

## ALLAH? The God of Islam and the God of Christianity?

Quotations are from the NRSV unless indicated otherwise

By Abd al-Masih

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? Or – as it is frequently but incorrectly phrased – is Allah the same as God? Recently Durie wrote a little book to answer that question and emphasizes that what the Qur'an reveals about God is so opposite to what the Bible teaches about God, that Muslims and Christians are really not worshipping the same God.<sup>1</sup> When it is formulated in this way, however, we are left with many questions. Like, which other God are Muslims worshipping then, since there is only one God? I would like to take up this theological challenge from my experience of having lived in the Middle East for almost eight years. First of all I will make a few more general comments concerning the identity of the God of Islam and the God of Christianity. Secondly, I will focus on an issue that is not only important for our understanding of God, but very sensitive in the Islamic world as well, i.e. the meaning of the Jewishness of Jesus; what does it mean that Jesus, who truly and fully revealed God, was a Jew? Finally I will try to make some concluding remarks.

### 1. ALLAH OR GOD?

#### ***a. An abstract question***

First of all the question whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God does not seem to be very relevant. The question is hardly an issue in the Middle East and in my relationship with Muslims it never played a role. Everyone in the Middle East simply assumes you believe in God; the opposite is absurd and inconceivable, even if 'faith in God' is experienced and expressed in many different ways. Sometimes non-Christians have asked me as a Christian to pray for a relative, because I believed in God and as 'rajul dīn', religious man, might have more direct access to Him. Also, when people exchange greetings, both Christians and Muslims call upon the name of God to wish you good.<sup>2</sup> So in general this question about God in daily life is not an issue.

Secondly, it is important how we phrase the question. Time and again I notice that people in the West distinguish between Allah and God, as if

'Allah' is the God of Islam and 'God' is the God of the Bible. This distinction sometimes even becomes a mark of confessionality; if you call Allah God, you are suspect of syncretism. For Christians in the Middle East, however, it is bizarre. 'Allah' simply is the Arabic word for God and Christians use it – following the Arabic translation of the Bible – to indicate the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> If we want to help the discussion, we must be clear that we ask about the relationship between 'the God of Islam' and 'the God of Christianity', not between 'God' and 'Allah'.

Thirdly, the question raises theological issues, for it assumes that in a kind of 'prolegomena' that precedes the encounter with Islam, can be decided whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. In that case, the suggestion is that 'God' is a known entity that can simply be defined in advance. This, however, is a misconception. The concept 'god' is as universal as abstract and can be used (both as genus and as personal name) for anything that claims a certain

absoluteness in life, from the gods of the Greek Mythology, to the spiritual nothingness of Bhudism. The real issue, however, is the *nature* of what we call God; who is the one who truly deserves to be worshipped as God and how do we know? What are our criteria to identify the true God? How does He reveal himself?

Fourthly, when we as Christians - in this context of the quest for the nature of the true God - assert that He has fully revealed himself in Christ, we have to be aware of the implications of this confession. It is obvious, that Christians and Muslims differ substantially and categorically in what they believe about Jesus. What exactly do we say, when we emphasize that Jesus is God. Again it is easy to suggest 'God' is the known entity that further defines the nature of the person of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is like God. However, the most striking and outrageous element of this confession is that it does not first of all define Jesus, but explicates God. Professing Jesus Christ as divine does not elevate Him into the inaccessibility and aloofness of Allah, but explains how God is as near as Jesus. For Muslims this confession therefore implies a reinterpretation of the person of Allah. In Christ Allah reveals Himself as the one who is visible to our human eyes, who can be touched with our own hands (1 Joh. 1:1; Joh. 1:14). For Bilquis Sheikh the confession that Jesus was Allah signified that Allah was as close as a Father.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the real issue is how to truly know God and serve Him properly. Or, phrased in a more Christian vocabulary, how can we become members of the Kingdom of God and be saved? That challenge remains, in whatever way we would answer the question whether the God of Islam is the same as the God of Christianity. If we would answer this

question with 'yes', even then it is only through Christ that God can be truly known, for there is 'no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12 NIV).' If we answer the question with no, the message is also the same, i.e. God has fully revealed himself in Christ and there is no other way to enter the Kingdom than through Christ. So in both situations our approach will be similar. Rentier might be right when he emphasizes that the issue is not whether we serve the *same* God, but whether we *serve* God.<sup>5</sup>

