

### Christianity's Relation to Judaism and Islam in respect to worship

First, you asked me on what basis I say Jews worship the same God as Christians but not Muslims. My primary answer to that is simply the basis of the revelation in their respective sacred texts and their authority and accuracy in their portrayal of God. Jews have the Tanak or Old Testament as the basis of their (incomplete, but accurate - inasmuch as was actually then revealed – Hebrews 1:1-2) understanding and relationship to God. Being a Christian I accept the accuracy of the statement in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is God breathed (which includes the Tanak), and along with that a concept of inerrancy (which I don't have time to articulate here). Suffice it to say that I don't believe Jews have an inaccurate portrayal of God in the Tanak/Old Testament as much as an incomplete one (with further caveats that they rejected clear prophetic signs from their Messiah that were given in those same OT scriptures, however, thus are acting in rebellion to their own God).

For Islam on the other hand I cannot accept the truthfulness of its texts since the Quran contains direct contradictions of both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in them, both in major and minor details. An example from the Quran where it differs with the OT/Tanak is that Abraham takes Ishmael to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him and not Isaac (I would classify that in the "minor" category however compared to larger variances in the conception of God himself between the Quran and the Bible – which I'll get to in the articles I link to further below). And of course for variances between the Quran and the NT, the Quran denies the sonship of Jesus, and therefore also his divinity (not to mention the Quran contains an incorrect concept of the Trinity as consisting of the Father, Jesus, and Mary).

But back to the point, I believe that the Jews' scriptures allow them - on the basis of accurate revelation -to worship the same God Christians do, whereas I have no such assurances about the accuracy of the Quran's claims to revelation and therefore to the accuracy of who it represents God to be, and is a text that has very dubious origins as Mohammed was supposedly dictated all of it from an angel, and certain Surah verses were abrogated by later ones when Mohammed changed his stance on Jews and Christians, etc. But given some further constraints in my argument below I may even have grounds to think the Jews in fact do worship a different God because of the nature of the Trinity, but that remains to be seen.

## A Philosophical Argument of Identity

My foremost mental image at play here is one involving a situation where the name for something/someone can be distinguished from its actual essence. So, you had said before that if Muslims do not worship the same God as the Jews and Christians, based as they are upon Abrahamic faith, then you don't know who Muslims worship. That brought up an important point, to which I may be able to respond with a two-pronged 'yes' and 'no' answer to the "same God" question, but one being more essential (pun possibly intended) than the other.

What I mean is this: Basically I think the name for something or someone can be identical, based on the same or similar historical traditions and the same intended referent, as used by multiple people, but that the essence behind the name may differ in certain circumstances. What I am arguing is a little bit more than slight variance of perspective between two or more people on essentially the same thing/being (God in this case), but rather a major or fundamental variance in properties and attributes of the being that thus leads the two (or more) varied sets of attributes to refer to essentially different, and thus non-identical, objects (gods).

The argument I will frame philosophically/logically in two ways, one of which I am a little less sure about (the first) than the other, but which I hope will approximate my point.

The first is the metaphysical distinction (which originally arose from Scholasticism – Anselm used this, and Locke later) of the nominal vs. the real. In terms of definitions the nominal explains what we mean by a word or term, whereas the real is the objective reality it refers to, but the nominal is not itself the real essence of the thing. This article ( <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/11/anselms-ontological-argument.html>

) puts it like this, saying that the definitions consist of “

**what Scholastics call a**

***nominal***

**definition – an explanation of the meaning of a word – with what they call a**

***real***

**definition – an explanation of the nature or essence of the objective reality a word refers to**

”. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy also has an entry on it here:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/definitions/#ReaNomDef>

So as you may have inferred by now, the yes/no answer I want to offer is split along these two essences: the nominal and the real. To the suggestion that Islam's God, Allah, is called the

God of Abraham and that Islam's belief in Allah has its roots in the story of Abraham's faith in Elohim/Eloah (for which Allah is an etymological equivalent) I believe I can answer '

**yes**

' to that, in the nominal category; meaning that I acknowledge that the intended reference is to the same nominal definition of Elohim/Allah that are called by equivalent names. But when it comes to the real essence of the beings who are believed to be referred to by that nominal name, I believe those essences differ between the Christian God and the God of Islam, thus the

**no**

'. What makes up a real essence is its attributes and properties, and if a deity has different basic properties than another – no matter how similar – it cannot be the same deity.

