

**ENCOUNTERING GOD – THE ROLE OF PRAYER  
IN CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM RELATIONS**

by

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## OPSOMMING

Die verhoudings tussen Christene en Moslems word dikwels vertroebel deur wantroue, misverstand en kultuurverskille. Hierdie studie behandel gebed as 'n moontlike brug van begrip tussen Moslems en Christene. Die motivering vir die studie lê egter dieper as die soeke na goeie wedersydse verhoudings. Dit vloei voort uit deelname aan die "God se sending" in die wêreld. Hoofstuk 2 gee 'n noukeurige beskrywing van Moslemgebed (salat), deur te kyk na die oproep tot gebed, voorneme, wassing, gebedshoudings, asook die plek en rigting van gebed. Hoofstuk 3 bevat 'n Christelike interpretasie van Moslemgebed. Dit bestudeer die aanroep ("In die naam van God"), die Moslem-geloofsbelydenis en salat as ritueel. Hoofstuk 4 tref 'n vergelyking tussen die eerste Soerah (Al-Fatihah) en die "Onse Vader". Beide verskille en ooreenkomste word aangetoon. Hoofstuk 5 trek dan 'n paar missiologiese konklusies, met die klem op gebedshoudings en die verhouding tussen dialoog en getuienis.

## SUMMARY

Relations between Christians and Muslims have often been strained due to mistrust, misunderstanding and cultural differences. This study focuses on prayer as a possible bridge to mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians. However, the motivation for this study goes deeper than a search for good neighbourliness. It stems from participating in the "mission of God" in society. Chapter 2 gives a detailed description of Muslim prayer (salat), looking at the call to prayer, intention, ablution, prayer postures, the place and the direction of salat. Chapter 3 contains a Christian interpretation of Muslim prayer. It examines the invocation ("In the name of God"), the Islamic Creed, and salat as ritual. Chapter 4 draws a comparison between the opening Surah (Al-Fatihah) and the Lord's Prayer. Both the common and distinguishing features are highlighted. Chapter 5 draws some missiological implications, focusing on prayer postures and the relationship between dialogue and witness.

**Key Terms:** Prayer; Ritual; Christian-Muslim relations; Interreligious dialogue; The Lord's Prayer; Salat; Al-Fatihah; Witness; Prayer postures.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Kwazulu-Natal we live in a pluralistic society. We rub shoulders with people of other faiths, particularly Muslims, whose relations with Christians have been strained over the centuries. In this context we as Christians are called to fulfil the "Mission of God" and seek ways of improving this relationship. Hence this study is made. But first there is a need to see the overall picture in terms of the following:

#### 1.1 SIGNIFICANCE

The birth and spread of Islam as a major religious movement and a way of life presents both a marvel and a challenge to the Christian church. As Anderson (1990:3) observed:

The influence of Islam stretches from the Atlantic to the Philippines, from the Caucasus to Cape Town. Muslim immigrants have also settled in Europe and North America. Numbering some 900 m people, Muslims now represent more than one in every six human beings drawn from races as diverse as the European from the Hausa-Fulani, the Aryan Indian from the Philippine tribesmen.

Consider also the fact that

its members are tightly united by a belief in one God and a common faith which carries with it a fraternity and a religious enthusiasm in its adherents without parallel ... (in Vander Werff 1977:209).

Furthermore, Muslims are a people bound together by a faith and social system which insulates itself by the privileges it offers, the penalties it can impose, and the easiness of the spiritual demands it makes. This is the Islam which faces the church of Jesus Christ in this twentieth century.

In saying this we are not suggesting that Muslims should be looked upon as enemies, although the truth of the matter is that

often the "church has engaged in negative argumentation, condemnation and confrontation toward Muslims" (Marantika 1989:214). Muslims too have looked at Christians negatively. As Kimball (1991:8) says, "Muslim-Christian relations have been characterized by mistrust, misunderstanding and mutual antipathy".

To add to this, obstacles still exist and these must be removed if we are ever going to see any improvement in the relationship. These include a long history of enmity, biased and inaccurate information and fundamental theological differences. But our concern does not arise just from the thought of being good neighbours in a global village that makes it almost impossible to ignore one another.

Our concern is rooted in the "Missio Dei" i.e. the Mission of God, which can be described thus:

The Church's mission is its participation in and co-operation with what God is graciously doing redemptively here on the earth. It is to be a sign of the presence of the Kingdom in word and deed" (in Dayton *et al.* 1980:58).

From that missionary obligation, then, we have the motivation to do everything we can to improve Muslim-Christian relations. There are many ways of doing this, but in this study we explore the possibility of using prayer as a bridge of understanding, since it is a central practice among the adherents of both religions.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

Several objectives will undergird this study. These include the following:

1.2.1 To attempt a detailed study of Muslim prayer, known as salat. Such a study will give us insights into one aspect of Muslim spirituality, the premium they place on salat and the reasons for this. What is involved in salat will also become

evident.

1.2.2 To sample various Christian interpretations of *salat*, which will enable us to highlight both strengths and weaknesses of Muslim prayer. At the same time the strengths and weaknesses of Christian prayer will be evident as well. Thus *salat* will serve as a mirror to Christian prayer.

1.2.3 To compare an important component of *salat*, namely *Al-Fatihah*, with the Lord's Prayer. This will highlight the common needs of the two religious groups under consideration. It will also bring out some of the Christian distinctives.

1.2.4 To probe the possibility and show the importance of dialogue for Christian-Muslim relations in general and for prayer in particular.

1.2.5 To broach the question of the adaptation of Muslim prayer forms to encourage new believers from Muslim backgrounds and to attract others by showing that they need not abandon acceptable cultural forms.

1.2.6 To create a platform for authentic Christian witness.

### 1.3 LIMITATIONS

This is an exploratory study of the role of prayer in Christian-Muslim relations. It does not emerge from personal experience, but the insights gleaned from others have been used to show that prayer is an important issue for Muslim-Christian interaction and that the possibility exists for fruitful dialogue in this area.

Many issues relating to prayer have not been given the full treatment they deserve, primarily due to the length limitations of a mini-dissertation such as this. Further reflection and study is therefore necessary.



#### 1.4 METHOD

This is a literature study, in which a number of prayer manuals together with writings by both contemporary and classical writers were consulted. Thus no interviews were carried out. In so doing, therefore, the study is characterized by description, analysis, and interpretation. In the end some practical suggestions are also made, particularly in the area of dialogue and the adaptation of prayer forms.

In this light the study is divided into three main chapters. The first gives a detailed description of Muslim prayer, with specific reference to salat (the five compulsory daily prayers) as presented by Muslim scholars. The second chapter deals with the various interpretations of salat by Christian scholars. The third chapter provides a comparative study of Al-Fatihah and the Lord's Prayer. The conclusion summarizes some of the salient points discovered in the study and draws several missiological implications, with reference to dialogue and witness, prayer forms, and encountering God. It also indicates issues for further study and reflection.

## CHAPTER 2

**ESTABLISHING SALAT**

Prayer is one of the most important ways of establishing personal communion with God. For the devotees for whom the personal apprehension of the holy is the essence of religion, prayer may be the definitive expression of all religious life (Streng 1976:78).

Islam, in particular, underscores the truth of the above statement, for the essence of Islam is the consciousness of and submission to God and the most direct means of developing these activities is through prayer. Prayer in Islam, however, finds expression in many ways, the most important being salat, the five daily prescribed prayers:

The word salat is used for attending to something or paying attention to someone. From this it came to be used for ruku, the glorification, exaltation, supplication, entreating or invocation in prayer (Rahman, A. 1979:1).

Salat also carries the idea of "burning", since it comes from the Arabic word "sala" (Karim s.a.:146). Salat therefore is able to "burn away" the evil tendencies in human beings (cf. Surah 29:45).

Salat, however, must not be viewed in isolation; rather it should be seen as an integral part of the obligation of ibadah, i.e. a worshipper turning towards God in intimate communion, reverence and spirit of devotion and humble submission (al-Zarqa 1980:109). For that reason ibadah is generally translated "worship", even though scholars like Fazlur Rahman (1979:32) prefer to speak of "service to God" without necessarily negating the idea of "worship". Moreover, in Islam:

Worship in the ritual sense stands at the centre of this system with no dichotomy between the "sacred" and the "secular" - every human action is seen as ibadat,

the worshipful service of slaves to their master (Kritzinger 1980:100).

In that light Kateregga (1980:63) affirms that salat is the fundamental and most important obligation of ibadah.

Against the background of this introduction to the subject of Muslim prayer, particularly salat, attention will be given to several specific issues and features such as: the Importance of Salat, the Call to Salat, the Intention before Salat, the Ablution in preparation of Salat, the Postures of Salat, the Place of Salat and the Direction of Salat.

## 2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF SALAT

Muslims are required to observe salat both by precept and example; the precept of the Qur'an, their Holy Book, and the example of Muhammad, their Holy Prophet. We should, however, bear in mind that prayer is legislated in Islam, i.e. it is a sacred duty that is enjoined upon Muslims as part of Shari'ah<sup>1</sup> (Islamic law), of which the Qur'an and Sunnah<sup>2</sup> are two basic sources. Hence salat is considered to be one of the five pillars of Islamic practice.

### 2.1.1 Qur'anic Injunction

Prayer is not only mentioned 85 times in the Qur'an (Karim s.a.:142) but is also emphasized by the use of several words. For instance, Surah 7:206 enjoins a worshipper to "Remember your Lord in your soul with humility and reverence and without ostentation. Do so at morn and at eventide and do not be negligent". A close examination of this verse reveals a two-fold exhortation. First of all, there is the call to "remember" God. This call to

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<sup>1</sup> The four basic sources of the Shari'ah are: Qur'an, the Sunnah of Muhammad, Ijma (consensus) and Qiyas (analogical reasoning). Cf. Noss (1980:519).

<sup>2</sup> A reference to the behaviour or practice of Muhammad in Medina or to the content of a hadith. Cf. Noss (1980:519).

"remember" God is designed to create a sense of God, the practice of religious awareness whereby the worshipper is reminded of the ways and claims of God (Cragg 1975:60). It is, moreover, a response to the will and mercy of God.

Closely related to the word "remember" is the word "recollect", translated from the Arabic verb dhakara. The Qur'anic use of the word, is

sometimes like the Hebrew "making mention of the Name of the Lord" (Surah 87:15). It is also associated with salat (Surah 33:41; 4:142). The word has also come to stand for recitations of certain fixed phrases (usually based on the Name or Names of God) in a given order (Padwick 1961:14).

There is some question, though, whether the verb "recollect" occurs in Surah 7:206. Yusuf Ali's translation of the phrase "remember your Lord ..." to that of "bring thy Lord to remembrance..." is suggestive that the idea of recollection is implicit and not explicit. Padwick (1961:14) offers the following explanation of the word dhikr itself to further clarify the issue:

We have dhikr, a very rich word, combining ideas of recollection ... of making mention of invocation and of worship.

The Qur'an, in Surah 2:153 also says, "Remember Me, and I will remember You: be thankful toward Me and do not belie Me". The call here, is for "thankfulness" toward God. In that light, the aforementioned verse draws attention to the antithesis between thankfulness or gratitude and atheism, i.e. between shukr and kufr:

The latter is a very familiar term having to do with the denial of God. But it is not only contrasted with belief here. Instead it is opposed to thankfulness, which is not necessarily a denial of God but an act of ignoring God as if He were dead or gone (Cragg 1975:7).

In respect to thankfulness or gratitude, Surah 54:35 is understood as follows by A. Rahman (1979:116):

If God's people are grateful and appreciate His favours and make right use of them and do not rebel against His commandments, but surrender and submit to Him to show their gratitude to Him, He will increase His favours to them.

Thus there is reward for those who are engaged in salat. The Qur'an also emphasizes prayer because "it prevents from evil" and helps man to conquer difficulties, especially when combined with "patience" (Rahman F. 1979:36). As Surah 22:130 records: "Therefore be patient with what they say and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord ..." Ali (1946:818) explains,

all good men must be patient with what seems to be evil around them ... what they are told is that they must not be impatient: they must pray to God and commune with Him, so that their patience and faith may be strengthened, and they may be able the better to grapple with evil.

Closely related to this, the Qur'an urges the seeking of Divine help through steadfastness and salat (Surah 2:154). In that light mercy is promised to those who keep up prayer in response to the call of God's Messenger (Surah 24:56).

There is a warning also to those who have the tendency to be lazy or sluggish when it comes to prayer. Hence laziness and sluggishness is seen as a sign of hypocrisy (Surah 4:142) and abstention from it a sign of disbelief (Surah 107:4,5).

### 2.1.2 The Example of the Prophet

These verses from the Qur'an, however, must suffice as we now turn our attention to the example and sayings of the Prophet.

A. Rahman (1979:57) helps to put its importance in perspective:

Prayer is an obligatory duty and mere performance of it will no doubt absolve a believer of his duty to God but if he wants to nourish and develop his self and soul he must perform it in the way it was performed by the messenger of God himself.

In the same vein, Khan (1962:107) exhorts other Muslims:

Following the example set by the Prophet, the habit of prayer should be very constant. The Prophet was eager to maintain communion with God through prayer.

Together with the example of the Prophet, his sayings are considered to be of equal importance. Several of the most popular are cited. Once Muhammad is reported to have remarked: "Salat is the pillar of Religion and whosoever abandons it, demolishes the very pillar of religion" (in al-Zarqa 1980:115). He is also reported to have said: "Should one's prayers be marked as perfect, all his other deeds will win the satisfaction of the Merciful Lord" (in Kateregga & Shenk 1980:63).

On another occasion, in the context of warning against the sin of prayerlessness, the Holy Prophet said: "he who gives up prayer intentionally is indeed an infidel" (Surah 34:15). It is also reported that the Messenger of Allah said: "Between the divine service and infidelity, there is the giving up of prayer" (Karim s.a.:164). It appears from this hadith that Muslims should always pray. Those who do not pray are outside the pale of Islam.

Worshippers are also reminded of the Prophet's observance of their prayers in view of his concern for proper performance. As we are told in one of the traditions, Anas (in Rahman A. 1979:57), reported God's messenger as saying: "perform the bowing and prostrating properly, for I swear by God that I can see you behind me".

The above references to the Qur'an and Prophet of Islam then, underline the importance of salat in Islam. We now move on to a consideration of the call to prayer, i.e. the muezzin's reminder

and invitation to prayer.

## 2.2 THE CALL TO *SALAT*

The call to prayer (*Azan*) is just as important as prayer itself. In fact, it is an important characteristic feature of Islam. As Nomani (1978:110) remarks,

The *Azan* is a distinguishing feature and practice of Islam and makes a most eloquent and comprehensive call to faith.

It has also been said that, "whether in the prayer-rite or in our little manuals it punctuates Muslim worship like a minute gun" (Padwick 1961:29).

Furthermore this exercise carries its own merit:

the *Muezzin* will have great rewards on the resurrection day so much so that all the hearers of the invitation will intercede for him on that day (Karim s.a.:188).

In looking at this Call to Prayer, three essential aspects are brought to our notice viz. The Manner, The Conditions and The Meaning.

### 2.2.1 The Manner

The Call to Prayer is made by word of mouth. No trumpets are sounded nor bells rung nor fire kindled to attract the believers to assemble in the mosque for prayers (Sabiq 1989:113). This call is usually given from the top of the Minaret or any higher place in the Mosque so that it can be heard by the people in the neighbourhood. It is essential that the *Azan* is listened to with respect and the words of the call should be repeated after the *Muezzin* - the one who makes the call. The *Muezzin* also faces the

Qiblah<sup>3</sup>, in a standing position.

The call itself should be made in Arabic in a resonant, melodious voice of which the English translation is as follows:

Allah is the Greatest (4x)  
 I bear witness that there is no God but Allah (2x)  
 I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (2x)  
 Come to prayer (2x)  
 Come to success (2x)  
 Allah is the Greatest (2x)  
 There is no God but Allah.

