husband, but is considered to be only a little higher than a maidservant. She is regarded as his field, in which he can sow whenever he wishes (Sura al-Baqara 2:223).

This dominance of the male is projected even beyond the gates of paradise. A magnificent life awaits the faithful Muslim - trees of shade and fresh fruit, alongside cool rivers; a few dozen maidens and several lads always at his disposal. Little is said in the Qur'an about his previous wives in connection with paradise (Suras al-Rahman 55:54; al-Waqi`a 56:15-22,34-35,72).

How utterly different is the **Christian outlook on marriage!** Woman too is created in the image of God, not just the man. As far as the spiritual relationship is concerned, she is equal to the man. Monogamy is therefore the consequence of the spiritual position of a woman. She is a partner and helper to her husband to tackle all problems of life together. Christ confirmed monogamy and prohibited any irresponsible divorce (Mark 10:6-12).

The Apostle Paul demanded complete submission of the wife to her husband, but only in conformity to the Church's submission to Christ. Accordingly, the husband has the privilege of offering his life out of love for his wife and children, just as Christ gave his life as a sacrifice for the church (Ephesians 5:22-25).

Such spiritual principles regulate all areas of the Christian's life. The secret of the Christian culture is the everlasting **love** of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. In Islam, all areas of life are governed by the **judicial dominance** of the dictator, Allah. Islam and Christianity are thus two completely different religions, as distinct from each other as Allah is from the Holy Trinity.

III. THE TRUE FACE OF ALLAH

1. An Unbiblical Spirit

Muslims claim that Muhammad was not the author of the Qur'an. Their theological experts do not accept the obvious fact that 75% of the Qur'an is composed of distorted laws and stories from the Old Testament. On the contrary, they vehemently defend their belief that **Allah** inspired Muhammad and revealed his words and commands to him. Every sentence in the Qur'an is supposedly the pure word of Allah, infallibly by the Almighty.

All statements in the Torah (Pentateuch) and the Injil (Gospel) are thereby rendered relative. The Muslims accept these two books as being inspired by Allah as long as there is no conflict in them with the Qur'an. All statements in the Bible that are not in agreement with the Qur'an are considered false and invalid. This pits one revelation against another revelation, and each proves the other to be false. Islam brings judgement on itself in its radical rejection of the Trinity.

We should also bear in mind that Islam is a post-Christian religion. Out of historical necessity, Muhammad had to come to terms with the Christ of the New Testament. He accepted Christ partially, yet denied some crucial factors of his life. So we find that the Qur'an bears clear witness to the virgin birth of Christ but denies that he was **conceived** of the Holy Spirit. Muhammad claims that the Son of Mary was **created** through God's Word out of nothing. Christ's validity in Islam is simply as a great prophet who did mighty wonders. He made the blind to see, healed the lepers and raised the dead. Without dying, Christ was supposedly lifted by Allah directly into heaven where he still lives today. According to the Qur'an, the living Christ is an article of Islamic doctrine. He is recognised as such both in this and the other world, from which he will come again to judge all Jews and Christians who have not accepted Islam. Muhammad described Christ as an outstanding prophet who did greater miracles and had a better character than himself! But despite all this honour, there is a radical denial of Christ's deity and a rejection of the real purpose of his coming and also of his atoning death. According to the Qur'an Jesus was not the son of God, and his crucifixion never took place.

For all Muslims the **Qur'anic Christ** is the dark glass through which they look at the true Christ. The Christology of Islam is a false standard that they use to measure our Saviour and his salvation. However, with the recent developments in the Middle East we will have to come to grips with the Christ of the Muslims, because he will be the starting point or the conclusion of many conversations with them.

In view of the special significance of the Qur'anic Christ, we must recognise the fact that 600 years after the supernatural birth of his only Son, God would not have sent the angel Gabriel to Mecca to tell Muhammad that he, the living God, has no Son! And the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would never contradict and deny the historical facts of the crucifixion since the purpose of his Son's birth was to die on the cross to take away the sins of the world. If Islam claims that Muhammad received real inspiration, then it was another spirit, a false spirit and not the Holy Spirit who inspired Muhammad. God does not lie.