In writing his book, Durie seems to be motivated by the concern not to confuse the identity of the true God. Too easily it is assumed that all religions are the same and that it does not matter what and how exactly we believe. Comparing the different images of God, according to Durie, can only be done on the basis of His revelation. On that basis the images differ so much, that they cannot be identified as one being. I can understand and share his concern. In my view there can be no doubt about the character of God as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ. However, I would personally be a little bit more cautious not to pretend I exactly know who God is. The history of Christianity too clearly illustrates that claiming full knowledge of God is no guarantee for perfection. There have been many manifestations of Christianity that have claimed to represent the one true God in which I do not recognize Him who has revealed himself in Christ. The most extreme example of course is that of the Crusades, but it is easy to come up with a list of many different illustrations, varying from a 'biblical' defense of slavery and apartheid, to anti-semitism and the persecution of the Jews. So it does not seem so

simple to define exactly what the true image of God implies in real life.

From a Christian point of view I think it is true that Islam as a religion obscures the perception of God. Yet, there are many manifestations of Christianity that likewise obscure the image of God. However, we cannot escape the theological truth that there is only one God. Therefore with Chapman, I personally believe there are enough similarities between the Muslim image of God and the Christian image of God to use the same word for God.<sup>6</sup> Both the Old and the New Testament use the contemporary word for 'God' that is also used by others in the ancient Near East.<sup>7</sup> The same is true in the history of Mission. Missionaries consistently used local concepts and images to designate the one true God.

All of this does not imply that Islam and Christianity are identical or equally valid ways to God. Likewise, however, it does not imply that God is identical with Christianity.<sup>8</sup> In this context of the Christian and Islamic view of God, Chapman introduces<sup>9</sup> the image of the one sun seen on the one hand by people in an area where there are always clouds and on the other in an area where there are never any clouds. The first group of people, like Islam, has a limited and veiled image of the sun; the others – like Christianity – have a much clearer picture and feel the heat of the sun. Chapman is quick to emphasize the shortcomings of the image, for even Christianity is to a certain extent limited. It is in Christ that God has fully revealed himself, but no human being can fully understand and grasp the nature of God. It is in Christ that God has fully revealed himself. Nevertheless, the image helps to acknowledge that there can be truth in the Muslim image of God, albeit distorted and limited. Paul might have applied his qualification of the Jews in

Romans 10 in a certain way as well to Muslims, stating that 'they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness' (Romans 10:2-3). Therefore this veiled knowledge of God is not sufficient for salvation.<sup>10</sup>

### ***b. Fear and insecurity***

When this question is irrelevant, why does it nevertheless always surface with strong emotions? When during a meeting of Christian Students at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon) Colin Chapman explained the image of the obscured and the revealed sun many students were shocked. 'We cannot accept that there is truth in Islam. For why then are we Christians?' Their reaction displayed fear and insecurity. They felt their identity was at stake, not just theologically - what they believed – but also socially; they were afraid to be ruled by Islam and what kept them going was the knowledge that Muslims were completely wrong in their understanding of God. If that could no longer be sustained unambiguously, what would be left of Christians in Lebanon? It showed a mentality of survival through isolation. It is all or nothing. Either Islam has no knowledge of God at all or Christianity is not true.

This probably also is an issue for (Evangelical) Christianity in general. The vitality of the Islamic faith can make Christians feel uncomfortable. That makes me wonder about the strength and the rootedness of the Christian faith. Why is it, that Islam makes Christians feel insecure? Why is it, that some Christians find it difficult to encounter Muslims with inner peace and strength? The challenge of Islam

urges us to renewed reflection on what we believe and why. If the Church is motivated to such a process of selfreflection and renewal than that in itself would already be an important gain of the encounter with Islam.