### 2.2.2 The Conditions

There are specific conditions as to who is qualified to make the Call and how it should be made. For instance, it is important that the *Muezzin* should be a clean person. By this is meant that the one giving the *Azan* should be ceremonially or ritually clean just as it is required of a worshipper. As the prophet is reported to have said, "purification is the key to prayer" (in Doi 1992:97). Cragg (1964:13) emphasizes this point as well when he says

among the things which disqualify the acts of devotion are ill-discipline, unseemliness, chatting and laughter ... or unnecessary coughing and neglect of niceties of the ritual, as well as ritual impurity.

This includes that the *Muezzin* be not under the influence of alcohol. Other conditions include that the person must be a responsible male adult with a complete knowledge of the times of prayer. Furthermore he must enjoy good health. He must also have a clear and melodious voice. The importance of the above conditions should not be undervalued as

People rely on him for the *Azan* and so he should discharge the duty with the fullest sense of

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<sup>3</sup> The direction towards which Muslims turn their faces during prayer, although S.2:115 states, "Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah". Cf. Karim (s.a.:209).



responsibility by giving the *Azan* at the right time regardless of his own convenience (Nomani 1978:108).

### 2.2.3 The Meaning

The Qur'anic basis for the proclaiming of God's greatness at the beginning and the end of the *Azan*, is Surah 17:111, in which is the command "And proclaim His greatness by magnifying". Its importance lies not only in the invitation it gives but also in what it affirms. It is in itself an epitome of the teachings of Islam (Khan 1962:102). Herein is a witness to God's greatness and as such

The Call to Prayer is a shout of defiance, a word of power, against the dethroned gods believed to be living demonic forces ... (Padwick 1961:30).

But, more than that, it is a summons to the preparation of the heart as we read in the Prayer Manual: "Cause us when we hear the Call to Prayer to turn ourselves exclusively to Thy Mercy" (Padwick 1961:30). As Khan (1962:103) also explains:

Whatever pursuit or occupation a person may be engaged in when he hears "Allah is Great", which also means Allah is above all, the Call comes to him as a reminder that he must immediately transfer his attention from the business at hand to the worship of God ...

After the *Azan* is made, the worshippers gather at the place of prayer and when they are assembled, a second Call known as *Iqamah* (summons), is recited by one of the congregants. This is identical to the *Azan*, except that it is recited faster and not as loudly. In addition, the following sentence is added between the fifth and the sixth lines: "Prayer has begun, prayer has begun" (Doi 1992:114).

## 2.3 THE INTENTION (*NIYYAH* OR *NIYAT*)

True prayer for Muslims cannot be merely perfunctory or

mechanical. Just as the other pillars of faith are prefaced by the "Intention", prayer is no exception. Since the "Intention" is actually a statement that declares one's desire to pray and the purpose for which one prays, the worshipper must be clear and unambiguous in his or her declaration. For without the confessed intention, the form of prayer - though otherwise perfect and complete - would not be valid (Cragg 1959:151).

Qureshi (1984:228) is equally forthright in saying: "Mere habit without *Niyat*, without concentration of intent, invalidates all acts". For that matter all jurist and Imams are of the opinion that *Niyat* is a condition precedent to the validity of an action and an action without *Niyat* is void; particularly so with regard to the fundamentals such as Prayer, Fasting, Pilgrimage and Zakat<sup>4</sup> (Karim s.a.:82).

The Prophet of Islam also underlined the significance of "intention" when he said "Every action is based upon intention, for everyone is what he intended" (Sabiq 1989:119). Children are even taught the importance of the intention at a very early age. For instance,

if intending to make the ablution, one would say: "I make the intention of legal purification" or the making of two *rakats*: "I make my intention to perform the two prostrations of the prescribed prayer-rite of the morning hour" (in Padwick 1961:3).

The prayer manuals also record that "Deeds are only of value through intention behind them" or "His rightness of intention makes a man's action right" (Padwick 1961:51). There is some question, though, whether it is only a matter of verbalizing the "intention". Ibn al-Qayyim (1989:119) is of the opinion that

The intention is the aim and purpose of something. It is a condition of the heart and it does not come from

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<sup>4</sup> These are legal alms which are not only distinguished from *sadaqa* or free-will offerings but also linked to *salat*. Cf. Anderson (1985:120).

the tongue.

Al-Ghazali, the well-known Sufi<sup>5</sup> scholar, echoes the same sentiment by emphasizing the necessity of holding the "intention" in mind and spirit for the prayer-rite to be spiritually valid. He states:

Recollectedness of heart is the spirit of set prayers. The very least that will keep that spirit just gaspingly alive is that the heart shall be present at the moment of takbir. Less than that is fatal (in Padwick 1961:50).

The prayer manuals in fact stress the importance of "intention" both in terms of mental concentration and spiritual discipline. This meant that one method of training in concentration was to try to make the intellectual act of "intention" so inclusive that nothing in the prayer-rite should be excluded from it (Padwick 1961:51). As far as the spiritual discipline is concerned, it calls for a harmony between the outward and the inward action and the sincerity of intention. Added to this is the idea of searching discipline that calls for a spiritual purging from all other desires than the desire for God. Hence the worshipper prays, "Unite us to the 'intention' and with it to sincerity and singleness of heart" (Padwick 1961:53). Related to this is the matter of motives. After all,

it is one of the fundamental principles of law in all ages and climes that motives and intentions are the criterions by which actions of men are judged (Karim s.a.:81).

In fact, for Muslims the most important consideration should be that of seeking the pleasure of Allah (Surah 6:52; 9:72), which carries with it rewards both for this life and the next (Surah 42:20). The Holy Prophet himself

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<sup>5</sup> Sufi means a "person clad in wool". The emphasis is placed on a programme of spiritual ascent under the guidance of a master ("sheikh" or "pir"). Cf. Parshall (1980).

promised double rewards for alms to a relative, as there are motives of doing benefit to a poor man as well as keeping amity with a relation (Karim s.a.:83).

Good "intentions" also have a bearing on the resurrection of the dead:

Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: People will be raised up according to their intentions (in Karim s.a.:87)

All in all, the rewards increase according to the number of motives in an action, provided all the motives bear the stamp of seeking the pleasure of Allah.

#### 2.4 THE ABLUTION (WUDU)

Before Muslims present themselves before their Lord to offer prayers, they must prepare themselves both physically and morally. As the Qur'an states: "Truly Allah loves those who turn to Him and those who care for cleanliness" (Surah 2:222). A. Rahman (1979:43) goes on to explain:

Ablution before prayer is a constant training in cleanliness and purification. A believer first removes physical impurities from his body by ablution and prepares himself psychologically to meet His Lord ...

A tradition of the Prophet sums up the importance of purification, as it is reported that He used to say: "O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from impure deeds and evil habits" (Doi 1992:98). He is also reported to have said: "Cleanliness is half of faith. The key to paradise is prayer and the key to prayer is cleanliness" (Karim s.a.:234).

In that light the exposed parts of the body are washed in the following manner and sequence as described in the Muslim Student Association Handbook (1982:20):

1. The hands are washed three times.

2. The mouth is rinsed three times.
3. The nostrils are cleansed three times by sniffing in and blowing out water from one cupped hand.
4. The face is washed with both hands three times.
5. Arms up to the elbow are washed three times, with the right arm first.
6. The top of the head is washed with wet hands, ears with the thumb and the forefinger and the neck with the back of the wet hand once.
7. The feet up to the ankles are then washed three times, beginning with the right foot.

But what is the worshipper to do, should the circumstances not be conducive to water ablution? For instance,

when water is not easily obtainable as in the dry conditions of Arabia or when a person is ill or on a journey and has no full control over his supplies (Ali 1946:194).

Or:

If water is too cold and will harm the user physically; when one fears for life, family and wealth due to danger by human or beast in the process of finding water and if the obtaining of water will rob the worshipper of the time period required for prayer (Sabiq 1989:65).

In these circumstances it is recommended that "washing" be carried out with dry sand or clean earth (tayammum) in the following way:

You strike your hands lightly on a clean wall or on clean earth or sand and wipe your face with them once. Then you again strike your hands on the clean surface and wipe each arm up to the elbow once, right arm first (MSA 1982:20).

It is apparently not necessary, however, to make ablution for every prayer, unless during the interval of two prayers an individual has visited the toilet or vomited or even slept (MSA 1982:21).

In addition to *Wudu* or *tayammum*, a full bath (*Ghusl*) is prescribed under special conditions, e.g. after sexual intercourse, when the menstrual period is complete, or at the end of a discharge following childbirth (MSA 1982:22). However, this does not negate the necessity of a full bath for the *Jum'a* prayers (i.e. Friday congregational prayer).

## 2.5 POSTURES OF SALAT

Before discussing the details of the actual procedure, which involves certain prayer movements and recitations, several general facts have to be noted.

### 2.5.1 General Facts

Each of the five daily prayers (which will be listed below) consist of two, three or four units, which are commonly known as *rak`ah* (plural *raka`at*).

The five prayers with their times of occurrence and number of units include: (a) *Fajr* (dawn prayer), to be observed some time between dawn and sunrise, consists of two units, both of which are said aloud; (b) *Dhur* (early afternoon) prayer, to be observed from just after noon until mid-afternoon, consists of four units, that are said silently; (c) *'Asr* (late afternoon) prayer, occurs some time between mid-afternoon and sunset, with four units that are said silently; (d) *Maghrib* (evening prayer) which is observed after sunset and before the light fades, consists of three units, with the first two said aloud and the third silently; (e) *'Isha* (night prayer) is held at least one and a half hours after sunset and consists of four units, with the first two being said aloud but the last two silently.

The four basic body positions or movements are: (a) Standing (*iqamah*), with the right hand clasped lightly above the left, wrist over wrist and held a little above the waist. (b) Bowing (*ruku*), with hands placed just above the knees. (c) Prostrating

(sujud), with the forehead and tip of the nose touching the floor, hands (with fingers spread out slightly) resting on the floor, and elbows slightly raised. (d) Sitting (julus), with legs folded under the body.

### 2.5.2 Steps in Procedure

Islam places great emphasis on the proper performance of prayer, down to the minutest detail, in view of the fact that there is a close relationship between the various postures in prayer and the acquisition of divine favours (Rahman A. 1979:59). Also, it is reported that God's Messenger said: "Perform the bowing and prostrating properly for I swear by God that I can see you behind me" (Rahman A. 1979:59).

At this point it should also be noted that there are minor variations of such actions as the raising of or the spreading of the fingers at different times during the prayer ritual, for instance. These differences are based on the interpretations and preferences of the different Law Schools<sup>6</sup> in Islam and pose no problem as such to Muslims on the whole, as Maududi (1974:145) explains:

The differences that appear in the four schools are but the natural outcome of the fact that truth is many-sided ... What gives these various schools the authenticity that is associated with them is the integrity of their respective founders and the authenticity of the schools they founded. That's why all Muslims regard all the four schools as correct and true.

Against this background attention is now given to the actual procedure, with particular focus on the various postures adopted and recitations made in the different units of the five daily prayers. We go to the extent of laying out the steps in much

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<sup>6</sup> The conflict between Law and theology led to the founding of the four orthodox schools, viz. Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. Cf. Anderson (1985:148).

detail to show the meticulousness and the seriousness with which Salat is observed. This description will also show how involved Muslim prayer is and that strict observance is absolutely essential. To the outsider this may be unnecessary and tedious. Muslims would, however, respond by saying that they are just following the dictates of Allah, since

the overwhelming majority of Muslims do not feel they have the prerogative to question these commands, as they are confident all prayer rituals are Allah-ordained (Parshall 1994:66).

We are now ready to move on to the steps in the procedure related to Salat.

#### 2.5.2.1 First Unit (rak'ah) of Fajr Prayer

There are seven steps to be followed: (i) The first step is to ascertain the Qiblah, that is the direction facing the Ka'aba<sup>7</sup> which is situated in Mecca. Then, facing Qiblah, the worshipper stands upright on the prayer mat and silently declares the "intention" to pray two (three or four) raka'at of the obligatory Fajr (or Dhur, Asr, as the case may be) prayer, in honour of God. (ii) The second step involves the raising of the hands to the ears, saying loudly, "God is Most Great": Allahu akbar (this is called the takbir). It is preferred, though, that one extends the fingers while raising the hands (Sabiq 1989:130). Herein we have a statement of "glorification and praise of the Lord, filling the heart of believers with respect and humility" (Rahman A. 1979:30). Furthermore,

this constant reminder of the Real Sovereign and His great power shatters the claims and pretensions of the worldly powers, as well as of human desires, repudiating the power and authority of everyone except God (Rahman A. 1979:30).

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<sup>7</sup> A Meccan shrine containing a black meteorite – the centre of Hajj proceedings and all Islamic activities and prayers. Cf. Anderson (1985:94).



The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said, with reference to the takbir: "The key to prayer is purity. What puts one into its inviolable state is the Takbir" (Sabiq 1989:119). (iii) The third step requires the placing of the hands, particularly the wrists, one over the other, while silently reciting the words:

Praise be to Thee, O God and Thine is the praise, and blessed is Thy Name and exalted is Thy Majesty and there is none worthy of Worship except Thee. I take refuge in God from Satan the rejected.

The word "Praise" is understood as "thankful praise" which carries for the Muslim worshipper a sense of God's recognition (Padwick 1961:77). Cragg (1964:13) says in this connection:

The Takbirs (i.e. saying Allahu akbar) and the Subhans ("Praise to my Lord Most High) further proclaim that the worshipper is first and foremost acknowledging his Lord in tribute of reverence ...

The last line of the recitation is based on the Qur'anic injunction found in Surah 16:98, "when thou recitest the Qur'an take refuge from Satan, the accursed (rejected)". The verb 'adha, translated "take refuge",

appears to have the root meaning of clinging, as of flesh to bones and hence expresses clinging to someone for refuge from some person or some cause of fear (Padwick 1961:83).

More about refuge-taking will be dealt with when discussing Al-Fatihah in chapter 4. Remaining in this standing position, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, (known as Al-Fatihah) is recited, beginning with the Basmallah i.e. the act of saying ... "In the Name of God, the Most Merciful Lord of Mercy". Kateregga (1980:5) observes:

The reminder here is that God is Merciful in character and that His mercy is extended to all mankind; His love is extended to those who submit to His will.

The Qur'an says: "Say, (O Mohammed to mankind) If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is forgiving, Merciful (Surah 3:31).

Furthermore, this is recited aloud in the first two raka'at of Fajr, Maghrib and 'Isha prayer and silently in the first two raka'at of Dhur and 'Asr prayer. In addition, Al-Fatihah is recited silently in the remaining raka'at of any prayer.

With regard to its importance,

Al-Fatihah serves as a comprehensive prelude to the Holy Writ, the Qur'an. Although it is a short surah, it encompasses almost all the Islamic belief of the unity of the God-head. It praises God and at the same time serves as a prayer to God in simple but the most meaningful words (Doi 1990:56).

A useful summary of its message, however, is given by Khan (1962:105):

The worshipper finds himself in the presence of his Maker and seeks to impress his mind and soul with a certain concept of the Majesty of God by reminding himself of His four principal attributes. He then gives expression to the conviction, that He who possesses these attributes in perfection is alone worthy of worship and is the only Being from whom help may be sought ... and makes his supplication that in all his affairs he may be guided, so that he may be included among those upon whom God's grace descends

...

While in the same standing posture any other short Surah from the Qur'an is then recited. (iv) The fourth step brings the worshipper to a bowing position with his hands placed just above his knees and the saying of the words "God is Most Great" aloud. This is followed by silently repeating the words "Glory be to My Lord, the Almighty", at least three times. (v) The fifth step brings the worshipper to a standing position again for a moment, during which time the words "God hears those who call upon Him", are uttered loudly, followed by the words "Our Lord, Praise be to Thee", silently. The words "God hears those who call upon Him"

signifies the acceptance of one's allegiance as well as one's prayer. It also indicates that God is now asking His servant to ask Him whatever he likes (Rahman A. 1979:34). (vi) The sixth step involves that the worshipper says aloud "God is Most Great", while moving into a position of prostration. This is followed by a silent utterance of the words "Glory be to My Lord, the Most High" three times. (vii) The seventh step, which completes one unit of prayer, is when the worshipper engages in a sitting position for a few moments of rest. At the same time saying aloud the words "God is Most Great". Then the words "God is Most Great" is repeated aloud again and the worshipper prostrates. While in that position, "Glory be to My Lord, the Most High" is silently repeated again three times.

