

Allah Is God: A Challenge for Christians and Muslims

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Leaders of the Stone-Campbell movement minimized the theological relevance of the OT and its view of God hundreds of years before Christ. Globalization has brought Muslims into Western communities. This presents a challenge of an even greater magnitude—an understanding of God that emerged in Arabia 600 years after Christ. This article presents similarities and differences between the Muslim and Christian views of God, acknowledging the influence of completely different worldviews on the issue.

The focus and theology of the Stone-Campbell Movement limited its impact on the global community. A call back to the Bible (specifically the NT) would not be relevant to those who had never been in the Bible. The logic, individualism, and freedom of choice of these advocates of the Christian faith would seem very strange to a Muslim. Their worldview has more in common with the OT and the God of the OT.

James Barclay, the first missionary from this movement, went to Jerusalem in 1851 with plans to reach Jews but found more receptivity among the Muslims.¹ While on furlough, he wrote *The City of the Great King* (1858), the best description of Jerusalem available from the middle of the 19th century. A search for references to views of Allah in Barclay's book and other 19th-century publications of this movement proves disappointing, displaying scant interaction with Muslims and a low priority given to global evangelism. The world got the attention of Americans in World War II, but Islam has gotten the nation's attention after 9/11. Regrettably, an ignorance of Islam has led many to fear them more than to understand them. With the unprecedented changes within the Muslim world today, now is the time to embrace "the challenge of Islam." This article aims to provide needed information and perspective to those who desire to expand their understanding of Islam today.

¹ Paul Blowers, "Barclay, James (1807–1874)." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (ed. Douglas A. Foster, et. al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 69.

THE CHALLENGE

No challenge to the ideals of the Christian faith has been as long, bitter, and intense as that posed by Islam.² The teachings of Islam deny core beliefs of the Christian faith yet claim to follow the God of Abraham and to be the succession to Judaism and Christianity.

As Islam emerged from Arabia, it met opposition from Jews and Christians. The claim of new revelations from Allah that rejected fundamental Christian beliefs overshadowed what common ground might be found in their belief in one God. Evidence of the lingering confrontation can be seen today in the large Arabic calligraphy around the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem with references to Isa (Jesus) from the Qur'an. Just 600 meters from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are the words in large letters "Allah has no son."³ Muslims claim that they and the Christians worship the same God but deny the incarnation and crucifixion.

All Arabs, whether Christian or Muslim, refer to God as *Allah*, since it is the only word for "God" in Arabic. It is, for example, found in nearly all Arabic translations of the Bible. According to most Arab linguists, the word is a contraction of the definitive article *al* and the Arabic name for God, *ilah*. Hence the name *Allah* refers to God as the only God, "the God." The word *ilah* derives from a root carrying the ideas of adoration, protection, eternity, power, and creation. Some linguists consider *Allah* a proper noun, that is, the name of God, which has no derivation. It is like the name of God in other Semitic languages: Aramaic (*Elah*), Syriac (*Alaha*) and Hebrew (*El, Eloah, Elohim*).⁴ The word Allah appears 2,685 times in the Qur'an, but Muhammad did not invent the term. It was used by Arab Christians centuries before Islam.⁵

The political challenge becomes real when a declaration today that Allah is God could get a professor fired from a Christian university or a Christian in Malaysia expelled from the country. The theological challenge runs deeper. It involves much more than a Muslim challenging the historical claims of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It goes to the very nature of Allah, humanity, and the ideals of life. For Christians, God reveals himself through verbal revelation, history, and the incarnation. For Islam, Allah is unknowable. Perry says:

² For a good discussion of why we would use the word "challenge" here as well as a response to the question being considered in this article, see Colin Chapman, *Cross & Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008) 12.

³ Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 76.

⁴ Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam and Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) 84.

⁵ George, *Is the Father*, 70.

While God was the exclusive source of the revelation of Muhammad, God himself is not the content of the revelation. Revelation in Islamic theology does not mean God disclosing himself. It is revelation *from* God, not revelation *of* God. God is remote. He is inscrutable and utterly inaccessible to human knowledge. . . . Even though we are his creatures whose every breath is dependent upon him, it is not in inter-personal relationship with him that we received guidance from him.⁶

For Muslims, YHWH of the Jews and Christians is also Allah, the Creator of the universe—the one and only God. If we all worship the same God, then why is there so much dissonance? Islam came 1,500 years after the writing of the Psalms and 600 years after the Gospels, but the possibility of inadequate oral transmission cannot be tolerated or considered by Muslims. They attribute the opposing views to the corruption of the texts of the Bible—with little regard for the manuscript evidence, yet they explain the inconsistencies in the Qur’an by the doctrine of abrogation.

