

Essay

Are the supreme beings of Islam and the Bible one and the same?

The writer is managing editor of *The Good News and booklets for the United Church of God, Milford, Ohio*. This essay is based on a sermon Mr. Ashley delivered in several UCG congregations in recent months. A previous essay by Mr. Ashley, "In View of Sept. 11, Was Islam Ever a Religion of Peace?," ran in THE JOURNAL April 30, 2003.

By Scott Ashley

ARVADA, Colo.—Mohammad was a student at Al-Najah University in Nablus, a Palestinian city a few miles north of Jerusalem in the West Bank. This was a special time for him, because today was the day of his final exam to graduate from the university, and tomorrow was to be his wedding day, a day he had planned for three years.



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He arose early that morning to go to the nearby mosque for prayers and the reading of the Koran. After that he went to the university, where he took his final exam. Then he went to the mosque again for another of the five daily prayers required of Muslims.

Then he returned home, where he and his family sat up talking late into the night because, after all, this was the last night before his wedding.

The next morning Mohammad again rose early, because this was the big day. He washed himself, sprinkled himself with perfume and put on his best clothes for his wedding.

When he left the house, he kissed his mother's hand as he usually did and again went to the mosque for morning prayers.

After morning prayers he finished preparations for his wedding, which included putting on a large, heavy belt that would insure that his marriage would go as planned.

Back out in the bright sunlight, he caught the morning bus along its regular route, a bus that carried mostly Jewish passengers back and forth among the many towns and settlements that ringed Jerusalem.

After boarding the vehicle, Mohammad worked his way onto the middle of the bus, thinking all the time of his coming wedding.

When the moment was right, a strange smile came over his face. He opened his mouth, shouted, "Allah akbar!" (Arabic for "Allah is great!") and pressed a switch on his heavy belt.

Mohammad exploded into a pink mist, as did the Israeli passengers around him.

Screws, nails and ball bearings shot out in all directions from his explosives-packed belt. The bus burst into flames. The roof of the vehicle peeled back from the force of the blast.

When the smoke had cleared, more than a dozen Israelis lay dead, several dozen more were injured, and Mohammad Al-Bustami had, in Muslim teaching, gone to his wedding.

He was now in paradise, with 72 beautiful, dark-eyed, perpetually young virgins who would be his brides and companions for all eternity.

Suicide on the Web

The story you just read can be found on the Web site of the Palestinian Students Association at Al-Najah University, where it serves to recruit other suicide bombers (it appears there in Arabic; an English-language translation appears on an Israel Defense Forces Web site).

Palestinians refer to Al-Najah University as "the greenhouse of the martyrs" because eight of its students have blown themselves up as suicides.

The institution is considered an arboretum where the seeds of martyrdom are planted and nourished until they can bear their deadly fruit.

Sick inside

When we hear a story like the tale of

this young man—and such happens all too frequently in the Middle East—our reaction is typically to feel sick inside.

But that is not the typical reaction in the Muslim world. Customarily the family of a suicide bomber is showered with praise and gifts, and, in the case of Saddam Hussein until recently, he rewarded families of suicide bombers with \$25,000, which is a fortune in that part of the world.

You may have seen footage of Palestinians dancing in the streets and cheering in the aftermath of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. You may have heard that immediately after that tragedy the most popular name for newborn boys in the Muslim world was Osama, after Osama bin Laden.

More recently you may have heard that earlier this year the most popular name for newborn boys in the Muslim world was Saddam, after Saddam Hussein, who at the time was being portrayed on Arabic TV stations as defeating the American and British forces before he suddenly disappeared and his nation collapsed.

Motivating beliefs

What drives this kind of thinking? What beliefs would make a college student plan for three years to blow himself up while trying to take with him as many Jews as he could? And what can we expect to see out of the Arab and Muslim world in the years ahead?

What is the Muslim worldview, and how can it help us better understand so much of what's going on in the world?

Let me start with the caveat that Muslims, like followers of traditional Christianity, don't all believe and practice the same things. A range of belief exists within Islam just as a range of belief exists within Christianity. We see

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extreme conservatives, extreme liberals and a whole lot of people who simply don't know what their religion teaches.

Nevertheless, the information covered here is to be found in the Koran and teachings of Muhammad, and plenty of Muslims believe it. I'm trying to help you understand the major beliefs that motivate the majority of Muslims.