However, there is another side to this issue, more missionary in character. The fear of Islam is regularly expressed very negatively, leaning to explicit hatred towards Muslims. That is destructive for mission. Fear easily manifests itself in a harsh posture: 'Islam as the enemy of the cross must be opposed, either with words or deeds'. That can be in the form of a very direct and often aggressive kind of evangelism; the wrong theology of Islam must be exposed and the truth proclaimed. When we cannot dialogue, there is only proclamation left, even if it does not respect a person's identity or culture. It can also take the shape of an insensitive and harsh opposition to growing Islam in society, which can eventually lead to a radical theological justification of violence and war. Although the blessing of arms does not seem to be a general evangelical phenomenon,<sup>11</sup> there is nevertheless a growing tendency in the Evangelical world to interpret the war on (Islamic) terrorism as apocalyptic if not as a Christian mission. That at least is how many Muslims experience it.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious, that this is the end of Christian witness. When theology and politics are being confused in this way, theology easily ends up justifying certain – not necessarily Christian or biblical political views and actions. That makes it very hard to share the love of Christ with those who oppose you. Christianity combined with power often corrupts the gospel, for it usually becomes a tool to defend earthly freedom and privileges. The Kingdom of God, however, is not of this world;

the centre of that Kingdom is the Crucified Messiah, who is an outsider and a stranger. He challenges our rootedness in this world and calls people to radically follow him by taking up their cross and by dying like a grain of wheat that falls into the ground. That is the only way to bear fruit (John 12:24), not to try and save one's life, but to lose it in love for one's enemies and prayer for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:44; Luk. 9:24). A theology of fear leads to opposing and fighting the adversary, a theology of love manifests itself in fervent prayer.

### ***c. Theology or Shari'a?***

The core of (Protestant) Christianity is faith and doctrine, not ethics. Because the doctrine of grace is central to reformed and evangelical faith, the practice of the Christian life is not central to salvation and tends to remain in the background. The heart of Islam, however, is not in theology, but in Shari'a, the Islamic Law. Of course there is a basic core of theology in Islam, but it is limited; it is primarily an explication of tawhiid, the doctrine of oneness. There is only one God and the major and unforgivable sin is to associate other beings with Him: polytheism or 'shirk'. God's nature, who God is, cannot be known, since God is ultimately transcendent. The only thing that can be known is God's will. Therefore Islam is submission; it is not so much a way of believing as it is a way of living.

This structural disparity between Islam and Christianity makes a difficult to discuss the question of the nature of God. Christian theology will try to answer the question by comparing what each religion confesses about God, while Islam in general would prefer to compare how submission to God is realized. Therefore theological discussions often do not reach a deep

level, but are limited to debates about whether God can have a Son, how God can be three and one etc.

During a class about 'Son of God' in the Gospel of John, a student asked me how we could explain this qualification of Jesus to a Muslim. My answer was that we should not try to, unless a true relationship has been build and a Muslim would really have existential questions about it. Otherwise it will always lead to a discussion in which each one tries to convince the other of the false nature of his faith. It is very difficult to explain the essence of the Christian confession of the Sonship of Jesus to someone who has learned almost from the cradle, that God does not have a Son. A theological debate in this context rarely connects hearts, it usually deters people

The only way for people to discover the secret of Jesus is when He becomes a reality in the life of the Christian community. A theology of continuing incarnation is the starting point for the encounter between Christians and Muslims. That is not meant as salvation by works; it is not asserting that a Christian can and should live a perfect, sinless life as is claimed possible by a theology of perfection. What I propose is a 'reality-check': is it really true what we confess? 'By my works I will show you my faith', for 'faith without works is (...) dead' (Jam. 2:18, 26). It is all about a theology in which doctrine and life melt together. Isn't this what Bonhoeffer meant with his resistance against cheap grace? How can the beauty of God's holiness in Jesus ever become clear to non-Christians if this beauty is not reflected in the life of His community (2 Kor. 3:18 NBG)?