Christians struggle to understand how Allah could be the YHWH of the Bible when Islamic views of the divine nature are so different. Just how great would the differences have to be to conclude that we do not worship the same God? With divergent views regarding the fundamental beliefs of creation, revelation, Christ, and the kingdom, interactions with Muslims often start with God and shared values.

Context also shapes—or complicates—this discussion. Within a Western context that celebrates freedom of religion but at the same time is suspicious and fearful of Muslims, Muslims have been investing a lot of energy and resources to convince their Christian neighbors that they worship the same God and that Islam is a religion of peace. Within the Muslim world, Christian Arabs read the term “Allah” for God in their Arabic translation of the Bible. For the nine years of my life that I worshiped in Arabic with Palestinian Christians, we prayed and sang to Allah. By implication we would assume we worshiped the same God. The first verse I ever memorized in Arabic was Rom 1:16 with its reference to the power of “Allah” to save.

What are the options for Christians? Are the characteristics of Allah and YHWH so different that they cannot refer to the same being? Is Allah really YHWH but misrepresented by Islam? Should Christians take a defensive posture that defines the theological chasm so great between the divergent views of deity that they cannot find common ground in Allah? On the other hand, should Christians take a missional posture that seeks a theological bridge to the Muslim heart, to introduce them to a deeper understanding of God as revealed through Jesus Christ?

A survey of responses to the question of whether Allah is God fall into three categories: yes, no, or both.

⁶ Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958) 155, 157.

IS ALLAH GOD? NO

One can find a tradition within Judaism that viewed Christians as idolaters even while Christians proclaimed they were worshiping the same God as the Jews. One Muslim even raised the question of whether the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox worship the same God since the Orthodox believe the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone and the Catholics believe it comes from the Father and the Son.⁷

“The Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* (Allah is One) represents the primary non-negotiable foundation of Islam. Royster explains: No religion has laid a greater stress on the primacy, centrality, and finality of the Divine Oneness. . . . Allah’s Oneness is not simply a doctrinal position in Islam. It is rather the basis for an entire worldview.”⁸ Polemical literature of the Byzantine era emphasized the discontinuity between Islam and Christianity in their respective understanding of God because God loves, suffers, and serves, but Allah does none of these.⁹

In the 15th and 16th centuries European Christians viewed Muslims as a menace, seldom attempting to understand what they really believed. As Lenning noted, “They had little empathy for the ways a Muslim practiced his faith in Allah. Even the word “Allah” was seen by some as the name of another false god.”¹⁰

Temple Gairdner served as one of the earliest Protestant missionaries among Muslims in Cairo for many years. In 1909 he concluded that very little in Islam resembled the revelation or work of God. According to Vander Werff, while “Gairdner later develops a sympathetic view of Islam (1928) which acknowledges fragments, half-truths in Islam, he never repudiates this early criticism.” By the 20th century more emphasis is made on what Christians and Muslims have in common, namely, faith in the one true God and a common inheritance from Abraham.¹¹ [See Figure 1 for a list of differences.]

Two Turkish brothers, former Muslims, have represented a Baptist perspective on this question in their book, *Unveiling Islam*; in which they ask a series of questions to “show how ridiculous it is to identify Allah with Yahweh: “Is Allah triune? Does Allah have a Son? Is Allah the vicarious Redeemer and atoning Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world? If the answer is no to any of these questions, then

⁷ Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?” In *Do We Worship the Same God: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue* (ed. Miroslav Volf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 97.

⁸ James E. Royster, “Configurations of *Tawhid* in Islam,” *Muslim World*, Vol. 77.1 (1987) 28-29.

⁹ Michael Nazir Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum, 1987) 17-18.

¹⁰ Larry G. Lenning, *Blessing in Mosque and Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980) 6-7.