Allah vs. God

First, keep firmly in mind an important truth from which so many other truths flow: *Allah and the God of the Bible are not one and the same.*

What I have just stated is one of the most politically incorrect statements a person can make but one that I firmly believe: God and Allah are *not* the same.

But nearly everyone simply assumes they are. I assumed that for a long time. However, after looking into the Koran and seeing what Allah supposedly revealed to Muhammad and what Allah wants his followers to do and how he wants them to think and the values he wants to instill in them, and reading material that shows the connections between Islam and ancient moon-god worship, it all makes sense.

Allah is simply an ancient pagan deity, and Islam is simply continued worship of that pagan god.

The underlying assumption of nearly everyone is that, since Christianity and Islam and Judaism believe in a supreme being, and since there can in reality be only one Supreme Being, all three faiths believe in the same supreme being.

Belief in one supreme being or one God is called *monotheism*, from *mono*, meaning "one," and *theism*, meaning "belief in God."

But monotheism—belief in one God—doesn't in and of itself tell you anything about the nature and identity of the one God being worshiped. In other words, it isn't enough to say there is only one God if you worship the wrong God.

Ancient Egyptians could say that Ra, Isis or Osiris was the one true God, but this didn't mean that the Hebrew God Yahweh and the Egyptian deities were one and the same.

The Canaanites could have taught that Baal or Molech was the one true God, or the Greeks and Romans could have argued that Zeus or Jupiter or Saturn was the one true God. But merely arguing that there *is* one God doesn't automatically mean that the one God you choose to worship is the *right* one or that they are all one and the same.

In the Bible the one true God has revealed Himself in such a way that His character and nature cannot be confused with the nature and character of the pagan deities of other peoples.

The cult of the moon god that worshiped Allah was transformed by Muhammad into a monotheistic faith with its own holy book and eventually more than a billion followers. But, since Muhammad started his religion with a pagan god, it should come as no surprise that he ended up with a pagan god.

What are some of the differences between Allah—the God of Muhammad and the Koran—and the God of the Bible?

The book *The Islamic Invasion*, by Robert Morey, chapter 5, has a helpful analysis of the differences. Let's look at some of them because they do disprove this dangerous assumption.

Knowable vs. unknowable

"According to the Bible, God is knowable," writes Mr. Morey. "Jesus Christ came into this world that we might know God (John 17:3).

"But in Islam, Allah is unknowable. He is so transcendent, so exalted, that no man can ever personally know Allah. While according to the Bible, man can

"Neither does Allah 'have feelings' toward man. That concept is foreign to Islamic teaching. That would reduce Allah to being a mere man—which again is blasphemous to a Muslim."

Active vs. passive

"Allah does not personally enter into human history and act as a historical agent. He always deals with the world through his word, prophets, and angels. He does not personally come down to deal with man.

"How different is the biblical idea of the incarnation, in which God himself enters history and acts to bring about man's salvation."

Ignorance of the differences

Mr. Morey concludes: "Many Westerners assume that Allah is just another name for God. This is due to their ignorance of the differences between the Allah of the Quran and the God of the Bible and also due to the propaganda of Muslim evangelists who use the idea that Allah is just another name for God as an opportunity to convert Westerners to Islam.

"The Bible and the Quran are two competing documents that differ in their concept of deity. This fact cannot be overlooked just because it is not in conformity with the present popularity of religious relativism."

Blunt summary

A source that I read months ago concisely and bluntly summed up the differences between the God of the Bible and Allah of the Koran. It said that, in Christianity, *God sent His Son to die for you*. In Islam, *you send your son to die for Allah*.

The book *Inside Islam*, by Reza Safa, features a short section that perfectly

this would include you and me.]

"Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them."

Note here that Muhammad's followers are specifically told to fight dirty—to lie in wait to ambush others, not to fight them out in the open.

This reminds me of the passage in the Bible concerning the Amalekites attacking the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.

The Amalekites attacked the rear of the Israelite column, killing the weak and the infirm, the young children and the elderly, rather than targeting the Israelite fighting men.

I think this could be the earliest recorded incident of terrorism, and that's exactly what it is.

It's the same people still doing it, and it's the same mentality at work over the centuries from the time of the Exodus to the time of Muhammad right down to our day.

Of course, God's judgment on the Amalekites was that their actions were so despicable that God instructed that they were to be wiped out entirely.