This is where the second philosophical concept comes in, complete with a (hopefully) helpful video illustration. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz came up with a law called the **Identity of Indiscernables** which plays off of this name/essence – nominal/real – concept I think (though it does not actually reference those terms, but I think interacts with the concept). I readily confess my indebtedness to a friend for pointing this law out to me recently, and I have since have found other references to Leibniz's law in a book discussing logical aspects involved in defining the persons and relations within the Trinity; so I think the law is applicable to this category of discussion as well, as to properties and identities of divine beings.

So, without further adieu, here is a brief video (<3min) explaining Leibniz's *Identity of Indiscernables*

: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxnQRzZYYs>

. Based on that concept, if the essential properties and attributes of Allah based on what the Quran says about him differ from the properties of what the OT & NT says about God (and therefore Jesus) then they cannot be the same God, no matter how similar. The Trinity is an obvious difference, and is criteria alone to not be "Indiscernable," but I think beyond that that there are even character attributes of Allah as the Quran portrays him that further diverge from biblical definitions of God's character.

Also, as I realize, if I fully accept this then I will probably have to revise my stance on Jewish worship as well and admit, after all, that they do not worship the same God as Christians since they do not worship Jesus and do not accept the Trinity. That obvious disconnect stares me in the face, and upon further reflection I must therefore probably reject or modify one of my propositions, but I wanted you to get the essential idea.

Let me then move on to arguments for why Allah is different than the God of Christianity based on attributes, properties, and characteristics.

### Attempts at Explanations for where Allah and Christianity's God Differ

I will try to keep this section short since the content is mostly in articles. Here are the two opinions (albeit, of course, opinions) by two well credentialed Christian scholars, authors, and professors concerning why they see differences between Allah and the God of Christianity.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity>

Notable quote: *“For the world’s religions conceive of God, or gods, in so many contradictory ways that they cannot all be true. In particular, the concept of God in Islam and Christianity is so different that both religions cannot be right. Islam and Christianity have different doctrines or teachings concerning what God is like .”*

**Dr. Timothy George** (Dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham): <http://rzim.org/just-thinking/is-the-father-of-jesus-the-god-of-muhammad-a-conversation-with-timothy-george>

Craig’s article is perhaps a little more to the point of this topic, but George also brings up differences in redemption and also how Allah is not essentially a God of love, the latter point found around where this quote appears:

*“You write that scholar Kenneth Cragg said that “the Names of God in Islam describe his activity but not his essence.” And you cite several passages from the Koran that lead you to conclude that, “In the Qur’an, God’s love is conditional and accidental. Love is something God does, not that which God is .”*

Lastly, as for a scholarly book which I have not read but discovered today in a search online, this book is written by a professor of Jewish Studies and the Hebrew Bible at Harvard who thinks that what are called the Abrahamic faiths have less in common amongst themselves than most people think, and endeavors to demonstrate that: (“Inheriting Abraham”) <http://www.amaزون.com/Inheriting-Abraham-Patriarch-Judaism-Christianity/dp/0691155690>

Two reviews of the book:

- <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/122502/our-abraham-not-theirs>  
“In *Inheriting Abraham*, Jon Levenson, the Albert A. List Professor of Bible at Harvard’s Divinity

*School, throws cold water on the mutual-understanding campfire* .”

- <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28655/reviews/31048/sandmel-jon-d-levenson-inheriting-abraham-legacy-patriarch-judaism>

“Jon Levenson offers a close reading of the Abraham narrative in Genesis. He describes how each of the three religions has developed its own Abraham, at times over and against the Abraham of the other traditions .”

## **Two Possible Interpretations of John 4 & an interpretation of Exodus 32**

This last section is more on the “exegetical possibilities” side as relates to this topic.