¹¹ Lyle L. Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1977) 339.

we could not possibly be talking about the same God.”¹² They claim that the popular notion that the monotheistic religions worship the same God is really blasphemous to all three and would best be understood as the influence of modern pluralism.¹³

Figure 1. Allah Is Not Like God

GOD/YHWH	ALLAH/QUR’AN
Revelation of God	Revelation from Allah
<i>All created in image of God</i>	<i>Not created in image of Allah</i>
Adam sinned, need atonement	Adam forgot, need mercy
<i>Unconditional Love</i>	<i>Justice, No love for sinners</i>
God is love	Love is what God does
<i>Offended by sin</i>	<i>Not offended by sin</i>
Trinitarian = plurality of persons within the divine essence	Unitarian = only one divine essence
<i>Accepts intercession of Jesus</i>	<i>Accepts no intercession</i>
Jesus suffered, lost	Muhammad successful, won
<i>Allow innocent to atone</i>	<i>Never puts sins on the innocent</i>
Knowable	Hidden, unknowable
<i>Immanent</i>	<i>Transcendent</i>
Jesus the uncreated Word	The Qur’an the uncreated Word
<i>Gospels (pl)</i>	<i>Injil (Gospel)—singular</i>
Assurance of salvation	No assurance of salvation
<i>Consistent</i>	<i>Abrogation of differing revelations</i>
People need redeemed/grace	People need revelation/guidance

Douglas Jacoby, an author within the Stone-Campbell tradition, identifies the differences between the impersonal, distant, unknowable Allah and the personal, knowable, loving God and says they are “irreconcilable.” He writes, “Do not tell a Christian he worships the same god as the Muslims, and do not tell a Muslim he worships the same God as Christians!”¹⁴

A sample of voices outside Stone-Campbell tradition could include Sam Solomon and John Piper. In *Not the Same God* Solomon develops the thesis that any sameness is an illusion.¹⁵ Despite some similarities, he believes:

the Allah of Islam as expressed in the Doctrine of Monotheism (*Tawbeed*) is the diametric opposite of the Triune Lord God of the Bible—opposite in nature,

¹² Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 108.

¹³ Caner, *Unveiling*, 206-207.

¹⁴ Douglas Jacoby, *Jesus and Islam* (ipibooks, 2009) 129.

¹⁵ Sam Solomon, *Not the Same God: Is the Qur’anic Allah the Lord God of the Bible?* (Wilberforce Publications, 2016) Kindle version.

character, knowability, description, and attributes. . . The Qur’an, although seemingly innocent has as its main objective to undo the message and mission of Christ.¹⁶

For Solomon, the all-encompassing sociopolitical nature of Islam translates into four challenges for Christians: theological, political, administrative, and pragmatic. The theological challenge of the Qur’anic claim that Allah is the same God the Christians worship drives the other three challenges and any attempt to establish so-called “bridges of understanding” in order to facilitate dialogue with Muslim are hopeless.¹⁷ Islam is characterized as an “all-encompassing system” or ideology aimed at countering the message and mission of Christ in stark contrast to a biblical narrative of a “covenant-making and covenant-fulfilling God” in a relationship with humanity through Christ.¹⁸ Muslim scholars reject any direct revelation from Allah, who they claim is unknowable, and what we can know of his will comes through his messengers. Because the Islamic doctrine of “*Wahy*” (revelation) portrays Allah as unable to reveal himself or communicate directly with his messengers, we are left “with no hope or the possibility of any commonality.”¹⁹ He also uses “Allah” in the book as reference only to the supreme deity of Islam and elects to ignore the use of the term “Allah” by the Arab Christians.²⁰

John Piper responded to a *New York Times* article in November 2007 about an initiative at Yale for Muslims and Christians to love God and neighbor together, based on their worship of the same God. He objected on the grounds of John 14:6-10. For him, “Jesus Christ is the litmus paper as to whether or not we are talking about the same God.” Because the Muslim view of Allah is so unlike Jesus, it would be dishonest “to lead Muslims to think that we really have . . . a common vision of God.”²¹

Similarly, Anees Zaka and Diane Coleman propose that only two choices are possible:

- 1) Allah and Yahweh are the same deity, although revealed to Muslims and Christians in antithetical terms, and demonstrating completely different ultimate purposes.
- 2) Allah and Yahweh are separate deities—one false and one true—with attributes that cannot be reconciled and purposes that are in opposition.²²

¹⁶ Ibid., “Introduction,” Kindle 0.3.

¹⁷ Ibid., “Introduction,” Kindle 0.5 (Loc 296).

¹⁸ Ibid., Kindle 0.5 (Loc 309).

¹⁹ Ibid., Kindle 0.5 (Loc 315).

²⁰ Ibid., Kindle “Introduction,” 0.6 (365).

²¹ Sited by Miroslav Volf, *Allah—A Christian Response* (HarperOne, 2011) 34-35.

²² Anees Zaka and Diane Coleman, *The Truth about Islam: The Noble Qur’an’s Teachings in Light of the Holy Bible* (P & R Publishing, 2004) 122.