The manner of prostration just described, however, has led to a number of different opinions among Islamic Law schools. For instance, most scholars prefer the placing of the knees on the floor before the hands while Malik Ibn Anas (the founder of the Maliki school), among others, prefers to place the hands down first and then the knees (Sabiq 1989:151). As far as the significance of this is concerned, A. Rahman (1979:35) explains:

This gradual bowing and leaning down in prostration completely destroys the pride and vanity of man and brings him within the spiritual climate of reverence and humility.

#### 2.5.2.2 Second Unit (Rak'ah)

The second unit of prayer is exactly like the first, with the exception that after the second prostration, the sitting position is assumed and the following declaration uttered:

All service, all worship and all sanctity are for God. Peace be upon You, O' Prophet, and God's Mercy and blessings. Peace be upon us and upon those who practice righteousness. I bear witness that there is no deity but God and I bear witness that Mohammed is His servant and messenger.

Before analyzing the words of this declaration, it would do us well to note an example with regard to the differences in the

postures of prayer according to the various law schools, as alluded to in the introduction to this section.

According to the Shafiyyah, one points with the finger only once when saying "except Allah" whereas the Hanifiyyah raise the finger in the denial part of the statement "There is no god" and puts it down during the confirmation part "except Allah" (Sabiq 1989:158).

There are also differences with regard to the number of times the Salaam (the final peace-greeting) is to be said. Some say it is obligatory to say one Salaam but preferable to say two. Ash-Shafi and most of the early and later scholars are of the opinion that it is Sunnah (in keeping with the rule of conduct) to say two Salaams, while Malik and others strongly argue that only one Salaam is Sunnah (Sabiq 1989:126).

As far as the meaning of the declaration (i.e. the one referred to in the second rak'ah) is concerned, one needs to also notice that there are essentially two parts to it. The first part, as mentioned already, is the Salaam where Allah's blessings are invoked on the Prophet. The necessity for this finds its basis in Surah 33:36, which says "Verily God and His Angels call down blessings on the Prophet. O ye who have believe, call down blessings on him and greet him with peace"<sup>8</sup>. As to its meaning, several explanations are offered:

a. God Most High informed His worshippers of the rank which His Prophet holds with Him in the heavenly hosts, by praising Him in the presence of the angels of access, and by the salat of the angels for Him. Then he commanded salat and a greeting of peace from the people of the world below so that the people of both worlds above and below might unite in His praise (as-Suyuti, in Padwick 1961:156).

b. Because the Prophet is pure without blemish or failings, while we have both blemishes and failings ... only a pure God can be asked to call blessings

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<sup>8</sup> This is why Muslims add "salla llahu alaihi wa sallam" (often abbreviated S.A.W.) after the name of Muhammad (or else P.B.U.H. = Peace be upon him).

upon a pure Prophet (al-Makki, in Padwick 1961:157).

Whatever else may be said, this much is certain: God is called upon to magnify His servant (Padwick 1961:156).

The second part of the declaration is the "witness-bearing" part which the worshipper sees "as a duty to God and the world, of setting His seal to the essential beliefs of his religion" (Padwick 1961:126). This two-fold witness acknowledges

that there is only one supreme Lord of the universe - who is omnipotent, omnipresent and the sustainer of the world and mankind (basic to the concept of *Tawhid* or unity of God) and affirms the prophethood of Muhammad in that we recognize that he was the last Prophet to whom and through whom God has given His message and guidance and who is the final model for all humankind (Ahmad 1980:31).

In addition to the declaration in a two unit prayer, the Ibraheemi prayer is offered, which consists of the following words:

O God, exalt Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, As thou exalted Abraham and the family of Abraham; And bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, As thou has blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham; Thou art the Praised, the Glorious.

Two or three other lines are often added to this, though this is not done as a rule. These include: "Show mercy ... as Thou didst show mercy. Be compassionate ... as Thou was't compassionate. Greet with peace ... as Thou did'st greet with peace" (Padwick 1961:167). The above prayer, however, raises the question as to why only these two prophets, viz. Abraham and Muhammad, are mentioned. One explanation given is as follows

because Abraham was the announcer of the sacred Law, when God Most High said to him, "And proclaim among men the pilgrimage, they will come to thee on foot and on every clean-run camel" (Surah 22:27), while Mohammed was the announcer of the whole practice of religion, according to the word of God Most High,

"Our Lord, we have heard a caller calling to faith"  
(Surah 34:192) (as-Suyuti, in Padwick 1961:172).

When the Ibraheemi prayer is completed, the worshipper turns the face first to the right and then to the left and says each time, "Peace be upon You and God's blessings".

#### 2.5.2.3 Three Units of Maghrib Prayer

For three units of the Maghrib prayer, beginning with what has already been described, Al-Fatihah and other short prayers from the Qur'an follow in a loud manner. Then the declaration is made. This completes two units.

For the third unit, the worshipper stands and says loudly, "God is Most Great" and silently recites Al-Fatihah. Then the words that accompany the motions of bowing and prostrating are repeated silently, which is no different to the first two units. After the second prostration, however, the declaration is said, to be followed by the Ibraheemi prayer and the Dua-e-Ma-Soora silently. The benediction "Peace be upon You and God's blessings" on each side is then given loudly.

#### 2.5.2.4 Four Units of Dhur, 'Asr and 'Isha Prayers

These are identical, except that the first two units of Dhur and 'Asr are said silently while the first two units of 'Isha are said aloud and the last two units of the four-unit prayers are always said silently.

For these prayers, the first two units are said as described, followed by the third and fourth units, which are identical to the first two except that they are silent. In the fourth unit, the sitting position is assumed after the second prostration and the declaration is uttered silently. Then the Ibraheemi prayer, Dua-e-Ma-Soora and the benediction follow.

## 2.6 THE PLACE OF SALAT

The mosque<sup>9</sup> is a public place where prayer is offered but it is by no means the only place of prayer. The English word "mosque" is apparently a corrupt form of the Arabic Masjid, meaning a place of prostration (Parshall 1989:40). For that reason it is required that at least the noon prayer on Friday is to be held as far as possible in the place of corporate prayer. Its importance is shown by Parshall (1989:40), who says: "It is that unique place where the devout gather and worship within the visible Ummah of Islam". Even a hadith states "The prayer in congregation is twenty times superior to prayer offered by a person alone" (Parshall 1989:68). Unfortunately the aforementioned sentiment condemns some women to one twentieth the piety of men, even though "In the prophet's time women attended public prayers in the Mosque" (Guillaume 1954:68). But, according to one hadith, women are allowed to join the congregation; at the same time prayer for them in the house is better than in the congregation (Karim s.a.:341).

In general terms, however, Islam still regards every place - whether it is one's dwelling, the back of an animal, the board of a vessel on the surface of the sea, or a mosque specifically built for worship - as pure enough for the performance of worship (Ahmad 1980:111). Similarly, the holy Prophet is reported to have said "The whole of the earth has been rendered for me a mosque pure and clean" (Ahmad 1980:111). If that is the case, then the prayer mat becomes the portable mosque and wherever worshippers choose to spread it they find their Qibla and worship God.

In fact, the Qur'an teaches that wherever people gather together in conversation, Allah is one among them (Surah 58:7) and that He is nearer to humans than their jugular vein (Surah 50:16). The Qur'an also speaks of the "face of Allah" (Surah 6:52), which

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<sup>9</sup> The mosque is not only a spiritual centre for Muslims, but also a political, educational, military and social centre. Cf. Karim (s.a.:209).

true believers seek and desire and which no one can escape (Surah 2:115). In other words, in whatever direction a person faces when praying, the "face of Allah" is said to be there.

The prayer mat plays another important role, i.e. it protects the worshipper from possible contamination and makes clean the immediate area of prostration. It is also accepted that,

since the place must be reasonably clean and it is desirable to provide some sort of covering at least for the spot where the forehead will touch the floor during prostration that a napkin, handkerchief, towel or sheet or a small rug be used (MSA 1982:22).

## 2.7 THE DIRECTION OF SALAT

The direction in which prayer is to be made makes a significant contribution to the whole question of unification in Muslim prayer. As Khan (1962:102) points out,

all worshippers participating in a service face towards the Ka'aba in Mecca, which ensures unity of direction throughout the world and spiritual concentration.

It also strengthens the sense of unity in a worldwide brotherhood. The importance of the Qibla must be seen, however, in terms of

the "massive" unity of all Islamic life in its orientation towards Mecca. For it is not only prayer which is directed towards Mecca: beds, graves and toilets, in fact the whole of daily life is oriented towards Mecca for a devout Muslim (Kritzinger 1980:101).

The question still remains though, "How does one determine the correct direction?", since millions of worshippers from across the globe engage in salat daily. Within the mosque setting it is not such a problem as the worshipper not only follows the Imam in the various postures and recitations but faces a semi-circular



recess called the mihrab, which is there to ensure that the correct direction is being adopted.

But what happens if a worshipper is unable to determine the direction of prayer, particularly outside the Mosque setting? In such a situation provision is made for the individual to find out from someone who does know. Should no one be available, however, every effort must be made by the individual according to the best of one's ability and then prayer is to be made. In that case the prayer will be accepted as valid, even if it is discovered later that the direction faced when in prayer was the wrong one (Sabiq 1989:115).

Further discussion on the matter of the Qiblah will follow in the next chapter. At this juncture it is only the significance of the Qiblah for the salat ritual that is noted.

The foregoing has been an attempt to analyze and describe Muslim prayer, particularly salat, from the perspective of Muslims themselves. In that respect attention was given to specific aspects such as: The Importance of Salat, The Call to Salat, The Direction of Salat, The Place of Salat, The Intention of Salat, The Ablution before Salat and The Postures and Recitations during Salat.

From this we can conclude that "Prayer is the main highway to making religion real ..." (Streng 1976:78) and

Prayer is the first, highest and most solemn phenomenon and manifestation of religion and is the absolutely necessary activity of religious life (Doi 1992:108).

Furthermore it was necessary to go into details to show all that is involved in Muslim prayer - in this case the five prescribed prayers. This exercise should lend itself to much understanding and appreciation from the side of Christians, even though Christians do not see the necessity for such detailed involvement. This introduces us to the subject matter of the next chapter, that will deal with the interpretations and understanding of Christians in respect to Salat.

CHAPTER 3  
INTERPRETING SALAT

Having described the dynamics and dimensions of Muslim salat from the standpoint of Muslims, attention is now directed to a discussion of various Christian responses and interpretations of Muslim prayer.

This is absolutely necessary, as Muslim salat could become a mirror for Christians to judge and evaluate whether their own prayers reflect a general biblical pattern and indeed whether they are offensive to Muslims or not. Furthermore it will help determine in what way or ways prayer can be used as a bridge not only to deepen Muslim-Christian understanding but also serve as an opportunity for an authentic Christian witness. Parshall (1983:127) himself sees this possibility:

It is my firm belief that prayer can be a bond - and a catalyst for witness - between sincere Muslims and followers of Christ. There is so much in the Islamic prayer ritual, both actual and symbolic that can be appreciated by Christians.

There is another reason for this approach, i.e. this exercise will help determine whether Christian converts with Islamic backgrounds can adapt Muslim prayer forms to their newfound faith, particularly in respect to salat.

With that in mind, we will give consideration to some of the most important aspects of salat such as the Invocation, the Islamic Creed and the role of rituals. We shall also endeavour to discuss Muslim prayer forms and their relevance to Muslim converts to Christianity. To the casual observer, however, there may be no connection between the aspects just mentioned. But upon closer examination it will become apparent that there is a connection. For the discussion will focus on those areas that are both common and uncommon features of prayer, so as not only to highlight the possibilities but also the difficulties and barriers to dialogue and witness that do exist. For that reason we began with a

description of Muslim prayer in the preceding chapter.

### 3.1 THE INVOCATION

Crucial to the understanding and appreciation of salat is the "invocation", a common statement Muslims are expected to recite before doing anything and one that constantly reminds them of the Mercy of God. It is expressed thus, "In the Name of God, the Merciful Lord of Mercy" or "Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim" and is usually called the "Bismillah" or, more commonly, the "Basmalah"<sup>10</sup> which conveys the meaning of "the act of saying 'Bismillah...'".

These words, however, are not only confined to ritual prayer. They introduce every chapter in the Qur'an, except the ninth. In fact, this is one of the most important "trade marks" of Muslim life, since Muslims hardly commence with any activity without uttering this saying. It is also found at the beginning of every letter or document written by a Muslim<sup>11</sup>. In light of this short introduction we first look at the significance of the phrase "In the Name of God" in relation to salat, the "Names of God" in terms of their role in Muslim prayer, and the phrase "In the name of Christ" in Christian prayer.

#### 3.1.1 "In the Name of God ..."

Notwithstanding the devotional recognition of God in the minutiae of daily life, designed to make one's Islam comprehensive and alert and to evoke the spirit of gratitude and humility, the question still remains, What does it really mean to pray "In the Name of God"? In the first place, it affirms the existence of

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<sup>10</sup> While the Jewish people honour the name of God by refusing to pronounce it, Muslims choose to honour it by constant use.

<sup>11</sup> The immense popularity of the number 786 among Muslims is also ascribed to this, since it represents the numerical value of the Arabic letters in the Basmalah.

God. As Cragg (1992:138) points out:

When Semitic faith prays "In the Name of God", they call upon God only because they believe they can legitimately "call" i.e. "name" him and by "name" denote him ... Invocation is in some sense "description", certainly "affirmation".

In the ancient world for that matter,

a name for God often stands as a "double" for God himself and is to be treated with the same awe or honor that his very being deserves. Thus to speak "in the Name of God", is a fearsome act, for as one deals with the Name, so one deals with the divine entity (Vander Werff 1989:184).

In other words,

the pray-er is responding to the fact of God. Worship is the recognition of worth. Tested by this criterion there is no doubt that Muslim salat is the expression of the Muslim sense of God (Cragg 1964:18).

In the second place, it is a call to submit to the highest authority on earth, the Lord of the Worlds (rabb-ul-'alamin). After all, "He is all present and all powerful. Every part of creation is viewed as subordinate to his transcendent, majestic dominion" (Vander Werff 1989:184). Kateregga (1980:6) makes a similar point:

Allah is the undisputed authority who alone is entitled to receive obedience ... He is the most supreme, so heads should bow to him in submission and adoration.

In that light, Muslim prayer

is in its specific ritual, the given undeviating, undeviated obligation. It's non-observance indicates the non-recognition of the faith of which it was the mandatory evidence (Cragg 1970:30).

In other words, failure to observe salat is a sign of unbelief. It is equally true that the central fact about the acts of Muslim

devotion in salat is that the believer is ceremonially expressing the meaning of his or her whole status before God, which is essentially an act in the Name of God, in the sense that it is according to his precepts and in homage to his Lordship (Cragg 1964:13).

In the third place, it carries with it the idea of accountability, in the sense that humankind is constantly to remember God for His goodness and mercy through the act of prayer. In this regard the Qur'an records the following exhortation: "And I will remember you: be thankful toward Me and do not belie Me" (Surah 2:153). From this we can gather that there is a tendency amongst us to forget God and therefore the reminder is both necessary and timely. In this context Parshall (1989:68) comments: "One of the greatest deterrents to true spirituality is God-forgetfulness." Hence, humankind has to be reminded of the

dignity of being accountable to God with an inclusive obligation which revelation guides, warns and forms and which is hallowed and betokened in a setting of devotional allegiance (Cragg 1959:12).