The New Testament teaches us how we have to regard Islam. The apostle John wrote in his first letter, "**Every spirit which does not acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh... is the spirit of the antichrist...**" (1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-6). We must therefore confess with all

humility that the spirit in Islam is the spirit of the antichrist. Muhammad had heard much about Jesus, but, in spite of all, he denied the crucified Son of God.

This brings us to our conclusion. The spirit who calls himself Allah and claims to have inspired Muhammad cannot be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead he is a **spirit full of lies**, who took upon himself the old Arabic name of God, "**Allah**", wearing it on his face like a mask and claiming to be God, although he is not God. Allah in Islam is an **unclean spirit of Satan**, who rules with great power in a religious disguise to this very day (John 8:30-48).

2. Islam - a Collective Bondage

We acknowledge that Islam can summon up deep religious fervour in its followers. It is a religion of worship, of righteousness by good works, and even calls for self-sacrifice in the cause of Allah. Countless Muslims have died in holy wars during the course of history to uphold the name of Allah and carry it into all the world.

Religious zeal, however, does not save anyone. Rather the gospel teaches us, "**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him**" (John 3:36). Islam rejects God's Son. Consequently, it puts itself outside of the truth. Islam is not a way that leads to God, because no one comes to the Father, except through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Such spiritual issues constitute a call for every Christian to serve the Lord among unbelievers, especially the Muslims. Have we become so contented with a Christianity that lives only for itself, that the spiritual destitution of 800 million Muslims fails to arouse us? If you cannot fly to an Islamic country to be a witness for Christ, you can still pray for Muslims and support other brothers and sisters who have been called of the Lord to serve among them. Maybe you can do something for foreign Muslim workers and students in your country. The fact that only a few younger or older Christians are ready to follow the call of Jesus to serve him in world missions should be an alarm signal shaking every church and congregation. Saved believers should have a desire to save others. If there is no sense of urgency for missionary service among the followers of Christ, then the question must be asked whether or not these church members have really experienced a genuine conversion and a Spirit-filled rebirth.

Christ is on the move even today, seeking to save those who are lost. Is the church abandoning him? Or are some responding with Isaiah, who, after sincere repentance and divine cleansing, said, "Here am I, send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)?

Alongside or within the structure of mission societies and existing indigenous churches, there are today special opportunities for skilled workers, students and tourists to enter closed countries where regular missionary work has not yet been possible.

For example, a skilled Christian worker has a golden opportunity to use his skill in some of the oil-producing countries combining it with a wise personal witness. The only question is whether he will seek training and accept the call to be sent by Christ as a witness among Muslims. The **skilled workers' mission** represents, in our days, a challenge to every young Christian.

Whoever wishes to participate in missionary service among Muslims must be aware that the spirit of Islam officially opposes every form of Christian mission. it is forbidden to call

Muslims to the crucified Son of God in almost every country where Islam is the state religion. We have to realise that Islam is not only a religion, but a culture, and sometimes a state. Anyone witnessing to Muslims in an Islamic country is regarded as committing an offence against the government and must sometimes face punishment. But we must obey God rather than man.

In our days the mission field has come to our homelands. Over 10 million Muslims live, work or study in Europe and over 2 million in North America. Who will speak with them about Christ? Who will give them wise guidance through their practical problems? Who will invite them for supper or tea? How often do we pray for the foreign workers and students? We love them only insofar as we pray for them! Those who do not understand their languages can acquire literature and cassettes from various centres to give to them.

Everyone who is ready to serve Muslims in Jesus' name will soon find that a long-time rejection of the Gospel has hardened their hearts. Muslims are conditioned and immunised from childhood against faith in the true Christ. The rejecting spirit of Islam holds them captive in a **collective grip**. No Muslim can come to a genuine conversion without the direct intervention of Jesus Christ.

In the world of Islam we find a mission field markedly different from those countries where the message of Christ had not been proclaimed prior to the establishment of the particular religions or cults in those countries. Therefore, it is imperative for a convert from Islam to detach himself from the spirit of Islam, together with its practices, and to fall in love with Christ. If he will not deny himself and depart from Islam willingly, he will suffer from spiritual schizophrenia that will sooner or later draw him back into Islam.