Those who emphasize the discontinuity between Islam and Christianity focus on the doctrine of Christ, contrasting the transcendence of Allah with the incarnation of Jesus, who is loving, suffering, and serving.²³

The tension is certainly heightened by the fact that Muslims deny that Jesus suffered and died and arose. Timothy George writes, “There can be no Christianity without this event. There can be no Islam with it.”²⁴ The God of the NT is the Father of Jesus (2 Cor 5:19). As George stated: “He is God with us and God for us for all eternity. For this reason, we should not say that Christians and Muslims worship the same God without qualifying biblically what we mean by *same* and what we mean by *God*.”²⁵

This perspective may be the most common within the Stone-Campbell movement. James Beverly identifies the challenge “where we have totally different views of God—especially the full revelation in Christ, the Son of God in contrast to the different view of God’s love and grace in Islam.”²⁶ Glover Shipp published a book on Islam and made it very clear that Allah is not God, saying, “This god, Allah, is markedly different from Yahweh. . . . Muhammad’s god is absolutely demanding and unrelenting.”²⁷

IS ALLAH GOD? YES

Most Muslims claim that Allah and YHWH are one and the same. The Qur’an states: “Our Allah and your Allah is one” (29:46) and “Allah is our Lord and your Lord” (42:15).

Those who deny sameness, as represented in the previous section, would expect a complete match if they are the same. They approach the subject as they would determining whether a banknote is genuine or counterfeit. Any difference renders it counterfeit. Some people are more holistic as they factor in the greatness of God, the influence of culture, and the inadequacies of language in fully explaining the divine.

Possibly one of the earliest examples of a Christian response to the question comes from the Nestorian patriarch Timothy (8th century) in his famous dialogues with the Caliph Al-Mahdi. He recognized that the Muslims and Christians were referring to the same God, although they understand his nature and attributes differently.²⁸

²³ Ali, *Frontiers*, 18.

²⁴ George, *Is the Father*, 97.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁶ James A. Beverly, *Christ and Islam: Understanding the Faith of the Muslims* (College Press, 1997) 74.

²⁷ Glover Shipp, *Christianity and Islam: Bridging Two Worlds* (Covenant Press, 2002) 80-81.

²⁸ Nazir Ali, *Frontiers*, 18.

In the late 1970s, two professors at a university in Kenya, one Muslim (Sunni) and the other Christian (Mennonite) engaged in a written exchange on Islam and Christianity. Both stated that they worship the same God but admitted they witness to different views of God.²⁹ [See Figure 2 for a list of similarities.]

Figure 2. Allah Is Like God

Similarities: God and Allah
Creator of heaven and earth
<i>Reveals His Word through the prophets</i>
Sent Abraham, Moses, Jesus
<i>Blesses those who obey him</i>
Is One
<i>Merciful, Compassionate</i>
Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient

Josh McDowell and Jim Walker, in *Understanding Islam and Christianity*, sought to bridge the contrasting views of God as one and the Trinity. While no specific statement clearly states they are the same, the reader gets that impression with statements like: “Contrasting does not mean the same as contradictory.”³⁰

Miroslav Volf in *Allah—A Christian Response*, has been a recent advocate of sameness. He says:

If the differences are decisive and similarities don’t count, then to Christians the God of the Qur’an will appear as an alien deity, a false god. If similarities are important and differences matter when they signal major incompatibilities, then we will possibly conclude that Muslims have a common God with Christians.³¹

There are Muslims and Christians who disagree so radically about God’s character that they, in fact, do worship different Gods. But then it would be easy to find Christians who disagree among themselves so radically that we may be tempted to conclude that they too worship different Gods.³²

Volf’s opinion that Allah is God focuses on the ideals of both Islam and Christianity as expressed in ten theses, some of which are debatable but give a basis for his conclusions. For example, the object of their worship is the same; Muslim monotheism is compatible with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; both describe

²⁹ Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Uzima, 1980) 8, 89.

³⁰ Josh McDowell and Jim Walker, *Understanding Islam and Christianity* (Harvest House, 2013) 100.

³¹ Volf, *Allah*, 92.

³² Volf, *Allah*, 96.

