

DO CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS WORSHIP THE SAME GOD? USE OF PREDICATES AND *HOMOOUSIOS* AS FOUNDATIONAL TO THE ANSWER

STEVEN TSOUKALAS*

Abstract: *The question of whether or not Christians and Muslims worship the same God has received much attention of late, from laity to biblical scholars, theologians, missiologists, and philosophers. Answering yes to the question stems from three widespread errors in Christian thought: failure to add proper predicates to “God”; failure to see as foundational the doctrine of homoousios as it relates to the three persons of the Trinity, especially the Father-Son, Son-Father relation; and doing theology partitively by severing theological categories from their ontological and theological mooring, which is the triune God. Conversely, when predicates and homoousios are given proper place in the undivided Trinity, two theologically proper questions arise, to which the answer is “no.”*

Key words: *Trinity, homoousios, theological predicates, “God”, homoousios τῷ πατρί, perichōrēsis*

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? This question occupied the minds of few in the past.¹ But not until recently² has it become commonplace to address the question in both academic and casual contexts.³

* Steven Tsoukalas is Professor of Christian Theology and World Religions and Chair of Theological Studies at Emmaus University, Cercaville, Acul du Nord, Haiti. He may be contacted at sten.tsoukalas@emmaus.edu.ht.

¹ One is hard pressed to find early works with the specific title “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?,” though statements addressing the issue appear in times past. For examples, see the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16, November 21, 1964: “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day”; “The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth” (cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter III, 21 to Anazir [Al-Nasir], King of Mauretania PL, 148.451A). Martin Luther stated that “all outside Christianity, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians or hypocrites, although they believe in, and worship, only one true God ... abide in eternal wrath and damnation” (*The Book of Concord, The Large Catechism*, Article 3:66, <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-4-creed.php>). See also William Burrige, *Islam, Britain & the Gospel* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1987), where his statement appears in the opening pages: “Christians and Muslims have many things in common. First, of course, faith in the same God, the one God, who created the world.”

² With the events of September 11, 2001.

³ See, e.g., Harold A. Netland, “On Worshiping the Same God: What exactly is the question?,” *Missiology: An International Review* 45.4 (October 2017); Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011); Philip Almond, “In Spite of Their Differences, Jews, Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God” (*The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/in-spite-of-their-differences-jews-christians-and-muslims-worship-the-same-god-83102>); Nabeel Qureshi, “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?” (RZIM, <https://trinitarian.rzim.org/read/rzim-global/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god>); Albert Mohler, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/december->

In this essay I argue that use of predicates, application of the *homoousios*⁴ doctrine, and the practice of non-partitive theology lead to phrasing the question in two different (but proper) ways that diverge significantly from the popular way of phrasing it, and answer “no” to these questions.

Alongside treatment of biblical passages, this essay features teachings from the writings of Athanasius (*Against the Arians*, *On Luke 10:22*, and *On the Incarnation*⁵) and insights from Thomas F. Torrance’s interactions with Athanasius, found especially in Torrance’s *The Trinitarian Faith*,⁶ *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*,⁷ and *Theology in Reconciliation*.⁸

I. ARGUMENTS FOR “WE WORSHIP⁹ THE SAME GOD”

Three arguments made by “same God” proponents center around the notions of monotheism, common traits and characteristics of God, and severing Essence from human constructs.

1. *Monotheism*. Those of the “same God” camp call upon the common foundation of belief in one God.¹⁰ In his April 15, 2011 interview with *Christianity Today*, Miroslav Volf defended his position that Muslims and Christians worship the same God: “Both groups are monotheists. They believe in one God, one God who is a sovereign Lord and to whom they are to be obedient. For both faiths, God embodies what’s ultimately important and valuable.”¹¹ Here the idea of oneness or monotheism takes the epistemological lead, followed by attributes and acts of God valued and expressed in common by adherents of both faiths.