Parshall (1983:66) also reminds us of the practice of dhikr (another form of remembering God) among Muslims by explaining that

Dhikr is commonly practiced among Muslims of all schools of thought. However, excessive emotional frenzy would be repudiated by the orthodox. The aim of Dhikr is to block out all worldly distractions and become completely absorbed in thinking about God.

In particular, though, the majority of folk Muslims seek a mystical encounter with God and Dhikr provides that experience where the emotional repetition of the names of God lifts one to the heavens (Parshall 1983:119). Padwick (1961:14) elaborates:

This outward recitation is undertaken to induce a state of inward recollectedness, of spiritual

concentration on the One who is named ... services are planned with careful gradation of exercises, with the help of group suggestion, of rhythmical speech and breathing and of rhythmical movement, so that by a kind of self-hypnotism to banish any external sight or sound or thought.

In the fourth place, it is a means by which the blessing of God is invoked, as God may always be invoked by a name relevant to the need of the beseecher. After all, as Cragg (1964:85) reminds us, "the primary purpose of what we may call God's namability is that he may be invoked". We are not to lose sight of the other fact that the Qur'an itself affirms and exhorts: "Allah's are the fairest Names. Invoke Him by them" (Surah 7:180). Huffard (1989:168) concurs that the desire for blessing is prominent in the Qur'an and is a primary felt need in daily life, so much so that a blessing is conferred on a family when a son is born, when the ritual of circumcision is observed and when the "right" marriage is made.

In the fifth place, the names of God in particular provide the ground for God's accessibility, in contrast to that of a mediator, as for example in Christianity and Sufi Islam (where a pir is engaged). This is shown by Cragg (1964:86) when he says:

God's Names are the ground of his accessibility. Calling him Ya Razzag (O thou Provider) and calling upon him to provide are synonymous. The mention of the Name itself is the plea.

As one studies the Qur'an it is noticeable that it centres on God and his Names to the extent that His Holy Names are mentioned more than ten thousand times while the name Allah occurs at least two thousand five hundred times (Vander Werff 1989:184). More discussion on the significance of the Names of God will follow in paragraph 3.1.2., but at this point it is sufficient to note that, according to Muslim understanding, God is accessible through His Names.

### 3.1.2 The Name and the Names ...

Muslims are not only acquainted with the phrase "In the Name of God", but also with "the ninety-nine beautiful names of God", known as the Asma al-Husna. It is true that the significance of the Names lie in what they indicate, viz. God's transcendent majesty and unity (Kateregga 1980:3). But they also reflect other attributes of God such as the Giver (Wahhab), the One to be Praised (Hamid), the doer of Good (Barr) etc. (Parshall 1983:124).

The significance is also evident in the relationship between the two phrases, "The Name of God" and "The Names of God", whereby the "Name of God" encompasses the "Names of God" in such a remarkable way that it finds expression in and through them. As Cragg (1992:63) explains:

The formula Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim brings the diversity of the Names into the singularity of "the Name of God" possessed of the most loved of descriptives in the double sense of "mercy". It governs all the actions of Muslim piety and life, initiating occasions, enterprise, functions, habits, in the manifold situations of daily life. It involves divine favor, protection, enablement, direction and authority in all pursuits, great and small.

Also, Constance Padwick (in Cragg 1992:63) observes

the Basmalah bears analogy with the making of the sign of the Cross in Christian devotion. It is a kind of spiritual armament against evil, a fortifier of the spirit, an antidote to sickness, even a charm against lurking ill.

What this means, is that our knowledge of God is not only enhanced but also has living significance, particularly so by means of His Names. No wonder Cragg (1964:87) emphatically declares that

He is not a formula with which to conclude a debate,

nor an abstraction to grace a theory. He has names!  
His significance has to do with our experience.

The fact of the matter is that

it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the divine names bring the Godness of God into direct association with humanity. He is not defined still less experienced in aloofness and disassociation. On the contrary, we know him in being known of him. Revelation is relation; truth is experienced; theology is doxology (Cragg 1964:88).

Yet, according to the Islamic doctrine of Mukhalafa (contrast or difference) even the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names" of God cannot tell human beings anything positive about the divine nature:

The doctrine of mukhalafa means that terms taken from human meanings - and there are of course no others - were said to be used of God with a difference. They did not convey the human connotation but were used in those senses feasible of God (Cragg 1985:48)....

Classical Islamic theologians took refuge in formulae like the famous Bila kaif, bila tashbih and Al-Mukhalafah whereby God could be denoted in human terms "without asking how" and "without similarity", insisting always on the doctrine of "the difference" (Cragg 1964:88).

In other words, these phrases meant that the names were to be used without conceding that when they were used they meant, divinely, what they mean humanly. In this way the danger of shirk (the attribution of partners or associates to God in Islamic doctrine), was eluded.

But Anderson (1990:63) rightly raises an important question:

If we may not conclude that divine compassion and mercy are in some degree analogous, although far superior, to human compassion and mercy, then the "Beautiful Names" of God - including Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim - may, indeed, be beautiful sounds in a Muslim ear, but remain devoid of any intelligible content.



To which Muslims would give this typical response:

God is transcendent and once you talk about self-revelation you have hierophancy and immanence and then the transcendence of God is compromised. You may not have complete transcendence and self-revelation at the same time (al-Faruqi 1976:406).

One would, however, have no problem accepting their concern to protect God's transcendence, if only they do not limit God to the extent that He is not given the freedom to exercise His prerogative as the Sovereign Lord when and however He so desires. The point we are trying to make will become clearer as we look at God's part in creation. When we look at creation we cannot get away

from the principle that the will of God is involved in the creation and therefore involved in man the creature, offering him the trust and giving him the vice-regency. And thus the omnipotence of God is in a certain sense compromised (Cragg 1976:406).

Even so, al-Faruqi (1976:408) points out that the issue really hinges on the nature or the kind of God's involvement. A closer examination of this question, however, indicates that the issue is really the degree of God's involvement. Take, for example, the words of Surah 6:12, "He has written the mercy upon his soul", which indicates that the will of God is taken into the nature of God. Cragg (1976:408) expands the meaning of this verse by using the metaphor of a shepherd, as an example, to explain the degree of his responsibility:

We think of shepherdhood as requiring the utmost of exposure, search, compassion, concern and one would not think a shepherd responsible if he were to say: "Here I have got a fold, and I will sit in it folding my hands."

The implication here is that the Shepherd is free to exercise his responsibility within the constraints of his nature, which is not limitation but fulfilment. In the same way, God should be given

the sovereign freedom of manifesting his transcendence in whatever way he chooses - which would include condescending to man's condition in terms of incarnation. A number of pertinent questions in that regard are therefore, in order:

Are we right in forbidding anything to God which he does not forbid himself? If God is truly greater than all will there be things God will not do that we can identify and "forbid"? May we be limiting God's sovereignty in the very act of, supposedly, defending it? (Cragg 1985:263).

Furthermore, it makes perfect sense to argue that if one cannot use human meanings in speaking of God, one cannot have a meaningful theology and without a meaningful vocabulary which flows out of one's theology, one can neither pray nor express belief in a meaningful way. Even on a purely human level when the print says "man" or the speaker cries "fire" a particular impression is conjured up in the mind of readers or listeners. Words in fact are the highways of the traffic of ideas, sentiments, emotions, and relationships, and the work of the world is done by them (Cragg 1985:244). It is true that the problem of meaning is real in all religions and is therefore not unique to Islam. It is really a question of understanding a word or phrase or concept in a literal or non-literal sense. A classic example of this is the Muslim understanding of the title of Jesus as the "Son of God". Muslims see Jesus' relationship to God in a physical sense and therefore ask, "... How can He have a son when He has no consort?" (Surah 6:101). Such a statement is just as offensive and blasphemous to us Christians, were it be true. But it must be surely based on a total misunderstanding. Just because humans cannot produce children without cohabiting, the Qur'an is supposing that God too cannot have a son without a wife. Muslims also view the title "Son of God" in another sense. In this connection, Khan (1962:93) points out that

the Qur'an not only excludes all idea of any equal or partner with Allah, it specifically excludes all idea of HIS having a son except in the purely metaphorical sense in which all mankind are his children ...

The question that naturally follows is "what is a metaphor?" Most simply, a metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending "this" is "that" because we do not know how to think or talk about "this", so we use "that" as a way of saying something about it (McFague 1982:15).

So, in terms of trying to explain what the expression "Son of God" could mean by the use of metaphorical language is commendable. This is why McFague (1982:50), in trying to remove the difficulties with "metaphysical" language in terms of a literal understanding, opts for the use of "metaphorical" language herself. In so doing she chooses to think of Jesus Christ as a "parable" of God. The reasons for this is two-fold: a) Jesus as a parable of God provides us with a grid for understanding God's way with us; b) Jesus as parable realigns our understanding of God ... he upsets our familiar, conventional understandings of God. McFague (1982:51) goes on to say

Metaphorical statements are never identity statements.... While we look through the story of Jesus to gain an understanding of what it means to live under God's rule we cannot make the illegitimate move of identifying Jesus with God.

Herein is the weakness in using metaphorical language. By this we are not saying that there are no strengths in its use. But it does not convey the full meaning, in keeping with the teaching of the New Testament (cf. John 1:1-3; 10:30; Phil. 2:3-11 etc.) as far as the deity of Jesus Christ is concerned. The relationship of Jesus to His Father (God) is a spiritual one and his sonship has a very special character (Gilchrist 1988:323). In fact, it is much better to think that the expression

is principally analogical - it indicates the relationship between the first two persons of the triune God. They are equal in essence yet one is subject to the other's authority (Gilchrist 1988:328).

The notion of subjection, referred to here by Gilchrist, however, must be seen in the context of Jesus Christ's incarnational

relationship to God.

### 3.1.3 The Name of God ... and the Name of Christ ...

In view of the commonality of prayer between Muslims and Christians and the possibility of using prayer as a bridge for Christian witness, the question remains: "Is there a difference between praying 'in the Name of God' and 'in the Name of Christ'?" In other words, can prayer be "Christian" without the explicit conclusion "through our Lord Jesus Christ" or "in Jesus' Name"?

For the answer it is incumbent upon us to search the New Testament and seek it within the context of the early church. When we look at the Lord's Prayer, for instance, or the prayers of Lydia and others at Philippi, we notice that they do not end with the phrase "through our Lord Jesus Christ". The reason for this is not hard to find. For with the transition from Old Testament to New Testament religion, particularly Christianity as understood by the early church, the "Name of Christ" was gradually incorporated into the vocabulary and theology of the early Christians. In fact, prayer in Jesus' Name began when the Lord's Prayer was given to the disciples (in Jeremias 1978:94). We also find Jesus inviting his disciples to pray in His Name with the assurance that God will hear and respond positively to those prayers (cf. John 14:13ff.; 15:16; 16:23).

It was not long, though, before the phrase became normative in the life of the church (Cragg 1970:22). Its theological meaning is explained by Cragg (1970:22) as follows:

We come to God on the ground of his nature, of his Name, and that, for Christians, his nature and his Name are assured to us in the life and ministry and passion of Jesus as the Christ. We also mean that "all we ask and seek is to be desired, interpreted and told in consistency with the "mind of Christ" and in the context of his self-offering in redemptive love.

Padwick (1961:104) further explains that "In the Name of", as used in the New Testament, means "in full accord and surrender to His character and purposes". Thus the phrase "through Jesus Christ our Lord" should not be seen as an arbitrary formula or a talisman that is present only when it is verbally uttered. At the same time it is synonymous with and equivalent to other common phrases used by Christians such as "for the sake of Thy Name" and "according to Thy will and glory".

In Muslim prayer, however, these phrases are conspicuous by their absence, the reason being:

"For the sake of" or "in the name of..." [is absent from Muslim prayer] for the offering of prayer depends altogether for its acceptability upon the divine will.... In one respect the pattern is the same. For the Christian use of the Name of Christ is the invocation of that inclusive sense of God, upon which all prayer depends, as it is made plain and sure in Jesus Christ (Cragg 1985:102).

What this means is that the Christian's standing in Christ is not external to God, as if it were a persuasion from without. It is rather a recognition of the place where God has made grace available and accessible for all people.

Furthermore, when a Christian uses the name of Jesus it carries the authority of Jesus that was given to the disciples to work miracles, preach or pray to the Father. A clear case in point is cited in the New Testament when the disciples were questioned: "By what name have you done this?" The answer was given in terms of the authority and power of Jesus (Acts 4:7; 16:18).

From a Christian perspective it should also be pointed out that while a "name" may not convey magical power, knowledge of the Name of God is essential for an intimate relationship with Him (Exodus 33:12, 18-19; John 17:6), and "believing in His Name involves an experience of Him and a commitment to Him (John 3:18; 1 John 3:23)" (Vander Werff 1989:185).

Muslims, however, with the exception of the followers of folk Islam, will not only find it difficult to identify with such intimate experiences but will in fact deny the very possibility of such experiences. As Goldsmith (1982:90) points out:

Muslims often feel that God is so distant in his glorious power, that it is unthinkable that we should be able to relate to him in close personal knowledge.

This the case, even though God is spoken of in the Qur'an as being nearer to the believer than his or her jugular vein (Surah 50:16). Physiologically speaking,

the jugular vein is the big trunk vein, one on each side of the neck, which brings the blood back from the head to the heart. The two jugular veins correspond to the two carotid arteries which carry the blood from the heart to the head (Ali 1946:1412).

What this means spiritually is the following:

As the blood-stream is the vehicle of life and consciousness, the phrase "nearer than the jugular vein" implies that God knows more truly the innermost state of our feeling and consciousness than does our own ego (Ali 1946:1412).

The significance of that nearness however, must not be underestimated, for it provides a reinforcing framework to their spiritual lives in that

The believer has to feel that he stands every moment in the presence of God, that he has to behave with awe and respect, and must never fall back into the "sleep of heedlessness", never forget the all-embracing divine presence (Parshall 1989:26).

Whatever else is said at this juncture, the truth of the matter is that the personal name of God is always more than a label, it is the very clue to his being (nature) and doing, the handle by which humans address him and gain access to his presence (Vander Werff 1989:185). Furthermore, for Christians at least, since all

the attributes and actions of God are linked to a name, the name and names of Jesus in the New Testament become signs pointing to his identity, relationship, authority and actions.

### 3.2 THE SHAHADAH (ISLAMIC CREED)

In Salat, the Shahadah is just as important as the invocation, for according to the Islamic understanding of Law (Shari'ah), it is obligatory for Muslims to testify to the truth, over and over again. Gilchrist's (1986:284) surprise at finding this first pillar<sup>12</sup> of Muslim practice among the duties of Islam, in the context of salat, is due to the fact that he fails to see the testimony of faith in the context of the all-encompassing Shari'ah. The fact of the matter is that Muslims do not make a distinction between faith and works, as Christians do, since the whole of life stands under the divine Law.

A further explanation for the inclusion of the Shahadah in this study is, however, necessary. Our inclusion of it here is designed not only to show its importance in the context of Salat, but also to raise the problem of Christians identifying with it and the difficulty that Christian converts from Muslim backgrounds will face in adapting to their newfound faith.

The Shahadah or creed of Islam is a succinct statement of belief that reduces the essence of the Qur'an to a few brief words. It probably has more power over its adherents than any other formal creed which has ever been articulated by anyone (Parshall 1985:204). It is, however, one of the deliberate acts of piety in Islam. It not only forms an important part of the Muezzin's call to prayer but also the congregational prayer. As Parshall (1980:201) informs us:

At the end of each pair of bowings and at the conclusion of the whole prayer the worshipper recites

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<sup>12</sup> The other pillars are prayer, fasting, zakat and pilgrimage.

the Shahadah and the ritual salutations.

The words of this Confession of Faith read as follows: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God". Upon closer examination we note that the first part of the confession affirms the existence and the nature of God.

This simple and austere affirmation of monotheism further establishes Islam within the Abrahamic tradition. It is reminiscent of the opening sentence of Genesis, "In the beginning God ..." and of the opening of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God ..." (Fry and King 1980:73).