## 2. JESUS, THE JEW

When in the encounter with Islam we maintain that God/Allah 'is like Jesus'

there is an issue that needs to be addressed. For Jesus was a Jew. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 'Jew' for many Arab Christians and Muslims has received a negative connotation.<sup>13</sup> Jews today are part of a powerful State that has been at war with most of the Arabic countries. Israel is the enemy. It have been *Jewish* soldiers that were fighting the Arabs and that where part of the invasion into Lebanon in 1982. Jewish soldiers were - purposefully or accidentally - responsible for targeting huge civilian areas in Lebanon in 2006.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the Middle East therefore a Jewish Jesus reminds people of that violence, of a State that tries to achieve its political, military and economic goals if necessary by force. A Jewish Jesus to many Christians (and Muslims) is as difficult to accept as a Palestinian Jesus for the Jews (or a German Jesus for the Dutch during the second world war). Such a Messiah represents the enemy. And when God is like this Jesus, He is the God of 'the enemy'. That in itself does not mean we have to deny the jewishness of Jesus, but it forces us to reflect on the issue.

In the West there is a growing awareness of the meaning of the jewishness of Jesus. However, that does not imply that its theological significance is obvious. Jesus the Jew is probably stranger to Western Christianity than is often assumed. For it certainly means that Jesus looked more like an Arab Bedouin in the Judean desert, than like a modern Jew in Tel Aviv. His eyes will almost certainly have been dark and his skin browned; he will have had a full black beard and worn a Jallabiye (the Arabic long dress for men).

But apart from his looks, it seems difficult to distinguish the exact *theological* significance of the

jewishness of Jesus. The Jewish nature of Jesus is rediscovered in New-Testament scholarship.<sup>15</sup> In Systematic Theology, however, there is no clarity of what it means for our understanding of God, that Jesus was a Jew, especially in the encounter between Islam and Christianity. Within the limited space here it is only possible to convey a few thoughts.

First of all, it is remarkable, that the jewishness of Jesus is never an explicit theological theme in the New Testament. Of course it is assumed that Jesus was a Jew and was rooted in Judaism, but it is not a theme to reflect on. That surprises, for the main discussion in early Christianity was about the relationship between the particularity of Israel as the chosen people of God and the universality of salvation in Christ. Was the Jewish character of serving God – including the Torah and the Jewish regulations – accidental or essential? In other words, does it belong to the essence of salvation and do people therefore have to become Jewish in order to be saved, or not? We could have expected the Jewishness of Jesus to be an important theme in the discussion in the early church. However, this is not the case.

Paul only incidentally mentions Christ 'according to the flesh', e.g. in Romans 9. In this passage he expresses his intense grief about the unbelief of Israel; he cannot understand that this nation, to which God has committed himself in such a special way, rejects its God-given Messiah. There was no nation closer to the eschatological salvation than Israel; no people had received so many benefits and blessings (Rom. 9:4, 5). The ultimate gift, the climax of the covenant, was the Messiah, 'who was from Israel according to the flesh'(kata sarka) and 'is over all, God blessed forever' (Rom. 9:5). In this context

'flesh' does not have a similar negative connotation as in e.g. Romans 8, where it is first of all the description of life dominated by sin. Here it simply points to the earthly existence of Jesus. As a human being He belongs to the Jewish people; it refers to his 'ethnic status'.<sup>16</sup> Jesus is an Israelite from the lineage of David (Rom. 1:3).

The expression 'according to the flesh' at this point is used with a dual purpose. First Paul uses it to emphasize the enormous prerogative of the Jewish people. The Messiah is the Messiah of Israel, a Jew among the Jews. In this way He belongs to no other nation. God himself, a stranger to the world, has become Jew and in His distinctiveness He is closer to Israel than to anyone else. Israel had the first opportunity among the nations to accept the Messiah and yet, Israel (as a nation) did not. 'He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him' (Joh. 1:11).

Secondly 'kata sarka' (according to the flesh) is also used in a critical way. It is 'restrictive'.<sup>17</sup> Jesus is from Israel *only* according to the flesh. His earthly lineage does not tell the whole story. God's plan of salvation does not progress by way of 'the flesh' but through the promise, i.e. by means of election and grace. No one is part of God's history through his own works and physical efforts. That was true even for the patriarchs. It is 'not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants' (Rom. 9:8). When the Messiah is from Israel 'according to the flesh', it implies that Israel does not automatically, because of its lineage, shares in the blessings of the Messiah. Knowing Christ 'according to the flesh' even for Israel is not enough. What really matters is faith. The reverse side of this 'restrictive' 'kata sarka', of course,

is that there is also hope for those who do not share the same 'flesh'. The Gospel is 'the power of God for salvation to *everyone* [curs. BR] who has faith' (Rom. 1:16); the blessings of the Jewish Messiah are also meant for the Gentiles *as Gentiles*.<sup>18</sup> They do not have to become Jewish in order to be acceptable to the God of Israel.

