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Christ's God – Mohammed's God

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Reflections

A number of guest columnists now contribute to Reflections. They come from various walks of life and offer a variety of 'reflections'.

Though about 400,000 Muslims now live in Australia, only in recent years have we recognised this significant new religious presence among us. We need to increase our understanding of Islam and our new immigrants and to invite them into our circles of discourse and community.

Since the September attacks in the US, in particular, many Muslims have felt isolated and under suspicion, and it will be important to reassure our Muslim neighbours and friends of our esteem and friendship. Some parishes and ecumenical groups have exchanged visits with Muslim communities and mosques so we may meet and understand each other better.

The Pope's recent visit to a mosque in Syria has set an example. Many of us have visited and prayed at synagogues and leaders of the Jewish community are readily welcomed into our religious conversations and gatherings. Muslims, however, have tended to remain outsiders.

Although Mohammed wanted to restore worship of the one God in 7th century Arabia, his image of God contrasts strongly with that of Jesus.

Mohammed did not have a direct know-

ledge of Jewish or Christian Scriptures, but only through oral transmission. He recognised Christ as a prophet but decided Christ could not be God, that he did not die and did not rise from the dead. Mohammed could not accept that God, in the person of Christ, could endure such suffering.

This is not a trivial or unintelligent position, but highlights how startling is the claim of Christians: that Christ in his crucifixion so identifies with human suffering in this ridiculously extravagant act of solidarity with all stricken humanity. Here, we believe, Christ unveils the deepest truth about God, who embraces in himself all pain and suffering and promises to transform these into new life.

The crucifixion manifests not just the Father's unlimited compassion for all people, but that God is profoundly moved by human suffering, indeed, as it were, is shaken to the core of his being. Mohammed could not accept that the

Almighty, all-powerful God could endure such humiliation. Indeed, without faith in Christ, Jesus remains the ultimate 'loser', who invites his followers to take up their cross every day and become 'losers', too.

For Mohammed, however, God was a 'winner', a warrior who fought with Muslims in battle to vanquish their enemies. While Mohammed engaged in 27 military engagements and personally fought in nine of them, Jesus abjured such military means and accepted humiliation and suffering so we would know what faith in him involved.

Christ died so we would be astonished at the depth of God's love and feeling for all 'the poor', the biblical code for all struggling with pain, suffering, alienation, sin in all its forms.

Christ dies the ultimate victim of injustice. He was no warrior like Mohammed. The Muslim 'martyrs' are those who die fighting to defend Islam, whereas the Christian martyrs die, like Christ, as victims, with this wild hope in Christ's resurrection.

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