Sentence of crucifixion

Another sura (chapter from the Koran) that illustrates Allah's cruelty is Sura 5:34-35: "Those that make war against Allah and His apostle [Muhammad] and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides, or be banished from the land. They shall be held up to shame in this world and sternly punished in the hereafter . . ."

Notice that here Allah commands torture of prisoners. Crucifixion was a horrible form of torture and execution. Cutting off a prisoner's hand on one side and his foot on the other side was barbaric and deliberately crippling and maimed a person for life.

In Islamic lands ruled by Islamic law, thieves' hands are typically cut off as punishment for their stealing.

Contrast that to God's punishment for theft. The thief had to restore the value of the stolen item several times over. If the debt were paid, the thief presumably had learned his lesson, would repent and could go on with his life.

But under Islamic law a thief would be permanently crippled, marked and humiliated, branded as a thief for the rest of his life, with no room for mercy, repentance and forgiveness.

During and after the recent war we heard incredible accounts of torture and cruelty out of Iraq in the reports of how Saddam Hussein and his cronies dealt with people who opposed them.

Those incidents didn't happen in a vacuum. The cultures in that part of the world are cruel. Islam is a religion of the desert, started among people who lived in a hard and cruel land and who worshiped hard and cruel gods.

We shouldn't be surprised that from that environment came a religion and a culture and a god that were also harsh and cruel.

The hell of the Koran

Another way in which this harshness and cruelty are spelled out is in the Muslim view of hell. We recognize that the popular view of hell isn't found in the Bible, and God isn't the kind of cruel being who would torment people for eternity in unquenchable flames.

We know that these kinds of ideas came into Christianity from sources outside the Bible.

However, Islam most definitely teaches the existence of a hell in which non-Muslims will be tortured forever.

Apparently Muhammad took some false ideas about hell from false Christianity and incorporated them into the Koran as Allah's revelation.

The Koran describes many tortures for residents of hell who had refused to submit to Allah and become a Muslim. Sura 9:35 describes the punishment of hoarders of gold and silver who didn't spend their treasurers in their lifetimes on Allah's cause.

According to the Koran, their gold and silver objects will be heated up in

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Jihad, the struggle to spread Islam, is a sacred duty for Muslims

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the fires of hell, and the miscreants will be branded on their faces, sides and back with those objects.

Sura 8:50 says: "If you could see the angels when they carry off the souls of the unbelievers! They shall strike them on their faces and their backs, saying: 'Taste the torment of the Conflagration! This is the punishment for what your hands committed.'"

Road to perdition

So here you have Allah's angels beating and maiming the souls of non-Muslims as they carry them away to hellfire.

Sura 44:43 states: "The fruit of the Zaqqum tree shall be the sinner's food. Like dregs of oil, like scalding water, it shall simmer in his belly. A voice will cry: 'Seize him and drag him into the depths of Hell.' Then pour out scalding water over his head, saying, 'Taste this, illustrious and honourable man! This is the punishment which you have doubted!'"

Here again we have people tortured without mercy, force-fed scalding liquids, having boiling water poured over them. If you don't think Muslims take this seriously, you're mistaken. Muslims have tortured infidels to death just as this describes, boiling them to death in cauldrons.

Sura 9:73: "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate."

Here Muhammad justifies the brutality of his religion. He says that Allah himself revealed to him personally that people of other religions are evil and belong in hell. Therefore, according to the Prophet, any barbaric act against unbelievers is justified because they deserve it and they're headed for hell anyway.

People of the Book

Sura 98:6: "The unbelievers among the People of the Book and the pagans shall burn forever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures."

Understand that "People of the Book" refers to Christians and Jews. So, according to Muhammad, Christians and Jews who don't accept Islam are no better than pagans and deserve to burn forever because "they are the vilest of all creatures" in the world.

Sura 22:19-21: "Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. They shall be lashed with rods of iron. Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: 'Taste the torment of the Conflagration!'"

Sura 18:28-29: "For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire which will encompass them like the walls of a pavilion. When they cry out for help they shall be showered with water as hot as molten brass, which will scald their faces. Evil shall be their drink, dismal their resting-place."

The Koran contains many more graphic passages that describe the torments of hell, but you get the picture. They graphically show the differences between the merciful and loving God of the Bible and the nature of the god whom Muhammad envisioned and worshipped, Allah.

Muhammad's Allah is a sadist. Since sadism is clearly described in the Koran as part of Allah's nature and character, we shouldn't be surprised to see the kind of cruelty practiced that we see in much of the Muslim world.