In other words, although Jesus is fully Jewish, in a certain way He also transcends His Jewishness. On account of his lineage He belongs to Israël, on account of His grace He is meant for the whole world, regardless of ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> '(W)hoever believes in him will not be put to shame' (9:33; 10:11). It is not the Jewishness of Jesus that is essential to salvation, but the fact that He is the Messiah.

This is also true from another perspective. Jesus may be from Israel 'according to the flesh', at the same time he is 'over all, God blessed forever' (Rom. 9:5).<sup>20</sup> The mystery that Jesus cannot be explained simply in human qualifications has consequences for our understanding of the Jewishness of Jesus. For if Jesus is God incarnated, He also transcends his humanity. He is more than a man and this universal connotation cannot but stretch the particular character of the Jewishness of Jesus. For when Jesus transcends his humanity, he must inherently also transcend his Jewishness. The divinity of Christ opens up the Jewishness of Jesus from the inside out. God cannot be contained into one specification of creation. Therefore Paul emphasizes that 'though we once knew Christ from a human point of view [according to the flesh, BR], we know him no longer in that way' (2 Cor. 5:16).

We can conclude that Jesus is fully Jewish, yet at the same time transcends this Jewishness. That has some implications for our

understanding of God. First of all, God is in a certain way truly revealed by Jesus as Jew. Transcending a category does not mean denying or excluding it.<sup>21</sup> In this respect Jesus' Jewishness primarily discloses God's faithfulness to Israel. He has chosen this nation to be a blessing to all the nations and He does not come back on His choice. Therefore we cannot understand Jesus without his relationship with Israel and Judaism.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, secondly, we cannot deny that Jesus as a Jew revealed God *in a certain way*. For if the Jewishness of Jesus would reveal God in an absolute way, it would imply that God is a Jew. 'Does Jewish-ness belong to the Glory of God?'<sup>23</sup> If that is the implication of the Jewishness of Jesus we cannot escape the conclusion that God is male as well, because Jesus is a man. This is a bridge too far, for God is not like man. Likewise God cannot be captured in Judaism or Jewishness. As the Creator of heaven and earth He transcends creation, even if He has chosen to be influenced by the contingencies of history. No religious system therefore, not even the Jewish, can ever be identified with the Kingdom of God.

In this respect the distinction the Dutch theologian Miskotte has made between *Edda* and *Torah* might be helpful. *Edda* for Miskotte represents the old German myth(ology), *Torah* stands for the explanation of the name of the God of Israel. No human being has by nature access to that name; it must be revealed by God. Man however, has a tendency towards selfredemption. This is *Edda*; it is found in all religions apart from Christianity. That tendency is criticized by *Torah*. Every natural element in society is judged by God and every form of selfredemption is exposed as insufficient. Thinking along these lines,

we can even say that Israel can become *Edda* and the gentile world could (through Jesus) be *Torah*. *Torah* and Judaism/Israel are not identical. That is why the prophets are often very critical of Israel, when it does not live according to the *Torah*.

Applied to our discussion, we could say that the Jewishness of Jesus in itself is not so distinctive, but what it represents, i.e. the revelation of God. As far as Judaism reflects *Torah*, it is an essential element to the person of Jesus. Maybe we should even reverse the coin and say that the true Jewishness, what it really means to be Jewish, can be found in Jesus Christ. He was the perfect Jew and as such the definition of Jewishness.