My understanding of the phrase in John 4:22 “*you worship what you do not know*” allows I think for two possible, but different, interpretations. The first could be that it acknowledges that the Samaritans worship the same God as the Jews but that they do not have personal saving knowledge (“know” - in the biblical sense of close acquaintance) of him, because “salvation is from the Jews”. Or perhaps it can be read that Jesus is saying that they do not worship the same God and what they are actually worshipping is something they are unaware of (perhaps a suggestion of worshipping idols & demons as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 10:20 “but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God” – and Samaritans were regarded as ‘Gentile-ish’). In either case Jesus is summoning her to the true way of worship through the Holy Spirit.

I have traditionally believed the latter interpretation, and it is well known that Jews lost no love on the Samaritans and saw their religion as syncretic(sp?) and essentially heretical. How Jesus saw it (as opposed to the Jews at large saw it – if their views differed as regards Samaritan worship) I think has to be taken from this passage, which however is the very thing in question. But perhaps I am mistaken and the former interpretation is correct. I will leave that there for further conversation though.

On this passage I would also like note the observations from two commentaries. The first is by Leon Morris on John, in NICNT (New International Commentary on the New Testament). I found that his commentary has two different assessments of the matter on the same page (I’m not sure if the author realized it though). The body of the text expresses – with no real analysis however - the view that the Samaritans did worship the same God as the Israelites though imperfectly, while the footnote cites Calvin who gives an argument very similar to the metaphysical argument I gave above about attributes, properties, and identity when he says, “For unless there is knowledge present, it is not God that we worship but a spectre or ghost”. That’s essentially the same sentiment I was expressing above. You should be able to see a picture of the commentary page below:



that Jerusalem is laid down in other parts of Scripture (II Chron. 6 : 6; 7 : 12; Ps. 78 : 68). These passages carried conviction to Jews. But they meant nothing to the Samaritans, for they acknowledged no writings as sacred save the Pentateuch.

21 For "Woman" as a form of address see on 2 : 4. Jesus refuses to be drawn into an argument. Rather He solemnly predicts that a time is coming when worship will be possible in neither place. There may be a reference to the troubled times that lay ahead for the whole region of Palestine (*cf.* Luke 21 : 20ff., *etc.*). God is often called "the Father" in this Gospel (see on 1 : 14). Usually, however, it is the Father of Jesus Christ that is meant. Here He is thought of as the Father of all. The woman had appealed to the example of "our fathers". Jesus points her to the one Father.

22 Jesus' concern is with the essential nature of worship. He accordingly points out to the woman the inadequacy of Samaritan worship. Though they worshipped the true God the Samaritans did so very imperfectly. When we consider that they rejected the writings of the prophets, the psalms, the historical books of the Old Testament and much more we see that their knowledge of God was, of necessity, very limited. Jesus says that they do not know what they worship (*cf.* Acts 17 : 23).<sup>53</sup> Both His "ye" and His "we" are emphatic. He sets Jews and Samaritans in sharp contrast. And He associates Himself quite definitely with the Jews.<sup>54</sup> They do know what they worship. Jesus uses the neuter,

<sup>53</sup> *Cf.* Calvin: "we are not to essay anything in religion rashly or unthinkingly. For unless there is knowledge present, it is not God that we worship but a spectre or ghost. Hence all so-called good intentions are struck by this thunderbolt, which tells us that men can do nothing but err when they are guided by their own opinion without the Word or command of God." On v. 20 he has said, "The Samaritans took the example of the fathers as a precedent; the Jews were grounded on the commandment of God."

<sup>54</sup> *Cf.* Bernard: "Jesus, here, definitely associates Himself with the Jews; He is a Jew. Their God is His God. Nowhere in the Gospels is there another passage so emphatic as this, in its assertion of the common nationality of Jesus and the Jews who rejected Him". In passing we may notice that John possibly recorded this saying with a certain form of heretical teaching in mind. Some held that the God of the Old Testament was an inferior being. Jesus fully accepts the Old Testament and rules out any such interpretation.

[REDACTED]