Consequently it wipes out a host of heresies that have tormented the Christian faith - "atheism, agnosticism, materialism, naturalism, pantheism, deism and polytheism" (Fry and King 1980:73).

Cragg (1985:101) puts it differently, but categorically: "There is no other arbiter, no other enricher, no other Lord'. This, however, leads us to ask "whether Allah is the same as the God of the Bible in all respects"? It is to this question that we turn now. Goldsmith (1982:130) points out that

some Christians are asking the wrong question when they query whether Allah is indeed God or whether he is an idol. The answer lies between these two extremes. Allah is God but the Muslim understanding of his nature needs both addition and correction ...

Parshall (1989:24) writes in similar vein:

Islam presents an inadequate and incomplete - but not totally misguided - view of God. It seems unfair to declare the God of Islam to be absolutely distinct from the God of the Bible.

Christians have no alternative but to declare that "more crucial is the clear biblical teaching that God is only to be known and experienced through his Son, Jesus Christ" (Parshall 1989:24).



Cragg (1970:17), however, seeks to answer the question in a different way:

Islam and Christianity have many common predicates about God ... But they have also deeply divergent statements about God, for Christianity has to do with the Father and Shepherd analogies, which involve God with mankind in costly and intimate grace. From these Islam immunizes the Divine majesty and in its severest mood, insist that you can "ask Him no questions" and on Him you can "make no claims".

Thus God is unaffected by human ills, evils and frailties and we are required to say that God is not the "same" in the two faiths (Cragg 1970:18). For the Old Testament depicts God (Yahweh) as being "distressed" and "afflicted" in the afflictions of his people (Is. 63:9). For that matter the incarnation of Jesus Christ is demonstrative of the fact that God is moved by our circumstances and predicaments. But then Cragg (1970:18) goes on to explain:

Since the one theme of God is diversely understood in the statements of doctrine and terms of worship, our answer must be Yes! and No!

Furthermore, while we are in broad agreement with these sentiments, greater clarity on the identity of Allah will enable us to come to some kind of decision. Cragg (1973:144) reminds us, that Muslims would claim, if given the opportunity:

Islam did not invent the name Allah or announce His existence. It declared the sole existence of Allah already known as "Most High" in the pantheon of deities.

From a linguistic standpoint, it is interesting to note that "Allah is a contraction of Al-ilah" and this Arabic word is not just ilah (a god) but al-ilah (the god) ... There never was, nor can there ever be, a god equal to Allah (Parshall 1989:25).

We also find that this name is cognate with names for God used

by Hebrew writers in the Old Testament (e.g. El and Elohim), a fact which supports Muslim belief that their God is the very same God who was worshipped by Adam, served by Abraham, obeyed by Moses, praised by David and proclaimed by the prophets (Fry and King 1980:66). In addition,

the word for God in the Arabic Bible and in the Coptic Liturgy is Allah and for Arabic-speaking Christians it is the ordinary word for God (Nazir-Ali 1983:157).

Hence, in light of the above, Christians should have no problem affirming the first part of the Shahadah, but as far as the second part is concerned, where it says, "Muhammad is the Apostle (messenger) of Allah, Christians in all good conscience will certainly not be able to affirm it. This goes for Muslims who have become Christians as well. This must be understood in the light of Islam's claim that Muhammad is the final and greatest of all the prophets of God. As Cragg (1985:87) explains:

Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets" with whom divine revelation reached its climax. This conviction of continuity with previous scriptures is an important reason why Muslims are satisfied that Islam is final and that all valid religion tends toward it.

Ahmad (1980:22) concurs:

As a messenger he is the last and the greatest, about whom all the early messengers have predicted and who thus completes the process of revelation.

Parshall (1989:173) also underlines the attitude of Muslims towards Muhammad by saying:

Muslims acknowledge an integral link between Muhammad's personal integrity and his role as a channel of revelation of Allah in the Qur'an.

The question as to a Christians attitude towards Muhammad however, still remains. One's attitude will be based on one's motivation. For instance, if the purpose is to build good

relations in order to have an open and an authentic witness, then one cannot be arrogant and insensitive. In this light Dretke (1979:175) takes a very positive stance:

Admittedly, there are difficulties for the Christian with the person of Muhammad and the Qur'an, but this does not mean that the Christian has to castigate Muhammad as a false prophet and the Qur'an as a work of Satan. The least a Christian can do is to try to reserve judgement upon Muhammad.

Cragg (1985:186) also calls for discerning sympathy in this regard when he states:

What the Prophet means in the convictions of innumerable Muslims must be apprehended with discerning sympathy if we are to mediate the Christian meaning of Christ to the Muslim sense of Muhammad.

Hence, whatever attitude we decide to adopt, it is important that we do not undermine the high esteem that Muhammad enjoys amongst Muslims. As Parshall (1989:173) shows:

A devout Muslim invokes the blessings of Allah upon Muhammad at least forty times a day. This occurs during the five stated prayer times, plus the usage of the formula "Peace be upon Him" each time Muhammad's name is mentioned in conversation or is written on paper.

Having a sympathetic attitude towards Muhammad for the sake of keeping the communication lines open with Muslims should not be looked upon as compromise. It is really a question of reserving judgement until a friendship is established and respect is earned. In fact, God used Muhammad to say some important things to the people of his time. There is no reason why we cannot speak of the positive influences of his life. For one thing, he helped stem the tide of idolatry and turned people to worship the Creator. This belief gripped Muhammad so much that it became the capstone of Islamic theology - "There is no God but Allah...".

### 3.3 SALAT AS RITUAL

Many writers (including some Muslims) refer to salat as "ritual" prayer. Ahmad (1980:110), for instance, says:

Through belief in the unity of God, who is invested with all the attributes of perfection, Islam seeks to purge human intellect of the filth of idolatry and superstitious fancies. One of the manifestations of this concern is that Islam does not permit the performance of ritual prayer (salat) in front of a tomb, nor does it permit man to swear except in the name of God.

That being the case, it prompts the question "How can salat be classified as being a ritual?" For the answer, the meaning of the word "ritual" must be ascertained first.

#### 3.3.1 The Meaning of "Ritual"

In the context of a discussion on ritual and prayer, Noss (1980:14) observes that:

Prayers in preliterate cultures can be but rarely are individual and spontaneous and so without a set form; public rituals, on the other hand, are formal and structured and often of a fixed kind ...

From the above observation, several words stand out, viz. "set form", "formal", "structured and fixed kind" ... which indicates that "ritual" is a formal, structured, fixed and prescribed religious practice or act. Rituals also have different functions, since

ritual behaviour is a way of communicating with the divine for the purpose of changing the human situation. As such, ritual has two important dimensions: what it "says" and what it "does"... (Ray 1976:78).

Furthermore, rituals are performed to cure illness, increase fertility, defeat enemies, remove impurity, etc.

At the same time, ritual words and symbols also say important things about the nature of what is being done: "What is said in symbolic terms is what is done in ritual terms to modify experience in accordance with what men desire" (Ray 1976:78). From the above explanation, the key to understanding "ritual", then, are the phrases "what it says" and "what it does" and "words and symbols ... say important things about the nature of what is being done...".

A related word, that has relevance to the study of the meaning of "ritual" is the word "sacrament", particularly in view of the fact that Cragg (1985:97) describes the salat postures as sacramental in a general sense: Washing before prayer, posture in prayer, the qiblah toward Mecca, and Ramadan - all these and more are examples of material expression and spiritual meaning.

Actually those acts which bring forth sacredness to life are called "sacraments". Such acts are very often an expression of the simplest and most basic life functions: eating and drinking, washing, building a house, etc.; but it may also include such activities as the making of fetishes, chanting, prayer, confession and baptism:

The difference between the sacred use of these actions and their everyday use is that the sacred act discloses the "nature of things" ... From the perspective of religious meaning, the power initiates in the realm of the sacred and the cultic act is an image or demonstration of the nature of Ultimate reality ... However, in the sacrament this sacred power is bound up intrinsically with specific forms carefully preserved by a religious tradition - either verbal or bodily gestures or material symbols (Streng 1976:92).

So from what Streng is saying, "the verbal or bodily gestures or material symbols" constitute a sacrament. But the question still remains, "To what extent could we describe salat as a ritual or sacrament?" It is to this question we must now turn as meaning is sought in some of the aspects related to salat.

### 3.3.2 The Interpretation of Salat

In an attempt to interpret whether salat constitutes what has been understood as ritual or sacrament (as described in the previous section), attention will now be given to questions of Obligation, Symbolism, Direction and Adaptation.

#### 3.3.2.1 Question of Obligation

Salat has certain prescribed features that not only makes it incumbent on the worshipper but also demands that it be strictly adhered to. For some Christian observers, like Gilchrist (1986:286), this is tantamount to slavery:

This fixed ritual of prayer is so rigid in Islam that the pious Muslim will slavishly follow it day after day.

It has also been said, "In Islam prayer is reduced to a mechanical act, as distinct from a mental act" (Patrick 1978:471). But in all fairness to Muslims, they are warned of placing too much emphasis on forms and rituals and are exhorted to observe the spirit underlying them. As one tradition puts it:

There must not be too much stress on forms and rituals as it will divorce prayer from the spirit underlying it. More attention should be paid to the meaning beyond utterances and meanings of words and movements of bodies (Karim s.a.:159).

A. Rahman (1979:81), however, compares the discipline and training of Muslims in their constant battle to see that the commandments of God are obeyed, to that of soldiers in an army preparing for war. Noble as that may be, one is inclined to ask, "How many really carry out all five the daily prayers?". Parshall (1994:61) has observed that ninety-five percent of Muslim adults worldwide do not follow the legalistic demands of orthodoxy in regard to Islamic prayer ritual.

Others describe it as a duty, a precept or obligation and a debt due to God (Marsh 1975:18). A debt or duty that carries with it merit for the worshipper. Cragg (1964:17) observes that

the shifting of onus for our relationship with God to a fulfilment of obligation, a bringing of tribute, a performance of ritual duty makes meritoriousness central .....

The point that Cragg is making is that salat is observed as a duty in exchange for God's favours. In fact, according to the Qur'an (Surah 24:56), those who keep up prayer in response to the call of God's messenger are promised His mercy. Parshall (1994:63) observes that "the accumulation of merit is also an integral part of the motivation for the regularized performance of salat..." Huraira (in Parshall 1994:64) in a hadith highlights the role of prayer in obtaining the forgiveness of sins:

The reward of the prayer offered by a person in the congregation is twenty-five times greater than that of prayer offered in one's house or in the market alone... Every step he takes towards the mosque, he is upgraded one degree in reward and one sin is taken off (crossed out) from his accounts (of deeds).

Qureshi (1984:206), however, views it differently as he responds to the whole question of "obligation", by emphasizing that

prayer in Islam is obligatory but obligatoriness of prayer in Islam is an "Islamic obligatoriness"... which derives from the Qur'an and which is in line with the definition of Islam or submission ...

But is it not fair to say that it is much more than obedience to the Qur'an? It is really obedience to the Shari'ah - the Shari'ah instructs people on how to eat, receive visitors, buy and sell, sleep ... pray and perform other acts of ibadat (Kateregga 1980:67). In this respect Islam is a religion of law and therefore the attainment of salvation must depend on the quality of obedience to that law which characterizes the life of the individual concerned (Anderson 1984:105).

When compared to the Jewish notion of Torah, which basically is understood as instruction and guidance for its adherents, the notion of Shari'ah for Muslims seems to convey an oppressive legal duty. For in the Hebrew usage "torah" means "instruction, discipline" (in the sense of disciplining as well as chastening (LaSor *et al.* 1985:150). Thus the word is used of the instruction given by a father or mother (Proverbs 1:8; 3:1).

Yet Muslims do not feel that they have the prerogative to question these commands as they will confidently claim that all prayer rituals are Allah-ordained, and since they view themselves as the "servants" of Allah they have no other recourse but to obey. Consequently that act of obedience carries its own reward with it.

### 3.3.2.2 Question of Symbolism

More important than the question of duty or obligation, however, is the question of symbolism. Cragg (1985:97) remarks that

even though Islam prides itself upon its freedom from sacramentalism and priesthood, in that all worshippers worship themselves, it is evident that salat postures are profoundly sacramental in a general sense.

As Cragg (1992:182) goes on to explain, "just as prostration symbolizes gratitude and awe, so erectness spells responsible acceptance of control". Parshall (1985:182) also observes

that the attitude of supplication as seen in the uplifted hands portray sublime dependence and dignity ... at a certain point one finger is even extended to signify the unity of God.

Muslims themselves attach symbolic importance to the various movements and postures. As Kateregga (1980:63) explains,

the various poses and postures the worshipper makes in prayer are true embodiment of the spirit of total submission to Allah. The various recitals strengthen



his commitment to the Almighty God.

Hence we have material or physical expressions that convey spiritual meaning.

Besides the postures, there is the question of symbolic meaning in ablution or wudu. Ablution is normally based on Surah 5:7, where worshippers are instructed, "when ye prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; rub your heads (with water), and (wash) your feet to the ankles. If ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body".

Looking at the above verse, one is inclined to say that the performance is purely an external act of ritual purification, an ablution which is solely a regulation for the body (Gilchrist 1986:288). Klein, upon weighing the situation, concludes:

If, however, we carefully compare all the passages of the Qur'an which speak of purification and purity, it becomes evident to every unprejudiced reader that in none of them is there any reference to the inward moral or spiritual purity of the heart but that what is required in them is the outward bodily cleansing by means of ablutions and washings (in Gilchrist 1986:288).

Cragg (1975:56) observes, however, that

the ritual purity that washing serves is within a private competence.... We approach God through a symbol of purification that demands neither subtlety nor passion.

What Cragg means is that Muslims do not observe the wudu ritual because of an inward consciousness of sin or any sense of guilt; it is a matter of habit in obtaining some kind of symbolic purification. As he says, "there is no crisis about sin, only a habitual transaction about sins" (Cragg 1975:56). But, according to Muslims,

Islam takes interest in the purification of the body

from all dirt and impurities, as well as purification of the mind from false, wrong, and corrupt beliefs and attitudes (Kateregga 1980:63).

Granted that this is how Muslims perceive the symbolic meaning expressed in the ablution act, it still remains a moot point whether they in fact experience any inward cleansing. For Christians only the blood of Christ is able to effect any kind of inward cleansing (cf. 1 John 1:8,9). Even if one argues from an Old Testament perspective in respect to the Jewish sacrificial system, one has to note that in their place and time they served a purpose and in reality had only become a shadow without any lasting benefit:

For its sacrifices, yearly repeated, had no power to effect a permanent benefit for those who drew nigh to God ... animal sacrifices can never take away sins (cf. Heb.10:4). What they cannot do, Christ has actually done - His offering fulfilled the will of God with regard to sacrifice (Heb. 10:5-10) ... (Stibbs 1970:1208).

### 3.3.2.3 Question of Direction

Another area of concern relates to the facing of the worshipper in the direction of Mecca, which is an essential feature of salat. The qiblah, or direction to Mecca, towards which all Muslims pray, converges the focus of all on the central point of Muhammad's birth and of Qur'anic revelation (Cragg 1992:94).

This significance is further described by Cragg (1975:60-61) in terms of different categories, viz.

an historical unity - whereby the individual is one in his routine with all the prophet's people from that one beginning; a geographical unity - as the individual identifies with the whole territory of Islam in a great circuit; a local unity - in that each one gathers within the confines of a local Mosque and private unity - where the individual is affected both physically and mentally.

But it is an historical fact that prayer was not always in the direction of Mecca. Initially Muhammad, hoping to convert a sizeable number of the Jewish population of Medina, had adopted certain Hebrew practices - e.g. facing Jerusalem for prayer, worshipping on Saturdays and using a ram's horn as the call to worship (Fry and King 1980:44). But the refusal of the Jews to accept Muhammad as a Prophet led to his break with Jewish tradition, a move which included the change in the direction of prayer (Fry and King 1980:45).