In the context of the encounter between Islam and Christianity and the identity of God, we can conclude that the Jewishness of Jesus does not present a hindrance when it comes to the nature of God. The Jewishness of Jesus reveals God predominantly in its representation of the whole history of God with His people. Of that history, Jesus is the climax and without it He cannot be understood. However, Jesus' Jewishness does not reveal God as a Jew. Jesus transcends His Jewishness as well and therefore God is not the ambassador of the Jewish state of Israel. His Kingdom is not of this world. As the crucified one, Jesus is always present in this world as a stranger, a nomad and wanderer, as the one who is ultimately despised and rejected by the world. But precisely as such, He can be a saviour to the world. The 'God of the enemy' paradoxically presents himself as the Jewish Messiah to the Arabic people in their own Middle Eastern culture. Yet to everyone's surprise He is different than the enemy, for He stretches out His hands in reconciliation. As shocking as it is to

Palestinians today, to see that Jesus is a Jew, as shocking it must be to Israelis that the God of Israel is also the God of their enemies; that He is also the saviour of those who are ethnically and historically their opponents. Jesus is the saviour of the *whole* world and puts His loving arms around his and our enemies. That is the one and only God we serve, the God that is so intrinsically other than the God of Islam and the God of some manifestations of Christianity. That is the God that is, or at least should be, represented by the Christian community in its encounter with the Muslim world today.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?

1. This is a question that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Moreover, to me it does not seem to be the most important question any longer. Whenever we still try to answer it, we need to be consistent. If we insist that Muslims worship a different God, because what the Bible reveals about God differs substantially from what the Qur'an and the Sunna of Muhammed teach about God, we might have to say the same about Judaism. For Judaism also denies that God has a Son. Should true Judaism not be defined as that Judaism which believes Moses and the Prophets and therefore acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (cf John 5:46). Currently Judaism does not and the image of God therefore differs substantially from that in Christianity. Does that mean Jews worship a different God than Christians? And if so, should we not say the same about certain

- manifestations of Christianity that are no longer faithful to Gods revelation in Christ, as in e.g. a colonialistic form of Christianity?<sup>24</sup>
2. Many would be reluctant to draw this last conclusion, that Jews (and some Christians) worship a different God than the Father of Jesus Christ. It is also theologically hard to sustain, for there is only one God. What is at stake between Judaism and Christianity is the true worship of this one God. But if this is so, do we not need to say the same when we compare Islam and Christianity? For the only alternative is a demonizing of Islam, claiming that Muslims worship satan. Although I do not deny that satan gladly uses Islam to mislead people, I find it hard to put Islam in the same category as many satanic cults. It could be misleading as well, for satan uses all kinds of religious and philosophical systems to draw people away from God. In my opinion the greatest threat to Christianity today is not Islam, but (post)modern secularism, that is driven by the desire for money, power and sex.
  3. Islam has a different image of God than Christianity. I believe that Muslims in general do not know God in His complete and clear beauty. The same is true in a different way for Judaism and in again another way for some forms of Christianity. Therefore we are constantly impelled to discover the fullness
- of God's beauty and love, which has been revealed in Christ. 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth' (Joh 1:14). Although I firmly believe and confess that Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), I try to be careful not to suggest that my theological system is identical with God's revelation. God is not a Jew, God is not a Muslim, but neither is God a Christian. He is the almighty God, the exalted one, who became humble and lowly. This is the secret I confess, that I believe in, but for which I need an eternity to grasp its meaning. Therefore His humility should be reflected in my life.
4. It is especially this last element that is so crucial in the encounter with Islam. For the most important question is not whether Christians and Muslims serve the *same* God, but whether we truly *serve* God. Does it really show that we belong to the one true God? When the law of God is not through the Holy Spirit fulfilled in the life of the Christian community, the confession of the truth of Christ will not be heard by anyone. How can people be attracted to worship God the Father if His children do not reflect His love and serve Him wholeheartedly?

***This article is a rewritten version of an article that first appeared in Dutch, titled 'Allah? De God van de Islam en de God van het Christendom?' in Theologia Reformata, 47/2 (2004)***

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<sup>1</sup> M. Durie, *Revelation? Do We Worship the Same God. Jesus, Holy Spirit, God in Christianity and Islam. Guidance for the perplexed.* Upper Mt Gravatt Australia, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Some Christians tend to vary their vocabulary sometimes in order to stress that they are not Muslims. In stead of 'assalamu aleikum' (peace be with you) that is mainly used by Muslims, they prefer 'marhaba' (hello), or in Libanon 'bonjour.'