The paradise of the Koran

Since Muhammad had such a warped view of hell, we shouldn't be surprised that he also had a warped view of heaven, or "paradise," as it's called in the Koran.

Muhammad devised an effective marketing plan for his religion. In war against the infidels, Muslims have nothing to lose. Islam conquered much of the known world in the seventh century because Muslims had a powerful motivation. The Koran spelled out that four fifths of the booty of a victory went to the Muslim fighters, with the other fifth conveniently going to Muhammad or charity (Sura 8:41).

So war was a self-financing effort. Muhammad didn't have to pay soldiers to fight to spread Islam; they were happy to do so because they could share in the spoils.

If a Muslim man won in battle and lived, he acquired loot and plunder, children for slaves, women to take as wives or sexual slaves. If he died, he went to paradise.

What could Muslim warriors look forward to in paradise? I'll summarize some pertinent passages from the Koran.

Pearl decking

In paradise the faithful would enjoy great wealth. Those who went there would be "decked with pearls and bracelets of gold, and arrayed in garments of silk." They would eat from gold dishes with gold and silver uten-

Some say jihad refers to the struggle a Muslim makes to become a good person. Some say it means holy war. Both are right because jihad is the struggle for the cause of spreading Islam.

sils. They would "recline on green cushions and fine carpets" and "jeweled couches."

In short, they would enjoy wealth unlike anything they were likely to see in this life.

In the desert of the Middle East, the inhabitants didn't have much water. So the new resident of paradise would benefit from many springs of water, each one with a different taste. The most prominent were a spring that would taste like the camphor tree, one that would taste like nectar, one that would taste like ginger and one that would taste like wine.

Rivers flowed in paradise. One was a river of water, another of milk, another of honey and another of wine. Muhammad was promised his own river, which featured banks made of pearls.

Paradise was loaded with fruit trees covered with apples, dates, grapes, basil and flowers, all with trunks and branches made of gold.

On earth the acacia tree doesn't bear fruit, but in the Islamic paradise it bears fruit with 70 tastes and colors.

Because shade in the desert was hard to come by, there would be plenty of shade in paradise, the result of a tree so large that, according to Muslim tradition, it would take a horseman 100 years to ride past it.

Maybe you're thinking: I thought Muslims weren't allowed to drink alcohol.

That's true, of course, unless you're Saddam Hussein or one of his sons or some other Muslim ruler. Muslims aren't supposed to drink alcohol in this life, though that doesn't stop some of them from being hypocrites in that regard—claiming to follow Allah when it suits them and ignoring the Koran when it interferes with their baser desires.

So, even though Muslims are forbidden to drink wine in this life, in paradise the wine is different. It's nonintoxicating, so you don't get drunk or act stupidly, and, best of all, you can drink all you want without becoming sick or getting a hangover.

And, after you drink it, your body smells like perfume.

In fact, anytime you eat in paradise you smell like perfume because, according to Muhammad, in paradise you never have to visit the bathroom.

The food you eat or drink in paradise is transformed into perfume that oozes out of your skin and makes you smell good all the time.

Also, whenever you burp or hiccup, you smell like perfume. In fact, everything and everyone in paradise smells like perfume.

Being sure

In paradise everyone is healthy, complete, as tall as palm trees and in his prime at the age of 33.

Still, in paradise some have it better than others. If you are a good Muslim man or woman who makes it into paradise, there you will be married to the spouse you had in this life if you both were good enough. If not, you look around for someone else.

But, according to the Muslim author of *Inside Islam*, you can never be sure that you're good enough to make it into paradise, because Allah can be harsh in his judgments.

In Muslim teaching there is only one sure way to make it into paradise, and it's also the way you can be guaranteed the best that paradise has to offer.

That way is illustrated in the story I described in the beginning of this article, the story of Mohammad the suicide bomber.

You might have wondered why I kept mentioning that the day of his

of paradise you can take your pick.

A number of suras also describe that in paradise the men will not only have their 72 dark-eyed virgins, but all around them will gather fresh-faced young boys as pretty as pearls who are there to serve them if they are so inclined.

I won't go into more detail than that. I will just say that the particular practice implied here is widespread in the Arab world and apparently was also back in Muhammad's day.

It is not politically correct to say so, but the paradise of the Muslims is nothing more than the rantings and ravings of the sick and diseased mind of a self-proclaimed prophet, not a spiritual mind.