Muslim observers, however, do not concur with this reason for the change per se. For example, it is argued that it was in keeping with a Qur'anic injunction:

The first injunction which was abrogated in the Qur'an was that concerning the *qiblah*. This is because the Prophet used to prefer the Rock of the Holy House of Jerusalem, which was the *qiblah* for the Jews. The Prophet faced it for seventeen months in the hope that they would believe in him and follow him. Then God said: "Say, to God belong the East and the West" (Tabari 1984:168).

Fazlur Rahman (1979:20) argues as follows:

The evidence of the change of the *qiblah* to the *Ka'aba* would have carried more weight had it been the case that the prophet had appointed Jerusalem as the *qiblah* on His arrival in Medina in order to woo the Jews. The change to Jerusalem seems to be effected in Mecca and most probably at the time when the Muslims under persecution were not allowed to go to the *Ka'aba* for worship. Moreover, for the Medinese, as for all Arabs, the centre of religious activity was the Meccan sanctuary and not Jerusalem.

In saying this, Muslim writers, in all fairness to them, do not deny the fact that there was a rift between Muhammad and the Jews. They only provide a rationale for the change in the direction of the *qiblah* from their perspective, which is different to that of Western historians.

But whatever the reason was, it is clear that there was a

definite change in the direction of prayer and from a practical and symbolic viewpoint, particularly in view of the centrality of the Ka'aba in the lives of Muslims, one can be sympathetic to those who wish to justify the change. As Cragg (1992:94) puts it:

The invisible radii of countless concentric circles which imagination visualizes as formed by Muslims in their multitudes with the Ka'aba in Mecca as their hub are in turn the lines of travel - at least symbolically - when Muslims converge in Haji upon the same centre.

#### 3.3.2.4 Question of Adaptation

At this point it is necessary to raise the question of adaptation to various forms linked to salat in the context of prayer for a new Christian believer from a Muslim background. It is a matter of concern since these new believers either feel left out or forced to adapt to new prayer forms that are foreign to them. In this connection two issues of interest come to the fore. These are the practice of ablution and certain postures during prayer.

With regard to ablution, Muslim prayer commences with ritual washing. As Christians we know that God looks at the heart and examines our motives and is therefore concerned about our spiritual condition in His presence. Should there be the consciousness of sin, inward cleansing is obtained through the blood of Christ which is conditional upon confession of sin (cf. 1 John 1:9). Therefore external washing of any kind is not required. But to accommodate the new believer, would it not be possible to make provision for some kind of washing which at best would be symbolic? Parshall (1980:202) says that washing before prayer could be continued, provided that it is explained that the ritual does not earn any merit. One could not object to this, provided there is clear understanding that God is more concerned about the condition of the heart, as already mentioned.

Prostration in the Old Testament is basically translated as "worship" (Parshall 1980:202). There are also references to

bowing, kneeling and the lifting up of hands. Therefore it would not be out of line to allow the use of some of these postures, keeping in mind that none of these are prescribed. Again it needs to be emphasized that God is really interested in the inward spiritual condition of a worshipper. I return to this issue in the final chapter.

There is also the question of praying in the direction of Mecca. For Christians it is not so much a matter of geography but of where God is. In that respect one can point out that the publican refused to "lift up his eyes to heaven" (Luke 18:13) indicating that, in a certain sense at least, prayer was made in the direction of where God is. Even Jesus looked up to heaven when He prayed (Mark 6:41). We must not, however forget that it was customary for Jews to lift their hands upwards and pray with open eyes. In the reference made to Luke's Gospel above, it is significant that the publican did not even lift up his eyes, let alone his hands towards heaven. Moreover it has been the practice of Jews to turn towards Jerusalem, while Christians turned east towards the rising sun (a fixed Christian tradition at the time of Muhammad) as a symbol of the Risen Christ (Nazir-Ali 1983:21).

This chapter has been an attempt to crystallize the responses and interpretations of various Christians in respect to salat.

We have looked at the "Basmalah", particularly the phrase "in the Name of...", the "Shahadah" and "Salat as Ritual". From the foregoing we can conclude that there is much that Christians can appreciate in the salat, even though we may not necessarily agree with every aspect of it. Furthermore with sensitivity and sympathy we can allow for and adapt<sup>13</sup> certain aspects, e.g. postures in prayer and even recitations that do not conflict with the Bible.

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<sup>13</sup> We are aware that some Muslim (and Christian) scholars reject this procedure as dishonest - i.e. acting as if you are a Muslim in order to "catch", the unwary Muslim to become a Christian.

## CHAPTER 4

AL-FATIHAH AND THE LORD'S PRAYER COMPARED

The foregoing chapters helped us to see the importance of prayer in the lives of Muslims, both from their own descriptive perspective and from the interpretative perspective of Christians. In so doing we sought to show the strengths and the weaknesses of Muslim prayer, with the purpose of opening up the possibilities for dialogue and mutual witness.

In this chapter the objective is to delve deeper into the phenomenon of prayer by focusing on the common needs of both Christians and Muslims. But we want to also show that Christians are equally serious about prayer, if not more so, and to highlight some of the dynamics of Christian prayer, which have several significant distinctives.

Together with the "Invocation" the first chapter of the Qur'an is part and parcel of the fixed ritual prayer. Its extreme importance is shown by Cragg (1973:82):

Man in religious decision ... comes into clearest focus in the Fatihah itself, the great opening summation of the whole Qur'an ... its theme of praise, its deliberate resolve, its plea for guidance and its sense of destiny epitomizes the Qur'anic mind.

It has also been said that

it seems to occupy a place in Islam much like that of the Lord's Prayer in Christianity, for its five brief verses touch on many of the great themes of Islam (Fry & King 1980:62).

Assuming that this is true, a closer examination of both the Fatihah and the "Lord's Prayer"<sup>14</sup> will help us see the common needs and themes (features) in both of them. At the same time it

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<sup>14</sup> It is better to call it the Disciples' Prayer because Jesus taught them to pray like this.

will bring out the distinctives of Christian prayer. Moreover,

studying the two prayers side by side ought to remove the foreignness which we feel about prayer in Islam and enable us to appreciate some of the common ground in Christian and Muslim spirituality (Chapman 1989:306).

But first it would be helpful to make a few observations on the structure of the aforementioned prayers.

#### 4.1 BASIC STRUCTURE

As far as Al-Fatihah is concerned, it must be seen that it has a capital importance for it constitutes the most common and frequently uttered prayer of Islam. It is composed of seven propositions or verses:

1. Praise to God, Master of the worlds;
2. The Infinitely Good, The ever Merciful;
3. The King of the Last Judgement;
4. It is Thee whom we adore and it is in Thee that we seek refuge;
5. Lead us on the straight way;
6. The way of those on whom is Thy Grace;
7. Not on those on whom is Thy Wrath, nor of those who stray (Schuon 1963:65).

In respect to the Lord's Prayer on the other hand, apart from saying that the structure is simple and transparent, Jeremias (1978:94) observes that the prayer consists of

1. The Address "Our Father ... heaven";
2. The two "Thou-Petitions" "Hallowed be thy Name, Thy kingdom Come (to this is added "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven);
3. The two "We-Petitions" "Give us this day our daily bread ... and forgive us our trespasses;
4. Petition for preservation - Lead us not into temptation ...

But Bosch (1985:11) sees it differently in that

the invocation is followed immediately by seven

petitions. The first three clearly belong together ... They are often referred to as the "you" petitions, in contradistinction from the last four, which are called the "we" petitions.

Even so, it is unmistakably clear that there is a general pattern. In fact, this would be true of both the prayers under consideration.

## 4.2 COMMON FEATURES

As we compare the Lord's Prayer and Al-Fatihah, several common features become evident:

### 4.2.1 Relationship

First, there is an emphasis on our relationship with God. In Al-Fatihah, on the one hand, the relationship is described in terms of a servant to a master. In this, any idea of servility and degradation is foreign to the thinking of Muslims. In fact, Muslims count it a honour to be servants of God, as Pickthall (in Chapman 1989:307) points out, "to be the slave of Allah is the proudest boast of a Muslim, bondage to Allah liberates from all other servitudes". Also, it is to be viewed in the sense of both honour and grace as summed up in a short Arabic saying: "It is enough of an honour to me that I should be your servant; it is enough grace to me that you should be my Lord" (in Woodberry 1989:307). According to Chapman (1989:307):

The thinking of the Muslim at this point is close to that of the prodigal son who in coming home works out "a face-saving plan" - make me as one of your hired servants (Luke 15:19).

In the Lord's Prayer, on the other hand, the relationship is one of a child to a father. A study of both Old and New Testaments bear this out. Bosch (1985:9) says: "Even though nowhere in the Old Testament is God directly addressed as 'father', still there are fourteen references to God as father". In each of those



references, the emphasis is on the relationship between God and Israel - a relationship that can only be described as tender and intimate. But the question is, in what sense is God Israel's father? God is Israel's father in the sense that He is the One who elected, delivered and saved His people Israel by mighty deeds in history. It is, however, noticeable that

the designation of God as father comes to full fruition in the message of the prophets. The prophets accuse Israel constantly that they have not given Him the honour which a son should give to his father (Jeremias 1978:95).

In the New Testament,

when Jesus addressed God directly as "father", he used the Aramaic word "Abba", which was the address of a small child to his father - a term of endearment ... (Bosch 1985:9).

This word "Abba" in the preaching of Jesus is something quite new, absolutely new (Jeremias 1978:96). Furthermore,

in this term "Abba" the ultimate mystery of his mission and his authority is expressed. He, to whom the father had granted full knowledge of God, has the Messianic prerogative of addressing him with the familiar address of a son (Jeremias 1978:97).

Thus, we have in The Lord's Prayer, the wonder of the gospel whereby

Jesus, the only one who had a right to call God "Abba, Father" inviting his disciples to enter into that same intimate relationship he enjoyed with the Father (Chapman 1989:307).

And in so doing, He

gives them a share in his sonship and empowers them, as his disciples to speak with their heavenly father in just a familiar, trusting way as a child would with his father (Jeremias 1978:97).

Herein is a Christian distinctive that makes it possible for us to address God as father, confidently yet humbly. As Calvin (s.a.:1470) rightfully asks:

For with what confidence could any one call God his father? Who could proceed to such a degree of temerity, as to arrogate to himself the dignity of a son of God, if we had not been adopted as the children of his grace in Christ?

Notice that such a privilege is bestowed on all those who have experienced God's grace<sup>15</sup> in Christ (Eph. 2:8,9; John 1:12). So when Christians come to God in prayer, they come as children to a father with this wonderful promise, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your father which is in heaven?" (Matt.7:11).

#### 4.2.2 Worship

Secondly, Al-Fatihah express both praise ("Praise be to God ...") and worship ("You alone we worship"). In this light, Yusuf Ali (1946:14) writes

In our spiritual contemplation the first words should be those of praise. If the praise is from our innermost being it brings us into union with God's will.

Cragg (1970:19) goes on to affirm:

The praise of God ... allows no self-congratulation as some worship might. All is awe and surrender conformably to that other great word: Al-Rabb, "Lord", used in its full Semitic sense of "Owner", "Master", "Disposer".

Ayoub (1984:47) also makes the point that "Praise is the thanks to God for all his favours in this world and reward in the world

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<sup>15</sup> The most common New Testament word for grace is "charis", which means undeserved favour. Cf. Parker T.H.L., s.v. "grace" in Harrison (1975:257).

to come". But it is quite evident that Muslim prayer seems to partake more of the nature of a continual acknowledgement of God's sovereignty than of communion with Him<sup>16</sup>.

In the Lord's Prayer too, there are the twin aspects of Praise and Worship, as we worship God by praising Him for all that He has revealed about Himself (name), by acknowledging His authority as king and by surrendering to His will. More than that, "the disciples who prayed these words knew that God's name stands for His person or for God Himself ...". In other words, all our attempts at prayer are our efforts to respond - however imperfectly - to the God who is so gracious that He calls us to worship him. But it is also true that we are assisted in our prayers by the Holy Spirit, without whose help our prayers will suffer much impoverishment. As Luther (1972:1079) reminds us,

the presence of the Spirit of grace grants us the privilege and creates in us the ability, nay, the necessity, to begin to pray.

Furthermore the apostle Paul also assures and encourages us that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with "groanings" to God (Romans 8:26). The reference here is to the Spirit's help in communicating with the Father the thoughts we find difficult to verbalize, particularly in the area of knowing God's will in difficult circumstances. This too, is a distinctive of Christian prayer.

We have good reasons to praise God, the least of which is based on the fact that "wherever God may be known, there must necessarily be a manifestation of his perfections of power, goodness, wisdom, righteousness, mercy and truth" (Calvin s.a.:152). Biblically speaking,

"hallow" or "sanctify" is a synonym of "praise,

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<sup>16</sup> This is shown (inter alia) by the insistence on ritual purity and the use of Arabic, an unknown tongue to three-quarters of the Muslim world. Cf. Anderson (1985:119).

bless, glorify"; it means "to make holy". The word "holy" when applied to God expresses the peculiar mode of being. Thus to speak of a holy God is to speak of the "totally other", the "Other Dimension" ... He is completely the other reality (Boff 1983:44).

Therefore to sanctify or hallow God's name was no easy matter. It meant witnessing to God's name and such witness was often given at the risk of one's life (Bosch 1985:16).

Also, in praying "Thy will be done" they were expressing the realization that

it is integral to our Christian lifestyle to look for God's will rather than our own even if there follows a sacrifice of our own will (Bosch 1985:21).

In that light this particular petition is not to be regarded as a means of getting one's own will done but ensuring that God's will is done in one's own life first and then in that of others. And since God's will is something positively good to be embraced we need to express it through our words as well as our deeds.

Muslims also believe in the will of Allah. In fact, it is a common expression used in their everyday conversation. But this commonality in the spirit of worship does not erase the differences, as Cragg (1970:19) points out:

There is a certain perplexity as to how the hallowing of the Name, the coming of the kingdom and the doing of the will, of God, can well be matters of intercession.

In fact, the popular Arabic expression translated "what God has willed" suggests that all we can do is to accept what God has decreed - a kind of resignation to fate. But it has been pointed out while this may be true for some,

for millions of others it has been a source of power, for it sets the mind at liberty from worry over matters beyond its control (Fry & King 1980:70).

### 4.2.3 Sovereignty

Thirdly, both prayers acknowledge the sovereignty of God in His world. Al-Fatihah speaks of God as "Lord of the Worlds", the Lord's Prayer speaks of "God as king" ("Your kingdom come ... yours is the kingdom"). Chapman (1989:309) says,

It is worth noticing that confession of the sovereignty of God in the Qur'an and the Bible sound remarkably similar - "Knowest thou not that it is Allah unto Whom belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth?" (2:107); "The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19)

What is different and unique, however, is the concept of the "coming of the Kingdom of God". As we read in Ps. 96:10-13, "The Lord reigns ... he comes to judge the earth"; and in Mk. 1:15: "The time has come ... the Kingdom of God is near upon you" (NEB). These verses not only tell us that God reigns but also how he establishes his kingly rule, i.e. through the person of Jesus and the community which he called into being. This means that the loyal disciple must have a passion for the spread of the Lord's sovereignty over the hearts of people and situations everywhere. To this end Christ's followers not only pray but also work and witness. To believe in the kingdom of God<sup>17</sup>, however,

is to believe in a final and happy meaning for history. It is to affirm that utopia is more real than the weight of facts. It is to locate the truth concerning the world and human beings not in the past or completely in the present, but in the future, when it will be revealed in its fulness (Boff 1983:61).

Many conservative Muslims, on the other hand, hold to a reconstructionist worldview in that

God's will is to bring the kingdom of God to earth by putting all peoples under Shari'ah Law - a government dictated by the Qur'an and the Islamic traditions

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<sup>17</sup> This phrase means primarily the rule of God, the divine Kingly authority. Cf. Ladd G.E. s.v. "Kingdom", in Harrison (1975:310).

(Livingstone 1993:158).

In fact, Islam is a theocratic creed to the extent that,

in Islamic theory, church and state are one, and the canon law is the law both of the state and the individual, in every aspect of life (Anderson 1985:128).

