

Good Reading for the Evening Commute

Greetings from England. I read the December MF magazine from cover to cover last evening on the train going home from London to Berkhamsted and learned more in that short time about Muslim belief and response to September 11th than anything else I've read since then. I think MF is an important document, let alone a magazine, and I will circulate it around the UK Interserve office, where I serve. Congratulations – thanks for writing in a way that even a humble “newcomer” to cross-cultural mission can understand ...

Alastair McIver
Director of Communications,
Interserve

Who is Biblical?

I just got around to reading Stan Guthrie's article, “New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies.” I found it to be very insightful, and very applicable to my ministry.

For the last nine years I have worked with a very well known “missions agency.” In those nine years my organization has always encouraged us to work with, in, and for the local church. But in almost every situation (in working with local congregations) I have encountered resistance. Mr. Guthrie's stated reasons – money, theological, and control – have always been a part of the problem.

It is very hard to work with a church when they tell you, “We're not saying you are unbiblical, but we're not sure you're biblical.” In my nine years, I have always felt like the local church has treated our ministry (local and international) as a little red-haired stepchild. All I want to do is work together to see the Great Commission fulfilled.

Gary Schmalz
Ames, IA

Focusing on the Greatest Need

I just am reading your Jan/Feb 2002 issue of *Mission Frontiers* magazine. The statistics in it are very good, and gives a very good overview of where the needs are at in a general sense.

For my own personal purposes, many times I abide by the 80/20 principle which states that 80 percent of your effectiveness can be done with 20% of your activities. It appears that maybe you have that same perspective.



I say this because it seems that you are wanting to focus where the most need is. As a video producer, and a Christian with a personal commitment to supporting missions in the most effective manner, I wish to focus my efforts where the worst need is ...

Kurt Petrich

Are God and Allah the Same?

Contrary to what David L. Johnston wrote about Allah and YHWH being the same, I remain unconvinced. The article was clear, well-written and easy to follow, but the opening paragraphs contained assumptions which were, I respectfully suggest, incorrect.

First, he is “unconvinced that the God of the Qur'an is any different from the God of the Old Testament” (emphasis mine)... There is an essential difference between the God the Old Testament and of the Qur'an: the former has consistently interacted with humanity in a manner which is culturally relevant to us, ultimately modeled in Jesus Christ....

Jeff Morton
Garden Grove, CA

David Johnston suggests that God and Allah are the same “person” or “object of worship?” Not exactly. He recognizes that the “fatherhood and love is missing, and that that their definition of Christ is vague and comes nowhere near satisfying us.” Does the God they recognize as Allah line up to be the same God? The fact that the Arabic word for god is “Allah” comes far short of the biblical description of the God who revealed Himself to Abraham, Moises, the prophets and “who in these last days has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” ...

Robert E. Newman

David Johnston suggests that God and Allah are the same “person” or ... In brief I ask Mr. Johnston, “Do Muslims and non-messianic Jews worship Jesus? Is Jesus God?” Both non-messianic Jews and Muslims deny that Jesus is God come in the flesh. Neither would ever dare say, “I adore and worship you,

blessed Lord Jesus.” My understanding of Scripture is that the deity of Jesus and the doctrine of the Trinity set apart as far as the East is from the West the God of the Bible and the God (god) of both Islam and Judaism.

Sincerely,
Russ Irwin

David Johnston responds:

I appreciated very much the three (mostly critical) letters that were passed on to me. In fact, I agreed with most everything they wrote. In summary, here's my reaction:

1. I overstated my case (sorry!) by saying that I did not see any difference between the God of the Quran and that of the Old Testament. As the rest of the article pointed out, I meant only the fact of his being the Creator, Sustainer of the universe, Lawgiver, and Judge on the Last Day. As a missionary, one tries to build on as much common ground so as to move people ahead more quickly. And yes, the Old Testament presents some amazing theophanies and clear signs pointing to a suffering Messiah, easily transcending the Qur'an.

2. Ralph Winter has said it very well: the word “God” in English has pagan origins in the Germanic cultures, while the word “Dieu” (French) or “Dios” (Spanish) come from the polytheistic Roman culture. As I said, Paul endeavored to widen the meaning of the Greek “theos” for his Athenian listeners (Acts 17), starting with the common creation understanding.

3. A word of caution to all of us: I believe we evangelicals can become too self-confident and border on arrogance in the boundaries we draw in our constructions of biblical interpretation (theology). To be sure, we must include all the affirmative statements of Christ, Paul and the others in the New Testament, but how much of God did Abraham (and others in the Old Testament) know?... All I am saying is that the Holy is at work in the places and hearts we might least expect. Let's recognize the mystery of God's ways and walk humbly, even as we affirm the truth that has been revealed to us in our crucified and risen Savior. This will also enable us to live more happily with our differences in the Body of Christ, to cherish our unity in his love, and make him known together (more effectively!).