

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Do Muslims, Christians and Jews worship the same God?

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Do Muslims, Christians and Jews worship the same God? This has been a question asked by theologians and religious leaders for some time. It was the theme of the book "Allah: A Christian Response," by Miroslav Volf, professor at Yale University.



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It has been in the news lately because of a professor at Wheaton College, an evangelical school in Illinois. Last month, it was reported that Professor Larycia Hawkins chose to wear a hijab during Advent to express her solidarity with Muslims during this time of increased Islamophobia.

The college has begun the process for her dismissal, not for having worn the hijab, but for saying she believed, along with Pope Francis, that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

There are many aspects to this question that should be considered before jumping to a conclusion.

First, it is clear that Jews, Christians and Muslims have different understandings and beliefs about God. Jews and Muslims, for example do not consider Jesus as the Son of God, nor do they believe in the Trinity. Just to be clear, neither did Abraham, Moses or Isaiah. Does that mean they did not worship the same God as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin or Luther?

The different Abrahamic religions certainly have different beliefs, but so do Catholics and Protestants. or for that matter

Presbyterians and Baptists.

Just because we understand someone differently does not mean we are talking about different people.

Someone could honestly believe Ted Cruz is not qualified to be president because he was born in Canada to an American mother. Others honestly believe he is a "natural born citizen" as required in Article 2 of the U.S. Constitution.

Does this honest difference in belief mean there are two different people with the name Ted Cruz? Of course not!

Having different beliefs about someone does not negate that it can be the same person.

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE

It also is useful to understand a bit about language.

First, it is clear many terms are used for God. In the Hebrew

Scriptures, we find terms for God like Yahweh and Elohim, while the Greek name Theos is used in the Christian New Testament. Jesus used the Aramaic word "Abba" or Father, also used in the books of Romans and Galatians. Christians in Arab-speaking countries use the word Allah for God in the translations of the Bible, as well as in worship. In English, we also distinguish between god or gods and the One God referred to in monotheism.

Likewise, in Arabic, the term "ilah" is the general term for deity, while the variation "Allah" refers to the One God. Clearly the various terms used for God do not imply different gods.

Monotheistic religions insist there is, in fact, One God. We might disagree on the properties of the One God, and we clearly have different understandings, but we still can affirm there is

One God.

I am a husband, father, son, brother, professor and a Christian. People know me in these various roles in different ways. They might describe me differently, relate to me differently, understand me differently, even believe different things about me, yet I am one person.

If that is true on the human level, how much more must we not confuse our limited understanding of the divine as being the final word on whether the God I worship is different from the God you worship.

We have a right and even responsibility to discuss and debate our various and differing understandings, but we must be careful not to make final pronouncements that we worship different Gods.

A bit of humility might be called for in these discussions.