2. *Traits and characteristics of God*. In an essay published in an edited work by Volf, Amy Plantinga Pauw¹² seizes upon characteristics of God. Her argument be-

2013/do-christians-and-muslims-worship-the-same-god); Francis Phillips, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” (Catholic Herald, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2018/03/19/do-christians-and-muslims-worship-the-same-god/>); Jerry Rankin, “Do Muslims & Christians Worship the Same God?” (Zwemer Center for Muslim Studies, <http://www.zwemercenter.com/the-truth-about-muhammad/>); Lamin Sanneh, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” (*The Christian Century* 121.9 [4 May 2004]). See also a series of articles on “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” in *The Christian Century*, <https://christiancentury.org>.

⁴ Translates “[of the] same substance” or “[of] one substance.” Section III develops in depth the doctrine of *homoousios*.

⁵ These and many other works from early church theologians may be accessed at <http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers>.

⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980).

⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996).

⁹ “Worship” involves a multitude of mindful acts: reverence, adoration, respect, honor, thanksgiving, praise, exaltation, awe, etc. Herein the word is used in these senses.

¹⁰ See note 1 for sources for this argument.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?,” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/april/muslimschristianssamegod.html>.

¹² Amy Plantinga Pauw, “The Same God?,” in *Do We Worship the Same God? Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (ed. Miroslav Volf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 37–49.

gins with her “belief in God as creator of all.”¹³ After drawing upon other characteristics or attributes, including divine freedom, she offers conclusions concerning what Christians should think about the issue, and subsequently that Christians should trust the claims of Jews and Muslims. Pauw states, “Divine freedom reminds Christians that God does not need us to be God, and thus that we can claim no inherent divine obligation towards us, much less any monopoly on God’s favor.” She concludes: “When Jews and Muslims claim to know and love the One God, maker of heaven and earth,¹⁴ a Christian acknowledgement of God’s freedom leads us to trust their claims.”¹⁵ Pauw calls upon the divine freedom of God as conducive to God acting as God wills, not as we would want God to act. Due to this freedom of God, we can claim no divine favor upon ourselves. Pauw then prescribes taking our proper place and practicing “humility”¹⁶ toward those outside what we might perceive as his restricted covenant community.

3. *Severing “Essence” from human theological constructs.* This posits a dichotomy between “Essence” and humanly constructed (though, it is argued, still coming from divine revelations) theological expressions.

a. *The metaphysically objective “Essence” vs. subjective theological assertions.* Within this framework arises a higher spiritual knowledge that intuits the separation of the “Essence above all things” from the specifics of theological assertions concerning the Essence.

Reza Shah-Kazemi also wrote an essay in Volf’s edited work.¹⁷ In Volf’s various works on the “same God?” subject, he gravitates toward the view presented by Shah-Kazemi, which is *ṣūfīc*.¹⁸ For Shah-Kazemi, the Essence is what is objective, due to it being the “transcendent Object of belief.”¹⁹ This transcendent Object, divine Object, ultimate Reality, transcendent Absolute, unique source of Being, or “God” is what objectively “outweighs” all subjective theological labels.²⁰ The sub-

¹³ Pauw, “Same God,” 38.

¹⁴ Earlier in the essay Pauw refers to the Presbyterian *Brief Statement of Faith*, wherein, she claims, we read, “One God, maker of heaven and earth, whom alone we worship and serve” (“Same God,” 39). Since this statement does not have “One God, the Father almighty” or any Trinitarian language following Nicene orthodoxy, it sparked interest to look for this statement online. Though I was able to find the *Brief Statement of Faith*, wording concerning “One God” (without the predicates “the Father almighty” or “triune”) in the context Pauw mentions did not appear. Trinitarian language, however, appears in the *Brief Statement of Faith* in the first paragraph: “We trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve” (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/biblicalbases.pdf>). Interested readers might want to conduct a search of their own.

¹⁵ Pauw, “Same God,” 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” in *Do We Worship the Same God?*, 76–147.

¹⁸ Shah-Kazemi’s essay is 72 pages out of a total of 165 pages in *Do We Worship the Same God?*, and yet there are five other essayists.