<sup>3</sup> Toby Howarth explicitly deals with this question in his article "Is Allah dezelfde als de God en Vader van Jezus?" in: *Kontekstueel* 16/5 (2002), pp. 19-23, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> B. Sheikh with R.H.Schneider, *I dared to call Him Father, The Miraculous Story of a Muslim Woman's Encounter with God*, (Eastbourne, 2003), pp. 47-48.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. Rentier, 'Dienen moslims en christenen dezelfde God', in: *Theologia Reformata*, 47/2 (2004), pp.83-105, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> C. Chapman, *Cross and Crescent. Responding to the challenge of Islam*, Leicester 1995, p. 228. Chapman proceeds in three steps. First he underlines that the *idea of God* is not the same in Christianity and Islam. Secondly, he wonders whether there is *anything in common* between the idea of God in Islam and Christianity. Many would answer affirmative. Finally, he asks whether these images of God have *enough in common* to use the same word for God. Some, including Chapman, Cragg and Howarth, would answer positively, others would not.

<sup>7</sup> El/Elohim, with a similar root as Al-ilah or allah; Theos was used by the Greeks and the Romans for their Gods.

<sup>8</sup> Barth has made clear, that no religious system, not even the Christian, can be identified with the revelation of God in Christ, or with the Kingdom of God. Theology implies the continuous effort to understand that revelation; and therefore any theological system is also continuously challenged by the crucified One.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Cross and Crescent*, pp 228-229.

<sup>10</sup> When we want to assert that the Muslim God is a different God than the God Christians worship, the only alternative is that Muslims are worshipping satan, since there is only one God. That is difficult to sustain, even when satan can use Islam to obscure the image of God and to mislead people, see below.

<sup>11</sup> During the different gulf wars and the American war in Afghanistan, there have been several religious leaders that literally have blessed the weapons and prayed with presidents for succes in these wars.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. pictures of Israeli children writing unpleasant remarks on the warheads that were sent into Lebanon in 2006, during in the Israeli-Hezbollah war.

<sup>13</sup> There is a tradition in Islam, in which Jews are already considered in a negative light, being secondary citizens under Islamic Rule (dhimmis).

<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny atrocities that have committed by others, nor to say that Israel or the Jews have all been involved in injustice, but simply to describe the emotions that are attached to the word Jew, as for many Jews there are similar emotions to the word Palestinian/Arab, even though many Arabs have not engaged in war or committed any war-crimes.

<sup>15</sup> Cf the overview in NT Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1996), part 1. The term 'the Third Quest', is introduced by Wright himself, p. 80, and describes the research of people like E.P. Sanders, G. Vermes and N.T. Wright himself.

<sup>16</sup> T. Schreiner, *Romans (ECNT) Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bookhouse co., 2003), p. 486

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16 (WBC vol. 38b)* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1998), p. 528

<sup>18</sup> Cf. L. E. Keck, 'The Permanent Particular. Jesus the Jew' in: D. Moody Smith (series editor), *Studies on Personalities of the New Testament. History in Perfect Tense* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 22-64, p. 60

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 535; Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 486

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<sup>20</sup> In Greek there is no punctuation and therefore it is possible to read this verse in several ways. 'God blessed forever' can be connected with Christ; then Paul is confessing Him explicitly as God. However, it can also be an independent doxology, that praises God for all his blessings, mentioned in Rom. 9:4, 5. The first interpretation grammatically makes the most sense (cf. Rom.1:25; 2 Cor. 3:11; Gal. 1:5), but is slightly unusual in its content. Cf. the overview in Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 489. Whatever the conclusion, in both cases the description of Christ from Israel according to the flesh presumes that He belongs to a different relationship as well, cf. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 535.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant, Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, London, New York, 1991, p. 192, n. 62, talking about the new creation that transcends covenantal categories.

<sup>22</sup> To many Arab Christians it is obvious that Jesus cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of contemporary (i.e. first century) Judaism. They object to the suggestion that knowledge of today's Judaism is necessary.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. G.Khodr at the first of three consultations between the Middle East Council of Churches and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, in 1993 on Cyprus, cf. 'Report of the Ecumenical-Theological conversations on 'the Church and the Jewish People' 1993, (prepared by Janneke Houdijk of the CCN 1993), p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M.Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism. A Moral Critique*, Sheffield 1997.