God as loving and just; allegiance to the one true God is more significant than religious belonging or labels; and true monotheism rejects violence and totalitarian rule.³³ To deny that Allah is God leaves three options for the Christian view of Islam: Muslims worship another God, there is no real object of their worship, or they worship an idol.³⁴

The motivation for seeking commonality included a desire to find peaceful coexistence. The consequences of not worshipping the same God will fuel extremism where each group rejects the other as idolaters with a separate set of ultimate values.³⁵ Volf identifies the dangerous consequences of religious communities claiming their own God to justify violence:

But God is not a flag—at least for the Muslims and Christians, . . . should not treat the Creator of the Universe as a flag. If you turn God into a marker of identity, then you replace the one God, creator and redeemer of all humanity, with the many gods of the nations. The living God, who is above all creatures, morphs into an idol stitched together by human imagination from the stuff of this world, an empty receptacle of a community’s sense of itself. For both Christians and Muslims, God infinitely transcends any community; God is the source of everything that is truly valuable, including any given community in fellowship with all other communities. . . . God should be a *maker* and not a marker of identity. For Christians and Muslims alike, God is the *source* of worshippers’ deepest values. That’s why two communities can have a common God. And that’s why having a common God can be the foundation for unity rather than a cause of division.³⁶

IS ALLAH GOD? YES AND NO

One of the best-known pioneers of the 20th century in helping Christians understand Islam is Kenneth Cragg. While acknowledging the real differences, he takes their submission to the one Creator God as reason to believe they worship the same being. He observed:

It would be fatal to all our mutual tasks to doubt that one and the same God over all was the reality in both. Those who say that *Allah* is not “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” are right if they mean that God is not so described by Muslims. They are wrong if they mean that *Allah* is other than the God of the Christian faith.³⁷

³³ Volf, *Allah*, 14-15.

³⁴ Volf, *Allah*, 84.

³⁵ Volf, *Allah*, 259.

³⁶ Volf, *Allah*, 190.

³⁷ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Orbis 1985) 30.

Cragg would say “yes” and “no” regarding Allah and Yahweh by explaining how the two words both refer to the same subject. Christians and Muslims, however, use very different predicates in reference to the one God.³⁸

The Yale Center for Faith and Culture hosted two consultations on this question. One of the presenters, Reza Shah-Kazemi, gave a Muslim response. He noted that the discussion changes when one moves from a monotheistic perspective to a discussion of the nature of God.

It would seem that our answer to the question whether Muslims and Christians believe in the same God must therefore comprise both positive and negative elements; it has to be both yes and no: “yes” objectively and metaphysically, and “no,” subjectively and theologically. But the objective, metaphysical “yes” outweighs the subjective, theological “no.” In other words, Muslims and Christians do indeed believe in the same God, insofar as the ultimate referent of their belief is That to which the word “God” metaphysically refers: the transcendent Absolute, ultimate Reality, the unique source of Being.³⁹

He continues to identify the tension within Islam created by the fact that the Qur’an accepts the Christian belief in the one God but rejects fundamental Christian beliefs (incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection). He proposed priority be given to the shared belief in one God. On one occasion Muhammad allowed Christian worship in the mosque in Medina, by implication giving priority to the shared belief in God—a courtesy that would never have been given to a polytheist.⁴⁰

It may be helpful to know that with the history of Islamic theology several schools of thought developed over the identity of Allah. Nadar El-Bizri says, “The question of God’s essence (*dhat*) and attributes (*sifat*) confronted Muslim scholars with perplexing paradoxes touching on the divine unity (*tawhid*) and transcendence (*tanzih*).”⁴¹ The issue produced tensions between the Mu’tazilism and Hanbalism.

This perspective is not as common within the Stone-Campbell movement. One example would be from Evertt Huffard (my father), a Bible teacher at Freed-Hardeman University. He served as a missionary for 13 years in Jerusalem, Beirut, and Amman. He observed that “Muslims worship the same God of the Old Testament and the New Testament except for some different concepts about God. The object of Islamic worship was never intended to be a different God.”⁴²

³⁸ Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian* (Orbis, 1984) 124-125.

³⁹ Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Do Christians and Muslims Believe in the Same God?” in *Do We Worship the Same God: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue* (ed. Miroslav Wolf; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012) 78.

⁴⁰ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Christians,” 106.

⁴¹ Nader El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (ed. Tim Winter; Cambridge University Press, 2008) 137.

⁴² Evertt L. Huffard, *Christ or the Qur’an* (Hester, 2001) 61.

A CASE-STUDY: NABEEL QURESHI

It will be easy for any Christian to conclude that Allah is not God because nothing in our religious experience teaches us otherwise, and we suffer no consequences for such a perspective. However, a Muslim has been taught that Muslims and Christians worship the same God; so a denial of this doctrine yields serious consequences. The story of Nabeel Qureshi speaks into this question in a real and practical way.