¹⁹ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 78. On page 79, he offers as an explanation the intuitive, “spiritual orientation” that points to the one Reality or one God. This spiritual orientation is on the higher, spiritual plane than is “mental conception.” “Spiritual orientation,” says Shah-Kazemi, is “focusing more on the inner essence of faith than on its outer form.”

²⁰ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 78.

jective-theological appears in the realm of “human thought” at the point when “reality is conceived by human thought.”²¹ Included in this realm of human thought are “attributes and acts.” On this secondary level occur labels such as “Creator, Revealer, Savior, and Judge,” where differences arise due to “the limits of theology.”²² To remain on this level is to be “bound” by these limits. But the limits that evidence difference “can be resolved²³ on the higher plane of metaphysics and the deeper plane of mysticism—planes that are not constrained, doctrinally as regards metaphysics or experientially as regards mysticism, by the limitations of theology.”²⁴

A symptomatic conclusion results:

Muslims will not be able to affirm belief in “the Trinity” any more than Christians, on the plane of theology, can unequivocally affirm belief in what Muslims call “*Allah*”. . . . If, however, attention is directed away from the theological definition of *Allah*, and to its supratheological or metaphysical referent—that ultimate Essence (*al-Dhāt*) which is absolutely ineffable and thus unnameable; and if, likewise, we look beyond the theological definition of the Trinitarian conception of God, and focus instead on its supratheological or metaphysical referent—the “superessential One,” to quote St. Dionysius²⁵ . . . then we shall be in a position to affirm that, despite the different names by which the ultimate Reality is denoted in the two traditions, the Reality thus alluded to is indeed one and the same.²⁶

On this issue of Essence and human constructs, Volf mentions his indebtedness to the Sunnī Muslim mystic philosopher al-Ghazālī, whom Volf considers “the paradigmatic Muslim.”²⁷ On pages 160–62 of *Allah*, readers get a taste of the respect and influence al-Ghazālī has on Volf. Volf states concerning al-Ghazālī, “I try to write about the ‘normative mainstream’ of Islam. For me here the ‘paradigmatic’ Muslim is the great and immensely influential thinker Abu Hamid al Ghazali.”²⁸ Al-Ghazālī was a mystic in whose theology a great gulf between human conceptual

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ “Resolved” means coming to the conclusion that regardless of differences, it is still the one God upon which all may agree. See Shah-Kazemi’s conclusion above.

²⁴ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 78.

²⁵ This is the “Pseudo-Dionysius” that Torrance refers to in his *The Trinitarian Faith* (336), where he talks negatively about the severing of descriptive relations from the ontological reality to which they refer (and are). He describes Pseudo-Dionysius’s “mystical theology” as reaching “beyond the revealed concept of *Fatherhood*,” within which “God” is ultimately lauded “as superessential undifferentiated *ousia* [here transliterated] not nameable or knowable at all in its internal relations.” Shah-Kazemi in his essay also mentions Meister Eckhart as representative of this view (122–31). “Christian Apophaticism and Superessential Identity” also warrants a section in Shah-Kazemi’s essay (117–22).

²⁶ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 79. Volf in his *Christianity Today* interview calls upon the “radical divide between creature [creator?] and creation” that is fundamental to Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Therefore, says Volf, “they believe in the same God.” If Volf means “creator,” does this “radical divide” include the incarnation? See later on in this essay concerning the vicarious humanity of Jesus on our behalf.

²⁷ *Allah*, 12. Shah-Kazemi in his essay states that al-Ghazālī “was essentially a Sufī mystic” (82 n. 6).

²⁸ *Allah*, 12.

doctrines and the divine Essence exists. For al-Ghazālī, “the essence of religion is experience, not mere profession, and the *ṣūfīs* are the only ones who are able to experience the realities that theologians only talk about.”²⁹ Al-Ghazālī’s paradigm therefore posits the divine Essence as ultimately more important than the conceptions of theology wrought by humans.

