

Worshiping the same God

By [David Williams](#)

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There's been a [small flutter of conversation recently about a professor at Wheaton College](#), one who showed solidarity with America's increasingly nervous Muslim population by wearing a head covering, and asserting that Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

For that, she was suspended, which is not a surprise, given the more conservative nature of that school. There is much debate on campus, of course, about her assertions. It has been polite, actually, which is rather nice for a change.

The question is a fair one: do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?

The answer, as I see it, is both yes and no.

It is Yes, but not for the reason typically given by earnest liberals. Sure, we come roughly from the same Abrahamic tradition. But that, of itself, is meaningless. It does not mean we inherently worship the same God.

It is No, but not for the reason typically given by concerned conservatives. The names and symbols we use for God and our patterns of worship and devotion are different, as are our emphases. But that does not mean we stand in opposition.

Both progressives and conservatives fall into a false binary when considering Islam. Islam is not a monolithic entity, any more than Christianity is monolithic.

I can say, with certainty, that I do not worship the same God as *Daesh* or as the Taliban. When they call out to Allah, they are invoking something that is a horror to me. Their understanding of the Creator is an abomination, a phantasm warped by ignorance, human hatred, and a radical absence of mercy and compassion. They have no understanding of God, because if they did, they could not act as they do.

But I can say with certainty that where I see the actions and lives of Muslims whose faith guides them to be generous, kind, devoted, and honorable, there I can see the worship of the same God that I worship. The forms and disciplines differ. But when

they call out to Allah, they are simply using their language to name my God. They are on a different path, but they are not my enemy, or the enemy of my Way.

Faith is about purpose, and purpose manifests itself in our existence.

I do not doubt this because from both reason and compassion there is no cause to doubt it.

Our lives, after all, are the truest way to know the God we worship. Being a theist, I believe that God exists, [that God shapes and forms this reality and all others](#). Being a Christian, I believe that this reality, the one we inhabit now, matters infinitely to God, and that to stand in right relation with God, our lives here must mirror the life we see manifested in Jesus.

The Creator is not a fantasy, best approached through dreamy, substanceless sentiment. The God I call Father is not a theological construct, understood only through complex systematics and abstractions.

God, being real, is best approached by doing real things.

I know that is true, with the certainty that comes from having had good teachers.

The first place I remember learning that truth is with book in hand, reading the wonderful stories of Clive Staples Lewis. There's a tale he tells, at the conclusion of his Narnia books, in which he talks about the distinctions between Tash—the bird-god of the elegant, pseudo-Muslim, Ottomanesque Calormenes—and Aslan, the great lion of Narnia and narrative proxy for Jesus. The two are not the same, C. S. Lewis asserts, but the distinction isn't a matter of names and semiotics.

As the story winds to its fantasy-apocalypse conclusion, we encounter a Calormene by the name of Emeth. He has been a faithful follower of Tash his whole life, living honorably and kindly. He encounters Aslan, and, having despised Aslan his whole life, expects only death. Aslan responds with forbearance, and tells Emeth:

Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty by my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted.

Emeth, in Hebrew, means "truth," so it's clear that C.S. Lewis was making a very pointy point. The name of our god doesn't tell the truth of our faith, says the creator of Narnia and the greatest apologist of the 20th century. It is the life we live in response to our faith that matters.

Of course, one might argue that this is just a children's book. That is true, but that presupposes that the moral stories we teach our children aren't the most important ones of all.

There is another good teacher who made the same point, in the one place where he talked about what ultimately matters to God.

[We all know that story from the 25th chapter of Matthew.](#) It's the judgment on all the nations, meaning not just Christians, but everyone. And what we hear from the lips of Jesus is that the measure of whether we are sheep or goats, whether we have passed the test or failed, has nothing to do with our words and our theology. It has everything to do with our lives.

Did we welcome the stranger? Did we clothe the naked? Did we feed the hungry? Did we visit the prisoner? That, Jesus tells us, is the ultimate metric of our faith. It is measure is not just for Christians. The text of Matthew is intentionally constructed to make that interpretation impossible, but for all.

It's a humbler measure, certainly. It doesn't have the bright prideful certainty of ideology, the fierce uncompromising hardness of our carefully defended imaginings.

But as a way of understanding the truth of the God we worship, it does have the advantage of being real.

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