Islam and jihad

Another concept that we need to understand is *jihad*, an Arabic word that means "struggle." *Jihad* is a sacred duty for Muslims.

You've probably heard some of the debate about what *jihad* means. Some say that *jihad* refers simply to the personal struggle a Muslim makes to become a good person. Some say *jihad* means *holy war*.

In fact, both are right because *jihad* is the struggle for the cause of spreading Islam.

Islam means submission or surrender. So one who struggles with himself to submit to Allah is carrying out the duty of *jihad*, and the one who struggles to spread Islam is also carrying out

the duty of *jihad*.

Muslims who believe in *jihad* as holy war have no problem finding verses in the Koran and the hadiths that justify violence. To many of them, in fact, the teachings of Islam *require* violence to spread Islam. Note a few passages from the Koran.

Sura 8:60: "Let not the unbelievers think that they will ever get away. They have not the power so to do. Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your command, so that you may strike terror into the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and oth-



ers besides them who are unknown to you but known to Allah."

Sura 9:14: "Make war on them: Allah will chastise them at your hands and humble them. He will grant you victory over them and heal the spirit of the faithful."

Sura 8:12: "Allah revealed his will to the angels, saying: 'I shall be with you. Give courage to the believers. I shall cast terror into the hearts of the infidels. Strike off their heads, strike off the very tips of their fingers!'"

Spheres to influence

In Islamic theology the world is divided into two spheres: *dar al-Islam*, meaning "the land of Islam," and *dar al-harb*, meaning "the land of the unbeliever [or heretic]."

A fundamental aspect of Islamic teaching is that all non-Muslim lands must eventually be absorbed or conquered by Islam, preferably by peaceful conversion but by force if necessary.

This theology and approach perfectly explain what we see in the world. Muslim countries are generally at peace among themselves, though there are

civil wars in some Muslim countries where more hard-line factions battle for control.

The Arab world is united against Israel because it is an abomination in a land that was once *dar al-Islam*, part of the reign of Islam, to revert to *dar al-harb*, to come under domination of Jewish or Christian heretics.

This is also why Osama bin Laden and others have been so motivated to drive all Americans out of the Middle East in its entirety.

This also explains why in recent decades incessant wars have been fought on the fringes of the Islamic world. In those areas Muslims have gained enough power to see victory within their grasp, so they wage terrorist and civil wars to gain control of specific areas or entire countries.

This Islamic quest for control lies directly behind the civil wars and unrest in Algeria, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Kenya, Nigeria, Russia (Chenya), Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, the Philippines, Israel and India (Kashmir).

The unambiguous teaching of Islam is that it is the supreme and only true religion and that it will win out over all other religions, and eventually the entire world will come under its rule.

Sura 61:9 states: "It is He [Allah] who has sent for His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the idolaters [those who worship other gods, including Christians] may dislike it."

Prophecies of Islam

So what does all this mean for the future? Where might this be headed?

At the conclusion of the earlier essay (in April), we took a look at Daniel 11. Let's go there again. This is a crucial prophecy because its fulfillment triggers a series of events that will lead directly to a worldwide bloodbath and the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

"At the time of the end the king of the South [south from the perspective of the Holy Land] shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through" (verse 40).

Egypt has generally been the center of the land of the king of the South, going back to the time of the giving of this prophecy. Egypt is directly in the middle of the Muslim Arab lands on the one side and Muslim North Africa on the other. It's directly in the heart of the Islamic world.

So this end-time king of the South "attacks" the king of the North.

This word *attacks* is also translated "push at" in the KJV. The Hebrew word is used to describe the way a goat butts at objects with his head, so either "pushes at" or "attacks" or "rams" would be valid translations.

Whatever this "attack" or "pushing at" is, it triggers a massive retaliation from the forces of the king of the North. The king of the North we have long understood to be the leader of a federation of nations formed from a resurrection of the Roman Empire.

Is the current European Union that resurrection of the Roman Empire? I don't think so. For one thing, it appears to have far too many nations already in it or planning to join it shortly.

Will this prophesied resurrection come out of the European Union? I definitely think so. The EU is already economically unified, working on a European constitution to further politically unify them.

The Europeans are also working on a common European military force. Do you think they learned something from seeing what the U.S. military did in Afghanistan and Iraq?

You bet they did. The description here couldn't better describe the U.S. military invasion of Iraq: He "shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many

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