Quite telling are two of Volf’s chapter subtitles in his *Allah*. Echoing the partitive theology of al-Ghazālī, in which “concepts” or “number” or any other type of humanly articulated attribute of God is inadequate compared to the superessential One, Volf’s subtitles are “Beyond Concepts” and “Beyond Numbers.”³⁰ Within these subsections Volf states, “The talk of ‘Persons’ captures something important about God, but is inadequate to express the full reality, because God transcends the notion of ‘person.’”³¹ This contributes significantly to Volf’s insistence that the “one God” Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship is the same God, in spite of differences stated in doctrinal dogmas. As Volf states, “Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God, the only God. They understand God’s character partly differently, but the object of their worship is the same.”³² Consistent with his paradigm, Volf then states, “I reject the idea that Muslim monotheism is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.”³³

b. *Shah-Kazemi and Thomas Aquinas*. Shah-Kazemi demonstrates a working knowledge of Christian thought.³⁴ In an effort to demonstrate his partitive theology of Essence vs. human-produced theological distinctions, Shah-Kazemi calls upon Thomas Aquinas. Shah-Kazemi produces statements by Aquinas that reflect partition, a gulf between the transcendent deity and creation. A subsection of Shah-Kazemi’s essay is “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Common Ground of Transcendence.”³⁵ Following are a few quotations from Aquinas found in the essay.

²⁹ Mustansir Mir, “Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Al-”, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (4 vols.; ed. John L. Esposito; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2:61–63.

³⁰ *Allah*, 139, 140.

³¹ *Allah*, 140. Though the triune God’s infinitude and our inability to *fully* comprehend him is clear, the real issue is the *contexts* in which this notion is expressed. It is the incarnation of God the Son in space-time reality that contrasts sharply with Volf’s context. Ironically it is the *person* of Jesus, the incarnate-in-history God the Son who is *homoousios* with the Father, that is the all-important, sufficient and adequate starting point for what we can know of the Father (and the Spirit).

³² *Allah*, 14.

³³ Volf makes this statement in the context of his observation that “what the Qur’an denies about God as the Holy Trinity has been denied by every great teacher of the church in the past and ought to be denied by every orthodox Christian today” (*Allah*, 14).

³⁴ Readers might want to keep in mind Torrance’s lament concerning the dualistic framework generally found in the Western tradition, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Torrance often emphasizes that who the Trinitarian God is relationally-intrinsically cannot be viewed as a separate category from his attributes. See his *Theology in Reconciliation*, 95, where he begins his treatment of the Augustinian tradition. See also *The Trinitarian Faith*, 107. Though pedagogically one has to engage theology’s separate categories, there should be awareness that the content of these categories takes place within the life of the triune God. Therefore, in understanding the being of the triune God, one understands his acts and attributes in sync with and in relationship to his personal triune being.

³⁵ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 135.

Shah-Kazemi observes, “After addressing the question of sacred doctrine in general, Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologica* with a treatise on the unity of the divine Essence. There is little, if anything, in this treatise with which a Muslim could disagree.”³⁶ He then quotes Aquinas: “The name God signifies the divine nature, for this name was imposed to signify something existing above all things, the principle of all things, and removed from all things; for those who name God intend to signify all this.”³⁷ He again quotes Aquinas: “If we mentally exclude the personal properties there will still remain in our thought the divine Nature as subsisting and as a person ... Even if the personal properties of the three Persons are abstracted by our mind, nevertheless there will remain in our thoughts the one Personality of God, as the Jews consider.”³⁸ Shah-Kazemi concludes: “So, even if, like the Jews, Muslims do not believe in the Trinity, what they do believe in—the ‘divine Nature,’ the unique ‘Person,’ the ‘One Personality’—is identical to what Jews believe in at the same level of divinity—the transcendent unicity of the divine Essence.”³⁹

II. PREDICATES, THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STARTING POINT, AND A BETTER QUESTION TO ASK

Answering “yes” to the question “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” and phrasing the question that way are symptoms of several basic errors in Christian thought. This section probes two: lack of theological predicates; and the erroneous epistemological starting point. These provide means for addressing the arguments discussed in the previous section.

