

I've heard more than one radio preacher say that the Islamic God is a different God than the God of Judaism and Christianity. Is that true?

I too have heard uninformed radio preachers make two arguments to prove that the God of Islam is not the God of Judaism and Christianity. They say: the Islamic god Allah is a pagan, Arab god, the father of many other gods, while the Jewish and Christian God is the Only God, and the God of Islam is not a Trinity, and in Islam, God the Son does not become incarnate, die for the sins of the world, and rise on the third day.

They conclude then that the Islamic God is not the Christian God.

As to the first argument, it is true that in pre-Islamic Arabian religion, Allah (which means simply, "God") was the father of the gods. But

Muhammad transformed the father-god Allah from the highest god to the only God by denying the existence of all other gods. To his fellow Arabs, Muhammad in effect said, "You are wrong about Allah. He has no children and begets nothing. He does not procreate but instead creates." It is this unique Creator-God that Muslims pray to, not the old father-god of the pre-Islamic Arabs. The name is the same, but the concept is very different.

The Hebrews actually seem to have done much the same thing by identifying their God, the Lord (Yahweh) with El, the father-god of the Canaanites. To the Canaanites they said, in effect, "The Lord we worship is your god El,

THE REV.
WILLIAM G.
GARTIG



how the Canaanites envisioned and depicted El. The Hebrews took over the father-god of the Canaanites and said El was another name for Yahweh. So the Hebrews did something much like what Muhammad did.

Should Christians say Jews worship a different God than Christians because the Hebrews adopted the name and depiction of a Canaanite god and transformed it?

As to the other argument, it is true that

if you remove all the lesser gods from under El and understand that El is the only God." In fact, in Daniel 7 where the "Ancient of Days" (God) is described as an old man with a white beard sitting on a throne, that is exactly

in Islam, God is unitary and not a trinity. Therefore, in Islam, there is no incarnation, Jesus is not crucified nor is he raised.

But the same things are true of God in Judaism (no trinity, no Jesus as savior), yet many Christians say they worship the same God the Jews do. What Christians say, in effect, is, "We worship the Unique Creator-God too, though we believe Jews are wrong about God in some respects. As Christians, we believe God is a trinity of persons, and God the son became incarnate, died, and was raised."

Despite some significant differences between Christians and Muslims, I see no reason why Christians cannot acknowledge Muslims as fellow-worshippers of the one, true God.

The Rev. William G. Gartig will answer your questions about the Bible, Episcopal life and other religious subjects. Send questions to 2146 Cameron Ave. Apt. 5, Cincinnati, OH 45212-3631 or at gartigwg@episcopal-dso.zzn.com.