In other words, Islam represents a complete system of public and private life as well as a religion in the narrower sense of that term.

From the common features evident we now move on to look at the specific needs that provide a platform for dialogue and witness. But they also show us that we share a common humanity and in that we can enjoy some kind of solidarity.

#### 4.3 SPECIFIC NEEDS

The words "To thee alone we come for aid" in Al-Fatihah can be roughly seen as a parallel to "give us our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer. As far as Muslims are concerned,

the word "aid" derives its meaning from the Arabic word "awn" which is defined as "help, assistance, succor, relief, support, backing" (Chapman 1989:308).

Christians view the words "daily bread" as that which "embraces everything that Jesus' disciples need for body and soul" (Jeremias 1978:102). Furthermore, "daily bread" refers to:

necessary bread, today's bread and bread for the coming day. Prayed in the morning, it would then refer to the day that has just begun; prayed in the evening it would have the next day in mind (Bosch 1985:27).

All in all the prayer is for "bread" that was necessary for existence, for survival. It is God's provision for the immediate future and in that respect we are to live one day at a time in

dependence on His gracious provision.

What this means is that whether we come as sons and daughters or as servants, there are needs that make it incumbent on us to come to God with those needs in any given situation. A sampling of these are implicit and explicit in both Al-Fatihah and the Lord's Prayer: guidance, deliverance, mercy ... It is to these that we now turn:

#### 4.3.1 Guidance

The prayer for guidance is expressed in the words, "guide us in the straight path" in Al-Fatihah and "lead us not into temptation" in the Lord's Prayer. For Muslims this is the first and foremost need

on it alone rests the wonderful charm and fascination of Paradise. Without it, nothing is worth living for and with it, there is nothing which cannot be given up (Cragg 1973:85).

In that light,

since the beginning of the creation, Allah has sent his guidance for mankind through his selected people. These chosen people are called prophets or messengers. They asked the people of their time to obey and worship Allah alone. They taught, guided and trained the people to follow the way of Allah (in Cooper 1985:40).

Sarwar (in Cooper 1985:39) also states quite confidently that "Allah's greatest favor to mankind is his guidance continued in the books of revelation". The giving of the holy books and the sending of the prophets, however, are said to be an act of free grace on the part of God. As Surah 16:9 reads: "It was upon God to indicate the right guidance or show the way". From the above, then, the "straight path" would obviously refer to the

Path of Islam, the way of life revealed in the Qur'an, but it would also include the way of life revealed in

the life of the prophet (Chapman 1989:310).

In this light Cragg (1986:77) comments:

What Islam calls acting "in the way of God" is a double formula. It prescribes our theology before it guides our ethics. What is the "path of God" is a question which precedes decision in the path of God.

For Muslims, however, pre-eminence is given both to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet. To which is added the judgements handed down over the years by Islamic Jurists and the opinions of the community (consensus). Furthermore, where there is no guidance in specific cases from the past, analogy may also be employed. Hence,

The "Shari'ah" is the course through which God has chosen to guide man. Strict adherence to Allah's code is the way of experiencing peace because the "Shari'ah" combines all aspects of divine guidance (Shenk & Kateregga 1980:56).

In the context of "Salat" the prayer is for Allah to

set them firmly in the way i.e. the way of truth, the religion of Islam or the true faith, other than which God will not accept from His servants (Ayoub 1984:48).

From a missiological standpoint, Muslims see the role of Islam in relation to other faiths as one of pruning, correcting, purging and completing them. Therefore they claim that

Humankind is firmly set in relation with the divine by dint of natural human worth universally shared, born under the divine mercy, destined for immortality and judgement and meanwhile guided, exhorted and disciplined by Islam into the obedience to the commands of God, which is the whole raison d'être of humanity (Cragg 1975:33).

Rahman (1980:60) also makes the point that

the whole fate of man, whether he will be "successful"



or "shall perish", depends on whether he can and does "take the right path" - something most men take very lightly, as though it did not make any difference to the future of humanity.

For Christians, however, the plea "lead us not into temptation" refers to something other than testing, although it could refer to trials, since "temptation in Scripture is used in both senses" (Sanders 1977:100). As Lohmeyer (in Bosch 1985:38) points out, "It is not concerned with the successful understanding of temptations, but with preservation from them". Jeremias (1987:104) explains that

it is a prayer not to preservation from temptation but to preservation in temptation or the prayer that God may help overcome temptation.

The question, however, is why should we have to ask God not to lead us into temptation? It has been suggested that Jesus is using a figure of speech called a litotes, which expresses something positive by negating its opposite (in Robinson 1989:23). And what this means is that it is a prayer that says in effect: "Don't let Satan ambush us. Don't let the foe of our souls catch us in his trap." A good question at this point is "what are these temptations?" Calvin (s.a.:162) reminds us,

the forms of temptations are many and various. For the corrupt conceptions of the mind, provoking us to transgressions of the law, are temptations; and things not evil in themselves, become temptations through the subtlety of the devil ...

The petition here is for us to not be overwhelmed and conquered by any temptations, but that we may be made strong in the power of the Lord to withstand whatever temptations come our way. Yet, the converse of this, i.e. the matter of asking to be led in a straight path, ought to be familiar to us since the Psalmist taught us to pray: "Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness ... make straight your way before me" (Ps. 5:8). In Ps. 23:3, the Psalmist, based on his relationship to the Divine Shepherd, says

with confidence, that "He leads me in paths of righteousness" or "He leads me in straight paths ..."

#### 4.3.2 Deliverance

Muslims and Christians alike sense the need for deliverance. The words "deliver us from evil" in the Lord's Prayer finds its parallel not so much in Al-Fatihah, but in other verses of the Qur'an, which are used regularly in prayer by Muslims

Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak, from the evil of that which he created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant witchcraft, And from the evil of the envier when he envieth (113:1-5).

In fact, at the end of the second movement of the prayer ritual, just after the ascription of "glory to God" and the confession of submission, the worshipper would say, "I seek refuge with God from the accursed devil" - a very common phrase used in the daily life of Muslims.

These verses describe prayers for deliverance from different kinds of evil and also from Satan himself. As Yusuf Ali (1946:1808) explains the viewpoint of Muslims: "Our trust in God is the refuge from every kind of fear and superstition, every kind of danger and evil". He adds:

Evil insinuates itself in all sorts of insidious ways ... this power of evil may be Satan or his host of evil ones or evil men or the evil inclinations within man's will.

But the idea of different kinds of evil, including Satan and jinn, is not unusual or strange. As Parshall (1985:79) informs us, "The Muslim world view is saturated with consciousness of the spirit world". Not forgetting, at the same time, that the belief in Angels is one of the fundamental articles of Faith of Islam. Of this group we have Satan or the Devil who most Muslims believe is an angel who fell through pride and is now an accursed

tempter. Closely associated with Angels are the jinns who are said to have been created from "flame" and are involved with Satan in obstructing the plans of Allah and leading people astray from the "straight path". Not all jinns, though, are said to be evil.

In this connection, one recurrent problem is fear: fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of evil and fear of sickness (Parshall 1983:119). For this reason

Millions of Muslims wear charms or amulets ... to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. A verse from the Qur'an is written on a small piece of paper which is forced into the amulet (Parshall 1980:80).

According to Anderson (1985:125),

the Prophet himself not only firmly believed in the jinn and in the power of the evil-eye, but apparently allowed spells to ward off the latter provided only the names of God and of good angels were used.

There is also a general belief in the power of magic-workers and others to cause demon possession. Particularly feared is the "Evil-Eye", a searching, a penetrating glance either from one of the jinn or from another human being, which is capable of captivating its victim and enslaving him to the power of demons. The power of the "Evil-Eye" is most feared over children. As we are told

The mother's chief anxiety is to protect it from the evil eye: it is with a view to protecting it from the glance of an evil jinn that many well-to-do families keep the child dirty and ill clad (in Gilchrist 1986:338).

In actual fact, Muhammad is reported to have recommended the chanting of appropriate verses as a remedy for the evil eye (in Gilchrist 1986:338). We also find that:

In the rural areas of the Punjab in Pakistan, young

women will not dress themselves fashionably because of their fear of the jinn. When a small child will not stop crying, the mother will take a red chili, circle it around the head of the child seven times and then throw it into the fire. The assumption is that a jinn wanted her child to play with his child; when the chili is thrown in the fire, the jinn runs away (in Parshall 1980:82).

Similarly, in the Lord's Prayer there is the prayer for deliverance from every kind of evil and from the Evil One. As Bosch (1985:41) explains: "The original Greek of the word translated 'evil' can either mean evil or evil one". Whether we choose to use the term "evil" or "evil one", the fact remains that evil is a reality and that the scriptures are clear that there is a spiritual being who is behind the evil that exists. By definition this being is "the tempter" (Matt.4:3), "the enemy" (Matt.13:39), "the great dragon" (Rev. 12:9), "the serpent" (2 Cor.11:3), "Satan" (Mark 3:23,26), etc. With regard to the ploys of Satan, Bosch (1985:42) writes:

His stratagems are many and varied, his influence pervasive. He channels the yearnings of our heart in the direction he wants them to go, he weaves the finest web into which he lures us and before we know where we are, we have accepted his value system and look at reality through his eyes.

Furthermore, the prayer "save us from the Evil One" in the Lord's Prayer, expresses the meaning of one being ready to enjoy the freedom of the sons of God in the Father's Kingdom (Boff 1983:109). The word

"save" in itself, though, in the original Greek "ruesthai" is that of snatching a person away from the brink of an abyss, protecting someone from the vicissitudes of a journey, protecting someone from the traps that lie in the path (Boff 1983:118).

Hence, Satan's task is to draw us away from the good path, to give us wrong directions. But God is able to protect us from the dangers, pulling us away from the ambushes and showing us the right direction to travel.

We are united and therefore share something in common with Muslims in our desire to be guided and to be delivered, not only from all that is evil but from the evil one as well. But for Christians, prayer in the "Name of Jesus" is the key to deliverance which opens up the possibility and opportunity to minister to one of the felt needs of Muslims. Another distinctive of Christian prayer and at the same time a wonderful bridge indeed!

### 4.3.3 Mercy

In Al-Fatihah we have a reminder of God's compassion and mercy. The words Rahman and Rahim both signify God's mercy, Rahman being the intensive form of the noun (Ayoub 1984:44). Also, Rahman refers to what God is in Himself, while Rahim refers to how God relates to humankind. Thus God "proceeds in relation to people in terms of what He is Himself" (Cragg 1971:75).

#### 4.3.3.1 Mercy and Majesty

God's mercy, however, must not be seen in isolation from His majesty. In fact, the Qur'an itself indicates that God's majesty and mercy are not unrelated, "God, the Master of human destiny prescribed for Himself Mercy" (Surah 6:12).

Muslims, therefore, hope or expect that God will be merciful on the Day of Judgement when they are called to account for their sins (Chapman 1989:312). Cragg (1971:76) reinforces this idea by saying:

This mercy belongs with the sovereignty of the last day, the authority of final judgement which was the fervent eschatological meaning of the doctrine of unity.

But the question remains, "are we, then, to conclude that mercy can only be obtained in the final day of judgement and whenever Al-Fatihah is recited in salat, the future is always in view?"

In other words, what about the need to experience God's mercy on a daily basis? That question really leads us to the next section that deals with the relationship between mercy and forgiveness.

#### 4.3.3.2 Mercy and Forgiveness

In the Qur'an, Muslims are enjoined to offer prayer for "forgiveness of sins" (Surah 3:17). Even in the Qur'an's theme of worship the will to be forgiven is a constant exhortation ... "Seek forgiveness from God" runs the repeated command (Cragg 1973:110). Furthermore,

In forgiving, too, God is answerable to His Names: Al-Ghafir, Al-Ghafur, Al-Ghaffar which mean that, in some sense, pardon is inherently divine, and "refuge" - if need be from him - is always in Him (Cragg 1992:67).

Gilchrist (1986:263) adds:

Islam recognizes that evil deeds are an affront to the creator and merit his punishment and yet teaches that God will exercise forgiveness and remit the sins of the faithful.

Forgiveness, however, cannot be looked at in isolation. What is it that we ask God to forgive? In the Lord's Prayer the word "debts" is used. The meaning of that word understood in its Christian use is different from its use in classical Greek. As Bosch (1985:30) explains

in different versions of the Bible in English the Greek word "Opheilemata" is translated as "debts" or "wrongs" or "trespass" or "sins". The Greek word, however, primarily means "monetary debts".

From this primary meaning a secondary one developed: whatever a person is or says or does, he or she is and says and does, as a loan from God. In other words, a debt is an obligation incurred - in this case God has placed upon us an obligation we have failed to discharge (Sanders 1977:99). This obligation embraces sins of

omission and commission. We have therefore robbed God and people, and stand in need of forgiveness. For Muslims it is a question of "sins" rather than "sin". But even though that is the case, the

Qur'an contains remarkably little definition of sins. It does, however, have some denunciation of specific sins like pride, ingratitude towards God, coveting, or rejection of God (Goldsmith 1991:47).

Others, like Abu Talib and Al-Ghazzali (in Goldsmith 1991:48), have gone to the extent of dividing sins into four basic categories viz. (a) sins of pride; (b) Satanic sins - envy, deceit and other evil attitudes in the mind; (c) animal sins - anger, lust, coveting, etc.; (d) Beasts of prey sins - murder, rape, fighting and other acts of violence. Parshall (1989:120) also points out

that sin is categorized according to degrees, much as in Roman Catholic theology. A minor sin can be said to become major in dimension under any of the following conditions

1. Persistence in committing sin.
2. Treating it lightly.
3. Taking pleasure in it.
4. Being boastful of doing evil.

This still brings up the question of original sin. As far as original sin - that basic disposition and tendency in all of us to sin, arising from the sin of Adam, is concerned (Gilchrist 1986:263), Muslims regard it as incongruent with the idea of God's justice. As Asad (1980:53) argues,

God does not make the child responsible for the doings of his father ... and how could he have made all those numberless generations of humankind responsible for a sin of disobedience committed by a remote ancestor?

The fact of the matter, Muslims would say, is that

evil is never essential or even original; it is an acquisition of man's later life and is due to a misuse of innate, positive qualities with which God has endowed every human being (Asad 1980:53).

Sin, however, can be avoided or overcome, as Kateregga (1980:108) explains, "since it is acquirable through choice, it can also be avoidable through knowledge and true guidance from God".

For, Christians, however,

Divine forgiveness can never be a simple amnesty or a reassuring "ma'lesh" - that wonderful word in colloquial Arabic which means everything from "never mind" to "it doesn't matter" (Chapman 1989:124).

For if the sacrificial system of the Old Testament taught the Jews anything, it was that forgiveness involves suffering - the suffering of an innocent animal, which at best was a shadow of the reality found in Christ (Col.2:17). There is also an incredibly perfect illustration of the link between suffering and forgiveness in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The basic message here is that God loves:

His love is totally unexpected, since we would not expect him to love his rebellious creatures. Not only does he proclaim his love, he demonstrates it in action. And this demonstration of his unexpected love is costly to him, for he really suffers in the process of forgiving people their sins (Bailey 1989:140).

What does this all mean? It means that

God does indeed show mercy on whom he wills (Rom. 9:18) but we can know where we stand before him. The way the father shows his love for both his sons shows how God's love is extended to us all and how he takes the initiative and comes to meet us and welcome us home (Chapman 1989:143).

Furthermore, we can be sure of God's mercy and forgiveness. We do not have to wait until the Day of Judgement before we know how we stand before Him, as is the case for Muslims. Citing the prodigal again,

he knows that he is forgiven because of the way his father goes out of his way to show that the wrongs of



the past are forgiven and forgotten (Chapman 1989:143).

In fact, even though the words "forgive us our debts..." in the Lord's Prayer,

looks toward the great day of reckoning which the world is approaching, the disclosure of God's majesty in the final judgement, they ask not only for mercy in the hour of the last judgement but also that God might grant them forgiveness already today. For through Jesus their Lord, they belong to the age of Salvation (Jeremias 1978:105).