1. *Lack of predicates.* Omission of proper predicates for God—due to the development in Christian thought of an abstract or generalized category for “God” and lack of emphasis on Trinity⁴⁰ as the epistemological and ontological starting point for all things concerning God—creates problems at the outset.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. Shah-Kazemi footnotes the source: *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 1:68, I.13.8, reply to objection 2. Torrance notes his general concern for the West’s partitive, dualistic thinking that posits a general, abstract notion of divine “Nature” in theoretical or relational disconnection (however well-meaning it is) from the three distinct persons as well as their distinct roles, and prescribes a unitary model (the Trinitarian matrix). In his *Theology in Reconciliation* he mentions “dualist forms of thought and life in the West, not least the separation between the doctrine of the One God and the doctrine of the Triune God” (10).

³⁸ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 139. Torrance states, “as we can see very clearly in the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, the doctrine of the One God was cut off sharply from the doctrine of the triune God, the former only being related to the epistemological structure of the knowing mind” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 285). This influence seems to be far-reaching, yet can appear “under the radar.” However, there is debate over whether or not Torrance is right about Aquinas, especially as regards a dualism between Essence or Nature and the Trinitarian relationships. See Bruce D. Marshall, “Aquinas the Augustinian? On the Uses of Augustine in Aquinas’s Trinitarian Theology,” in *Aquinas the Augustinian* (ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 41–61.

³⁹ Shah-Kazemi, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” 139.

⁴⁰ Including the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as *homoousios*.

This omission is the symptom of a deeply-rooted dualistic outlook in the West, which is notionally similar to the dualistic, partitive theology of Shah-Kazemi, noted in the previous section. Torrance charges the Western tradition of Christian thought, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, the latter of which he is a part, with falling prey to a dualistic cosmology and theology. He mentions “the damaging dualism between the intelligible and sensible realms retained in Augustinian theology,”⁴¹ and therefore Augustinianism’s “dualism between an immutable, impassible Deity and contingent, temporal existence.”⁴²

With this separation between the intelligible and sensible realms as foundational, the next step for those in the “same God” camp is to proceed to a predicate-less “God.” To remedy this, Torrance quotes Athanasius: “It would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate.”⁴³ In other words, the great gulf between humanity and God is a fabrication, because the relationship of the triune God with the world has been magnified and deeply instantiated through the incarnation of the Son of God in space-time reality.⁴⁴

The relational connection between the intelligible and sensible, between the triune God and creation, by way of the incarnation of the Word of God the Father in space and time, prohibits talk of a predicate-less “God.” Robust and clear Trinitarian language is appropriate and wise in all forms of Christian communication (including prayer) and proclamation.⁴⁵ When predicates enter into the conversation, the question “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” is misleading and inherently problematic from the start.⁴⁶ It presupposes an abstract, generalized

⁴¹ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 107; see also *Theology in Reconciliation*, 31.

⁴² *Theology in Reconciliation*, 268.

⁴³ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 49; see also Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 90.

⁴⁴ See Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 264.

⁴⁵ Failure to add to “God” the predicates “Trinity,” “the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit” can have negative theological implications on the lay level. Take, for example, “God and Jesus” or “God and Christ.” Though biblical, the phrases can communicate to the unaware that “God is God and Jesus is not.” The phrase “the Holy Spirit,” though biblical, can also lead to tragic errors regarding the identity of the Holy Spirit. Stating “God the Holy Spirit” is just as appropriate as stating “God the Father” and “God the Son” and guards against the assumption that the Holy Spirit is some holy impersonal force.

⁴⁶ Predicates play important roles in other issues regarding Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Two examples shall suffice. First, the claim that Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are “Abrahamic Religions” or are each an “Abrahamic faith community” (Volf, *Do We Worship the Same God*, ix) is at first tantalizing, but predicates make “Abrahamic” contradictory between the three religions. Jesus says in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” Abraham looked to “the day” of the Messiah. “My day” refers to the Christ event as a series of predicates, predicates that serve to define and describe “my day” and subsequently to describe the biblical Abraham’s faith. These predicates are far removed from Islam and modern-day Judaism. Islam and modern-day Judaism therefore are not *the* Abrahamic religion, though they have notions that they are Abrahamic religions. The second example concerns the claim that Qur’an 3:47 teaches the doctrine of the virgin birth. Important first is to understand that the Qur’an asserts here a *creational* miracle, not an *incarnational* miracle. When Mary asks how she could have a son when she has known no man, the answer is, “Nonetheless, Allah creates what he wills.” In Islamic theology Jesus is a created son of God just as Adam was a created son of God. Secondly, biblically, the virgin conception and birth occur when the eternal Logos