Every Christian who wants to serve among Muslims must first examine himself to discern if the Lord has called him personally to this service. Romantic enthusiasm does not motivate for long. **"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"** (Ephesians 6:12). Only Jesus is our protection and our strength. He alone produces lasting fruit. Every missionary among Muslims should therefore surrender and submit himself in a complete consecration to the crucified Christ, who leads dedicated people in the way and to the places He chooses. The spirit of a self-satisfied and traditional Christianity must be relinquished through obedience to the Spirit of Christ by missionaries among Muslims. They must no longer hold on to their rights, but only accept their duties, just as the Lord said, **"I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many"** (Matthew 20:28).

3. Growing Opposition of the Church and Persecution of Converts

As a result of the Islamic revival in our days, pressure is increasing on national Christians in Islamic countries. Here some **Christian churches** still exist after surviving numerous persecutions in earlier times. Today tens of thousands of Christians are emigrating from Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt and other countries because they no longer see any future for themselves and their children in Islamic countries. During times of political unrest Christians have been repeatedly suspected of wanting to set up their own independent states. Consequently some have been put under pressure. For example, in Egypt in 1981 eight bishops of the Coptic church along with fifty clergymen and laymen were put in prison. In 1979 approximately the same number of believers in Iraq were imprisoned.

We cannot deny that movements exist, such as those in Lebanon, where Eastern Christians have taken up arms to defend their Christian freedom and not be degraded to second or third class citizens, as often happened in the Near East during the past 1350 years.

"We must prepare our churches to suffer," said a church elder of a small group in Morocco as he realised what the Muslims have in mind for indigenous Christians in the future. He himself had been a prisoner for six months for the sake of Christ.

It is not often realised that national Christians, born as Christians and belonging to a regional church which possibly dates back to the early Christian era, have legal rights to live in an Islamic state as Christians. Muhammad tolerated them to some extent as **"people of the book"**. But for converts who have forsaken Islam there is no mercy. Allah's law demands their death because he does not release anyone who has previously submitted to him.

Today, **groups of converts** or small underground churches exist in several Islamic countries. The reason for this can be found in the fact that a more liberal outlook has infiltrated Islamic minds from both East and West. In certain cases, families reluctantly tolerate the conversion of some of its members to Christianity. In very rare cases an entire family will take this step together. But the fact remains that either an Islamic state or fanatical groups will **persecute** such embryonic cells of the church of Jesus Christ the moment their existence becomes known. Since Islam is gaining strength we must expect that converts will face greater danger in the future. If established churches are already feeling increasing pressure, then individual converts will be shown even less mercy. They may be offered the opportunity to return to Islam under the guidance of a sheikh. But if they do not consent, they could be executed by order of the government. This is the subject of a proposal which has been brought forward to the Egyptian parliament several times with the intention of having it made an official law. Until now many liberal Muslims have opposed this despite the requirements of the Qur'an.

The words of Jesus spoken in John 15:21-16:4 are becoming increasingly relevant today. **"They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well... They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me...."** Christ did not say to Saul on the road to Damascus, "Why are you persecuting my church?" but, "Why are you persecuting **me**?" This is the consolation for all converts from Islam who believe in Jesus, that no one is alone in persecution, but Christ suffers with him and gives strength to every faithful disciple.

The spirit that rejected the Son of God and nailed him to the cross 2,000 years ago is alive in Islam today. It denies and hates the Crucified One, and opposes all who are justified through him. A good Muslim thinks he worships the true God and honours him with his whole life. Yet, through Christ we know that Allah in Islam is not God, but a demonic, misleading spirit that has placed one-sixth of mankind under its spell. Whatever may happen, Jesus Christ loves every Muslim. Our Lord, who sits on the throne, can cast out any demon by a movement of his little finger. We can have a firm hope for every Muslim who comes to Jesus on his promise: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

All Biblical quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Quotations from the Qur'an are from The Koran Interpreted, translated by A.J. Arberry