But the matter of mercy and forgiveness does not concern the individual alone. We are social beings and in a religious sense we belong to a community of the faithful - in the case of Christians, the Family of God or the Church; in the case of Muslims, the Ummah.

#### 4.3.3.3 Mercy and Social Relations

The question of forgiveness, however, does not only take into account the relationship between God and people but also between people and people. We are thinking here of the social dimension as suggested by the second part of that verse in the Lord's Prayer that focuses on forgiveness: "... Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". In this prayer,

there is laid upon us the duty of forgiving the sins of others. And this fact is for ever true, that a man is never closer and more kin to God than when he forgives a fellowman (Barclay 1972:111).

Schweizer (in Bosch 1985:31) also stresses the importance of this aspect of the prayer, as he explains

so important to Jesus and his community was a readiness to forgive that a summons to forgive was incorporated into their prayer, where it is actually out of place.

It is fundamental to Christian conviction, however, that God's forgiving us is not made dependent on our forgiving others, as Bosch (1985:31) points out: "Our forgiveness of others do not earn us the right to be forgiven by God". In fact, the word

"as" (in as we forgive) does not imply a comparison; how could Jesus' disciples compare their poor forgiving with God's mercy? Rather "as" introduces a declaration. With these words he who prays reminds himself of his own need to forgive (Jeremias 1978:103).

At this point, one is led to ask, "what of the Muslim?" in this regard. According to Yusuf Ali (1946:1316), one of the characteristics of those who truly worship and serve God, is

while knowing that they are not themselves perfect, they are ready to forgive others, even though they are sorely tried with anger and provocation - Q.42:37.

Now, it is true that Muslims are reminded of others when they pray side by side and turn to greet those on either side at the end of their prayers, the question still remains whether the obligation to forgive is emphasized at this point in prayer. Perhaps, it is in this context that Chapman (1989:312) observes that

it is not unfair to say that while the Qur'an has plenty to say about mercy and compassion, the idea that we have an obligation to forgive others who do us wrong, do not come easily to the mind of the Muslim.

This could be attributed to their worldview which is based on the Shari'ah. For example, on one hand it is said

The ideal way to deal with personal disputes and injury is not to seek vengeance at all but reconciliation, forgiveness and making the offender aware of the gravity of his offence ... (Doi 1984:223).

On the other hand,

in private defence, they must be just in using the amount of force necessary. But in all cases, they must not seek a compensation greater than the injury suffered by them. The most they can do is to demand equal redress ... (Doi 1984:223).

Cragg (1973:111), however, points out that

forgiveness is at the heart of all social existence. For it has to do with turning the human condition, collective and personal, through self-accusation towards mercy, liberty and peace.

Another distinctive of the Christian faith is that the obligation to forgive one another is found in the context of prayer. This is not only true in the Lord's Prayer but in other parts of the Scriptures as well. Jesus taught in Matt.5:23-24, for instance, "if therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering". After all, the address "Our Father" binds us together as members of God's family or as the Messianic community of the Father's kingdom. This in no way, however, detracts from the fact that Muslims see themselves as the *Ummah* of Islam - that community of the faithful.

The above in reference to the need of mercy, as it relates to forgiveness and that which is common to both Christians and Muslims, must suffice. But before we conclude this section it is necessary to point out that even though "God's Mercy is to anyone, believer or unbeliever, obedient or disobedient, Muslim or non-Muslim, black or white" (Kateregga and Shenk 1980:4), there is no guarantee that God will shower His mercy on those who ask for it because in the final analysis "He makes whom He wills enter into his mercy" (Surah 42:8; 48:25).

The foregoing has been an attempt to do a comparative study of *Al-Fatihah* and the Lord's Prayer, in which we highlighted the

Basic Structure, the Common Features and the Specific Needs. Each of these aspects were just a sampling of the sort of commonality that not only bind Muslims and Christians together but also provide ideal opportunities for further dialogue and clarification with a view to instil appreciation and improve Muslim-Christian understanding and relations.

Also, on the basis of such understanding and appreciation, there arises the opportunity for mutual witness, as Christians and Muslims share together in the presence of God, the riches of their faith and the invitation to full commitment.

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

Prayer is a powerful force in the hands of Christians. In this respect Andrew Murray (s.a.:16) makes the point that "it is the very essence of true religion, the channel of all blessings, the secret of power and life".

But prayer can also be a useful tool to foster good relations between people of different faiths, particularly between Christians and Muslims. This follows naturally as both Christians and Muslims are not only well acquainted with this spiritual exercise in an academic sense but are very much practitioners of prayer.

The foregoing chapters have been an exploratory attempt to study Muslim prayer (salat). It has been a rewarding experience to the extent that we were able to see what value Muslims attach to prayer. But we have also been made aware of how involved prayer is. Therefore it was necessary to discuss the various aspects of salat, viz. the call to prayer, the postures in prayer, preparation for prayer (ablutions), the place and direction of prayer and the various recitations in prayer, in much detail. That was largely a description from their own perspective. But we then went on to bring to the fore a number of interpretations from the side of various Christians with positive and negative comments. At the same time we tried to show what we considered to be strengths, for instance: their emphasis on God's majesty and goodness which should evoke a sense of gratitude and worship; and the sense of unity and solidarity which they experience during salat. But there were weaknesses as well, for example, the rigorous nature of the number of times of prayer as well as the various movements during prayer constitute a system of ritual that does not produce the kind of spirituality that is induced by the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. But that does not mean that Christians are exempt from the possibility of

practising a mere outward form of religion.

Then we sought to show that Muslims and Christians share common needs, viz. for guidance, deliverance and mercy, by comparing Al-Fatihah of the Qur'an and the Lord's Prayer. But in so doing we also highlighted several Christian distinctives, such as the privilege of calling God "Father", the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer and the joy of experiencing God's mercy daily - not just in the future judgement.

In light of the above we need to now consider several aspects that need further reflection and clarification in terms of the role of prayer in Christian-Muslim relations. These contain a number of missiological implications arising from the foregoing.

### 5.1 DIALOGUE AND WITNESS

As this issue is crucial for fostering good relations, we give our attention to it first. We need to note that dialogue is not a new idea but one that finds its roots in the teaching of the Bible, particularly in the strategy of Paul in the Book of Acts (17:2,17; 24:25). Throughout Acts, Luke (the author) uses the word "dialogue" to indicate "reasoning", "proclaiming" and "evangelizing"; but at the same time the apostolic proclamation was not mere monologue (Goldsmith 1982:116). Our concern here, however, is not to go into details but to briefly set out some parameters for dialogue. It would be better to define dialogue first so as to be certain as to what we are talking about. Dialogue means:

a conversation, a process of communication through speech. It is a reciprocal relationship in which two or more parties endeavour both to express accurately what they mean and to listen to and respect what the other person says ... (Kimball 1991:86).

But some Christians may feel that to engage in dialogue is to avoid the command of Christ to proclaim the gospel. Some Muslims may also share the same feelings in the sense they will be

betraying their missionary purpose in leading others to the "straight path". Yet such feelings are mistaken. For in dialogue one is witnessing to one's faith in a non-aggressive or threatening way. As Kimball (1991:115) puts it:

Dialogue aims at mutual understanding through respectful exchange ... it stands on its own, not needing justification in relation to the imperative to proclaim the central message in one's tradition. At the same time, it does not require and should not encourage people to dilute the strength of their religious commitment.

But this does not mean that dialogue is the only form of communication in the context of religious pluralism. Preaching and sharing Christ's love through deeds of kindness can also be used. Davies (in Stott 1986:59), however, considers proclamation a sign of arrogance while dialogue a sign of humility, as he says "monologue is entirely lacking in humility ...". But "coveting for all men what in our moments of highest aspiration, we covet for ourselves, the privileges of walking consciously in the steps and in the power of the Crucified" (in Goldsmith 1982:117), cannot be termed arrogance.

Having said that, appreciation should precede reconciliation of ideas. For we believe that there are elements of goodness, beauty and truth in other religions and cultures and therefore it would be helpful to look at the elements that would evoke words of appreciation. This is what the apostle Paul did in his sermon to the Athenians recorded in Acts 17. In that sermon he commends the Athenians for being very religious, although he was not condoning their idolatry as such. In the context of Christian-Muslim relations there are certainly many things we can show appreciation for without being facetious. We have to be genuine in commending Muslims for being strong monotheists, for instance. Other things were mentioned earlier on in this chapter.

From this we can then look at the similarities and differences. In some cases there are real and substantial differences between Muslims and Christians and it does not augur well for effective

dialogue if we pretend that the differences are not that great, e.g. the unity of Allah (Tawhid) is the foremost theological formulation of Islam. It is constantly emphasized in the Qur'an, Hadith and salat. Parshall (1994:62) explains:

According to their rational orientation Muslims cannot comprehend Jesus as fully God without ascribing partnership or duality to Allah. Thus they consistently make a forceful objection to allowing Christ to assume any status other than that of a prophet.

Therefore it is incumbent on Christians to explain to Muslims in a friendly environment, established through dialogue, why belief in Christ being more than a mere prophet<sup>18</sup> is foundational to everything else they believe. For instance, "to the Apostolic church it was beyond doubt the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus which provided the conclusive evidence that he was "both Lord and Christ" (Anderson 1984:178).

At the same time one should be open to the possibility of gaining deeper insights into one's own beliefs. For as we talk to others we would foster understanding, correct stereotypes, explore similarities and differences and facilitate means of witness and co-operation across religious lines (Kimball 1991:85).

Then, in what Kimball (1991:91) calls spiritual dialogue, we can exchange ideas with Muslims on the meaning of prayer or worship in general. We can even pray in one another's presence in an effort to create understanding and in the Christian's case to show that prayer works in the name of Christ. As Luther (1972:1079) explains:

Asking in the name of Christ really means relying on him in such a way that we are accepted and heard for his own sake and not for our own.

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<sup>18</sup> Although Christ's prophethood is something that Christians should study in greater detail.



It is also important that Muslims hear us communing with God through Jesus. But prayer must not be to impress Muslims with our relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Goldsmith 1991:113). All in all genuine dialogue calls for authenticity, humility, integrity and sensitivity (Stott 1986:72).

## 5.2 POSTURES IN PRAYER

Another aspect that merits our attention at this point is that of the Christian convert from Islam. The questions usually revolve around the convert's life in the context of a Christian congregation, with reference to the use of Muslim prayer forms such as the postures of salat. We have already discussed ablutions and postures to a certain degree in Chapter Two. Now we continue the discussion on postures in prayer.

Basically there are three approaches to the general question, although it is applicable to prayer as well: a) Those who come to faith in Christ must make radical decisions to follow Christ in making outward confessions, for example through baptism, and thereby risk losing their lives through martyrdom; b) They are encouraged to flee to countries where they will be free to practise their Christianity within church contexts that are available; c) There are those who are told to live as secret believers, i.e. they observe the outward forms of Islam, while experiencing in their hearts that new dimension that is based on the person and work of Christ.

Assuming, however, that the people we are talking about are those who have the freedom to practise their new found faith, the question is "should they be allowed to continue with the postures they are acquainted with?" This should not be too difficult a question to answer, as we know that prayer in the Old and New Testaments is generally accompanied by some form of bodily posture. Ezekiel fell on his face when he saw the glory of God (Ezekiel 3:23). Jesus took the same position in Gethsemane. Daniel, Stephen, Peter and Paul knelt in prayer.

We also notice in the Old Testament that lifting up of hands towards heaven accompanied kneeling or standing (Ex. 9:29; I Kings 8:22; 2 Chron. 6:13).

As far as the content is concerned, we also know that prayer is a time of worship, praise, adoration and petition, so with the prayer ritual, there is no reason why they could not use verses from the Bible which comment on standing, kneeling, bowing and prayer with lifted hands (Parshall 1985:204).

There is also the question of whether it is helpful for prayer to be made in the symbolic direction of Jerusalem, in keeping with an Old Testament practice to be found in the Book of Daniel. While for Christians God is more interested in the inward spiritual condition, there is no reason why we should not permit such a practice, provided it is explained that the matter of direction is not an issue as far as God is concerned. In fact, Christians are taught that their bodies have become God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

This kind of adaptation will not only help the new believer feel at home but will also make it possible and perhaps easier for Muslims to become Christians. For very often the criticism is expressed that missionaries are responsible for deculturizing people and thereby alienating them from their natural habitats.

### 5.3 ENCOUNTERING GOD

We know that prayer by and large is a human response, a human activity and in one sense it is an index of human character, for the words one uses may reveal inner thoughts and intentions. But even though God is not speaking in the act of prayer, God is being addressed. In that sense, what one says to God and about God in prayer provides insights into God's identity, from the pray-ers perspective (Balentine 1993:264).

In salat God is addressed as the Sovereign One (Lord of the

Worlds), the Compassionate and Merciful One, the Great One etc. Yet from the Christian's point of view there are some missing dimensions, e.g. God cannot be referred to as "Father". This is where Christians can humbly affirm that through Jesus Christ we can experience the many blessings that come from that father-child relationship. As Calvin (s.a:94) put it so well,

by means of prayer, we penetrate to those riches which are reserved with our heavenly Father for our use. For between God and men there is a certain communication; by which they enter into the sanctuary of heaven and in his immediate presence remind him of his promises...

But all of this can only become real when we pray "in the Spirit" - which means praying by means of and in dependence on the Spirit's help, in the sphere of the Spirit, motivated and empowered by Him (Sanders 1977:56). He also imparts a sense of sonship and acceptance that creates freedom and confidence in the presence of God. For that reason Paul wrote: "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying `Abba! Father!'"

There is no greater joy than this, and it is therefore also what we desire for Muslims. We therefore not only pray but also witness and dialogue to that end, bearing in mind that this calls for a proper attitude. As Charles Taber (in Parshall 1980:121) exhorts us,

abandon triumphalism and develop sincere respect, appreciation and sensitivity for Muslim persons, for their faith and for their way of life. Mission characterized by any other attitude ipso facto militates against and misrepresents the gospel.

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## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC WORDS

<i>`adha</i>	To take refuge
<i>asma al-husna</i>	The "beautiful names" (of God)
<i>azan</i>	The call to prayer
<i>bismillah/basmalah</i>	"In the name of God"
<i>dhikr</i>	Remembrance of God through the repetition of the names of God (often until in a trance)
<i>du'a</i>	Personal petitionary prayer
<i>hadith</i>	A tradition concerning the sayings or example of Muhammad
<i>hajj</i>	The annual pilgrimage to Mecca.
<i>ijma</i>	Consensus of religious authorities or scholars.
<i>imam</i>	One who leads the prayers in a mosque.
<i>jinn</i>	Spirits beings, some of whom are evil.
<i>jum'a</i>	Friday congregational prayer.
<i>kufr</i>	To cover up, conceal; to deny God.
<i>ka'aba</i>	Cube-like structure in Mecca which contains the famous black stone.
<i>muezzin</i>	The one who calls to prayer.
<i>mukhalafa</i>	Doctrine of otherness or difference.
<i>pir</i>	A saint or spiritual guide in Sufi Islam.
<i>qiblah</i>	Direction towards Mecca for Muslim prayer.
<i>qiyas</i>	Reasoning by analogy.
<i>ramadan</i>	The month of fasting in the Muslim calendar.
<i>salaam</i>	Greeting of peace
<i>salat</i>	Five prescribed daily prayers.
<i>shari`ah</i>	Complex system of laws covering religious & secular life.
<i>shirk</i>	The sin of associating partners with God.
<i>sunnah</i>	Habits, customs and sayings of Muhammad.
<i>surah</i>	Chapter of the Qur'an.
<i>tashahhud</i>	The confession of the creed. Another word is Shahadah.
<i>tawhid</i>	Doctrine that emphasizes the oneness of God.
<i>ummah</i>	The community of believers or the faithful.
<i>wudu</i>	Ritual washing before prayer.
<i>zakat</i>	Alms given in accordance with the law of Islam.

NB: Other words are explained in the text, although there is some repetition.