notion of “God”⁴⁷ resulting in confusion over the identity of God, and a separation between the being of “God” and his attributes resulting in denial of God’s actual relational involvement with the world. Lingered fatally under the surface, these for too long have characterized theological discussion over the question.

a. *Predicates, the identity of “God,” and a better question to ask.* Due to the aforementioned, positing theological predicates is theologically proper. It also resolves the issue profoundly.

Placing aside a detailed examination of the much-needed predicates for the terms “Christians”⁴⁸ and “Muslims,”⁴⁹ the predicate-less word “God” in “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” warrants detailed critique. When the predicate “triune” is rightly and properly added to the word “God,” the issue resolves itself in an amazingly simple yet profound way. A better question to ask surfaces: “Do Christians and Muslims worship the triune God?” Or, take the statement “Christians and Muslims worship the same God” and add the proper predicate to “God”: “Christians and Muslims worship the same triune God.”⁵⁰ Asking the question or making the statement with “triune” renders the original question and statement theologically senseless and uselessly abstract while at the same time making the new question silly (rightly) because Islam denies the Trinity. “Triune” cuts to the heart of the issue.

Consider some of the arguments of Volf, Pauw, and Shah-Kazemi posed earlier. Volf stated, “Both groups are monotheists. They believe in one God, one God who is a sovereign Lord and to whom they are to be obedient. For both faiths, God embodies what’s ultimately important and valuable.” Adding the proper predicate “triune” changes things drastically: “Both groups are *triune* monotheists. They believe in one *triune* God, one *triune* God who is a sovereign *triune* Lord and to whom they are to be obedient. For both faiths, *the triune* God embodies what’s ultimately important and valuable.”

Amy Plantinga Pauw falls into the same error, failing to work with meaningful, proper predicates at proper times. Pauw’s essay of 13 pages employs “God” over 100 times and yet by comparison sparsely refers to anything Trinitarian. In her essay, she mentions Trinity, triune life, Trinitarianism, intratrinitarian, and the triune

of God the Father, who is the eternal God the Son, becomes flesh by the agency of God the Holy Spirit (thus, the virgin birth takes place within the life of the Trinity). These predicates are not found in the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān posits a notion of a virgin birth, not *the* virgin birth.

⁴⁷ This is evident in the sources Volf, Pauw, and Shah-Kazemi cite. For one example, see Volf’s *Allah* where he discusses the Roman Catholic Nicholas of Cusa (49–54).

⁴⁸ Christians are those who believe in the biblical God the Father, the biblical God the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ) and the biblical God the Holy Spirit and hold to the historic orthodox doctrine of the Trinity expressed in the early creeds, which articulate the orthodoxy already revealed in the scriptures.

⁴⁹ Muslims are those who believe in the Qur’ānic Allāh who is inherently one (*aḥad*) and a singularity (*tawḥīd*) that is unitarian, and believe in the Qur’ānic Jesus who is not God the Son.

⁵⁰ Gregory Nazianzen states, “When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (*Oration* 38.8). Utilizing “triune” as a predicate is proper since the triune God is truly, by nature, the only God that is. This raises the question of the ontological status of the Qur’ānic Allāh. The answer to this, however, is beyond the scope of this essay.

