

# What Islam Teaches about taking an Oath: “So help me God”

People in public office at the local, state, and federal levels are required to take an oath of office that requires them to swear, or affirm, to support the *United States Constitution*. This is based on Article 6, Clause 3 of that *Constitution* (the “Oaths Clause”). Here is the wording of that oath of office as required by Title 5, Section 3331 of the *United States Code*:

*I, AB, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.*

What does Islam teach about taking an oath? According to Islamic Doctrine,

*An oath is only validly effected [sic] if sworn by a name of Allah Most High, or an attribute of his entity.*

*Reliance of the Traveller (Umdat al-Salik), A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law, o18.3, p. 620*

This means that for an oath to be valid under Islam it must be sworn in the name of Allah or in the name of one of his attributes, such as the All-Merciful, or the Knower of the Unseen.

There are ninety-nine such attributes or names of Allah, and these names are found in various verses of the Koran.

So when a Muslim takes a federal oath of office to support the *U.S. Constitution* and ends that oath by stating the required words, “so help me God,” is that Muslim actually swearing that oath in the name of Allah, the god whose commands and attributes are found in the Koran?

To answer that question, we need to consider the fact that Christianity played a significant role in the early development of the United States. Dr. Mark David Hall wrote that the Founders “referenced the Bible more than all Enlightenment authors combined,” and that the Bible “was cited far more often than any other book, article, or pamphlet.” Hall also noted that the Founders “identified themselves as Christians, were influenced in important ways by Christian ideas, and generally thought it appropriate for civic authorities to encourage Christianity.”

Mark David Hall, “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” *The Heritage Foundation*, June 7, 2011

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the United States continued as a predominantly Christian nation, and it is interesting to note that in the middle part of that century various actions were taken by the federal government that emphasized that fact. It was during this time period that:

*The motto IN GOD WE TRUST was placed on United States coins largely because of the increased religious sentiment existing during the Civil War.*

This idea was initiated by an 1861 letter from a Protestant minister to the Secretary of the Treasury that stated:

*One fact touching our currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked. I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form on our coins.*

“History of ‘In God We Trust,’” *United States Department of the Treasury*

And in 1862 the U.S. Congress added the words “so help me God” to the federal oaths of office.

The words “so help me God” were added by the U.S. Congress to federal oaths of office during a time that saw an increase in Christian religious sentiment. Is there any support for the idea that when these words were added, the word “God” was also meant to include the Muslim god Allah?

The answer is “No,” because the God of Christians and Jews, and Islam’s god Allah are not the same. For instance, here is what Allah has to say in the Koran about Christians and Jews:

Allah states that the only religion acceptable to him is Islam (e.g., 3:19 and 3:85); Christians and Jews are disbelievers (e.g. 2:120, 3:99, 3:110, and 5:65), and Jews are among the worst enemies of Muslims (5:82); Allah curses Christians and Jews (9:30) and states that those who believe that Allah had a Son commit the one unforgiveable sin in Islam, *Shirk* (e.g. 4:48 and 4:116); Allah states that those who commit *Shirk* will go to Hell (e.g. 3:151 and 5:72-73); Allah

states that Christians and Jews are among the worst of creatures and “will abide in the fire of Hell” (98:6); Allah specifically forbids Muslims from being friends with Christians and Jews (5:51), and instead commands Muslims to fight Christians and Jews (9:29).

Allah states that Jesus was not crucified, but it only appeared so (4:157-158). Allah took Jesus bodily into paradise and made one of Jesus’ disciples look like Jesus; it was that disciple who was crucified. Muslims who know their religion look at a crucifix or a painting of the Crucifixion and see an imposter hanging on the cross. And if there was no Crucifixion, there was no Resurrection. So Islam teaches that Christianity is a false religion based on a fraud.

Taking into consideration the religious environment of 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, there is no support for any claim that during a period of increased Christian religious sentiment, the word “God” that was then applied to oaths and stamped on coins would include the deity of a separate religion that was openly hostile to Christians and Jews.

But what if a Muslim claims that when he swears to support the *Constitution* he is personally referring to Allah, the god of Islam, when he says the words “so help me God” in his oath of office?

In the first place, Muslims are generally advised against using any other word than “Allah” when referring to the god of Islam:

*But what the Muslim should use in his worship... and all other circumstances*

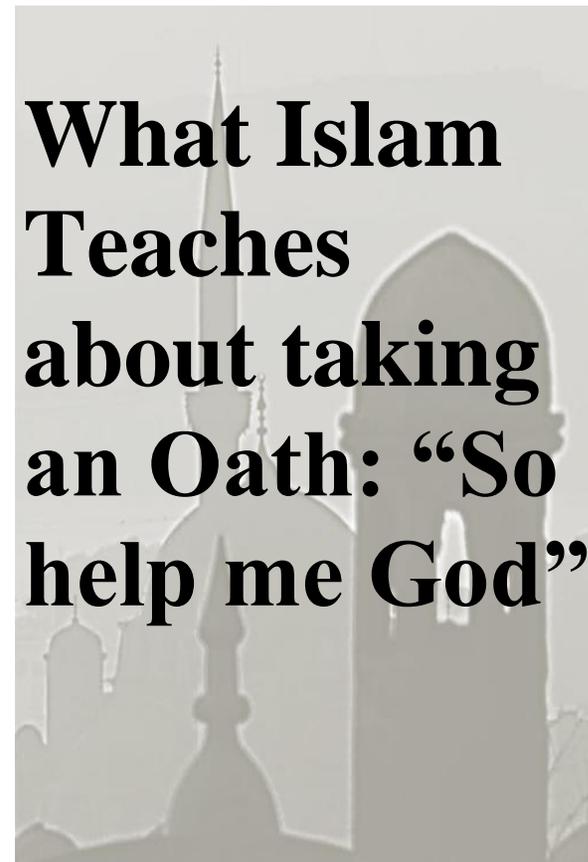
*when referring to Allah...is the word “Allah” ...because that has become a symbol for the Muslims and something that distinguishes them, and it helps to avoid any confusion between what they mean and what others mean when they say “God”, as others may sometimes be referring to Allah, but sometimes they may be referring to something else... when...swearing oaths, he has to avoid doing that with words other than the known Arabic words for the divine names and attributes, as they are confirmed in the Qur’aan and Sunnah.*

“Translating the names and attributes of Allah into other languages and swearing by them,” *Islam Question & Answer*, April 16, 2012

And, as I pointed out in my book *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*, there are many tenets of the *Constitution* that are in direct conflict with many tenets of Islamic Doctrine. So how can a Muslim swear to Allah, the god of Islam, that he will support a document that in large part is in direct conflict with many of the teachings and commands of Allah?

This means that when a Muslim public official takes the Federal Oath of Office to support the *U.S. Constitution* and ends that oath with the words, “so help me God,” he is in reality giving an oath to someone other than Allah. And according to Islamic Doctrine, that oath is therefore neither valid nor binding.

Dr. Kirby is the author of six books on Islam. His latest book is *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*. His books are available on Amazon.com.



Part of a series on Islam

By Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

IslamSeries@gmail.com

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