Nabeel Qureshi grew up in a devout Muslim home in the U.S. In college he engaged in several years of personal searching for the truth about God, Christ, Allah, and Muhammad. He published his story in 2014, as *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*.⁴³ His spiritual journey involved critical testing of the NT, the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection, the sonship of Christ and the Trinity. When he put Muhammad and the Qur'an to the same test and critical scrutiny, he was surprised. What he discovered generated internal conflict with his honor-shame culture and pain within his family.

His journey began with the common Islamic belief that Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews.⁴⁴ He does not answer our question with a bold “no.” The deeper issue focuses more on how Christians and Muslims understand or misunderstand the nature of God than whether it is the same God.

Two years later he published *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?*⁴⁵ In this book he draws attention to the differences between the Trinity and the *tawhid* rather than which one is the true God. As Qureshi explains it:

That is where the discussion should really be between Muslims and Christians: on revelation, not on the conceptual plane of “Trinity versus *tawhid*,” as if our reason alone can dictate or even decipher the nature of God. Based on their traditional teachings, Muslims and Christians should agree that God is greater than we can possibly conceive, more complex than we could ever hope or grasp. We are in no position to determine the intricacies of God's nature.⁴⁶

Chapter eight of Qureshi's volume addresses the issue of sameness with this summary observation: “Christians worship Yahweh, the Trinity, whereas Muslims worship Allah, a monad.”⁴⁷ The Trinity, he concludes, “makes the Christian God categorically different from the Muslim God.”⁴⁸ I think this was as close as he came to a “no”—it is not the same God.

⁴³ Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

⁴⁴ Qureshi, *Seeking*, 210.

⁴⁵ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

⁴⁶ Qureshi, *No God*, 56.

⁴⁷ Qureshi, *No God*, 69.

⁴⁸ Qureshi, *No God*, 72.

In 2016, Qureshi debated Wolf on whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. He did not agree with Wolf that they worship the same God but was unwilling to identify who Allah would be. Wolf argued that if Allah is not God then he is an idol or a false god.⁴⁹

WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVE

At this point some readers will likely want a definitive answer—do we worship the same God or not? I could complicate this discussion by noting that “worship” is neither understood nor practiced the same among Christians and Muslims. Who are the “we”? As noted above, this is a question western Christians ask. Our worldview and cultural values influence our judgments on this subject. To effectively minister cross-culturally, wisdom and experience would teach us to start with questions “they” are asking, not give them answers to “our” questions. Here is a reason why this question will not be the best starting point.

Christians and Muslims approach the search for God from two different worldviews. The very question of whether we worship the same God is one western Christians are asking, not Muslims. We expect a “yes” or “no” answer because we approach this topic from a dichotomistic pattern of thinking rather than a holistic pattern. On the nature of God, Muslims could be holistic and respect the role of authority while western Christians will be dichotomistic in their judgments. However, when it comes to religious practices—like worship—Muslims are dichotomistic and Christians are more holistic. Sherwood Lingenfelter defines these two ways of thinking as follows:

Dichotomistic thinking is a pattern of segmental thinking in which people exhibit great concern for the particulars of a problem or situation and tend to reduce them to right and wrong options. . . . Holistic thinking is a pattern of thinking in which particulars are not separated from the context of the larger picture. A holistic thinker insists that the whole is greater than the parts and reasons on the basis of perceived relationships within the whole.⁵⁰

For example, the possibility that David could be a “man after God’s own heart” challenges a dichotomistic view. From a holistic view, “judgements are open-ended—the whole person and all circumstances are taken into consideration.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ “Seeking Truth: Wolf and Qureshi Debate—Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God? January 13, 2016. Julie Roys Podcast: <http://julieroys.com/volf-qureshi-debate-do-muslims-christians-worship-the-same-god/>.

⁵⁰ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 53.

⁵¹ Lingenfelter, *Ministering*, 54.

In my experience, the more bicultural people become, the more holistic they will be in their thinking. Christians who are monocultural (even ethnocentric) will be dichotomistic and will respond with a firm, hard “no” to our question. Those who are bicultural (who minister cross-culturally as well as most Muslims living in the U.S.) are holistic and would be uncomfortable, even irritated, with the hard “no” to the question of whether Allah is God.

The original subtitle to this article was “A Theological Challenge for Christians and Muslims.” I dropped “theological” because theology never stands alone—it is also cultural, personal, and spiritual. Could it be that the ultimate challenge for all of us is theological—to humbly let God be God? ^{scj}