God, which together occur less than ten times.⁵¹ An example of Pauw employing “triune” in relation to God occurs in the second sentence of a paragraph on page 42. Here, however, Pauw merely makes passing reference to the triune God: “The triune God stands in a relation of asymmetrical dependence to all that is.” Pauw’s reference to the Trinity is a passing reference for the following reasons. First, in a paragraph that contains over 15 references to “God,” only one has the predicate “triune.” Second, Pauw seems careful not to use the phrase “triune God” when her theologizing involves Jews, Muslims, and Christians worshiping the same God. On page 42, she states, “When Jews and Muslims claim to know and love the One God, maker of heaven and earth, a Christian acknowledgement of God’s freedom leads us to trust their claims.” With her paradigm, such practice is a given. But as was the case with Volf, what happens when the predicate “triune” is inserted? “When Jews and Muslims claim to know and love the One *triune* God, maker of heaven and earth, a Christian acknowledgement of *the triune* God’s freedom leads us to trust their claims.” Given Pauw’s “same God” paradigm, she by necessity must leave out the predicate. With both Volf and Pauw, failure to include proper theological predicates leads to an appealing argument on the surface, but given that the triune God is the only God that truly is, the argument falls apart.

b. *Predicates and the attributes of “God.”* Volf, Pauw, Shah-Kazemi, and others call upon attributes and acts of “God” that are common to both Christians and Muslims (and Jews). The argument is as follows: “Both Christians and Muslims affirm belief in one God and affirm the one God as creator, sustainer, and all-powerful.” Predicates render this argument biblically and theologically senseless, for predicates concerning “God” express differences, not commonalities, when discussing attributes and acts.

Even when comparing the two religions merely phenomenologically, it is proper to distinguish the identity of the God doing the acts lest the phenomenologist fall into senseless narrative. Phenomenologically speaking, Christians confess the triune God as creator, all-powerful; Muslims confess their God as creator, all-powerful. Such language with predicates does justice to both Christianity and Islam, representing them properly within their respective theological frames.

But when moving beyond the phenomenological, beyond “the triune God creates/the Qur’anic God creates” and into the arena of absolute truth, Christians should claim that the triune God alone creates. Torrance often states his concern for the failure of the Western tradition to articulate theology within the Trinitarian matrix, or within the life of the Trinity. This failure results in severing the doctrine of the being of the triune God from the doctrine of his attributes and acts. For Torrance the notion of the being of God in his acts and the acts of God in his being go hand in hand. There is no partition whatsoever placed between who God is intrinsically as Trinity, and his attributes and acts in history.⁵² Note Athanasius’s

⁵¹ Pauw, “Same God,” 37–49.

⁵² See *The Trinitarian Faith*, 107.

statement that “there is nothing but the Father operates it through the Son.”⁵³ This means that whatever the incarnate Son does, he does within the life of the Father and the Spirit and as inseparable from the being of the Father and the Spirit. Thus it is the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) that are Creator, all-powerful, etc. Identity is inextricable from acts.

Shah-Kazemi’s ontological and practical gulf between the ultimate Essence and human-constructed theology concerning that Essence, leads to his notion that subjective-theological endeavors assigning predicates to God (such as Creator, Revealer, Savior, Judge, etc.) suffice merely to communicate conceived notions but nonetheless point to a distant, beyond-humanly-conceived ultimate Reality. According to Shah-Kazemi, it is on the human conceptual plane that differences occur (Trinity vs. a unitarian notion of God); yet these different conceptions of God still point to the ultimate Essence, to God, who is above all human doctrinal conceptions and can be acknowledged through intuition by faith. God is the one God within the “higher plane of metaphysics and the deeper plane of mysticism.”

Torrance’s (and Athanasius’s) paradigm of the being of God in his acts and the acts of God in his being plays the important role to challenge Shah-Kazemi’s doctrine.⁵⁴ Since Father, Son, and Spirit share the same essence that is divine personal triune being, and since it is the Son (the eternal Logos of the Father) incarnate who exegeses the Father for us,⁵⁵ through the acts and attributes of Jesus given to us in space and time we may possess knowledge of the Father.⁵⁶ Put another way, through the incarnate Son, our knowing of the Father (and the Spirit) comes to us in one unified objective act in relational, concrete, metaphysical, and personal reality in the realm of human thought and existence.⁵⁷ In this sense, Jesus as both God

⁵³ Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.12.

⁵⁴ Ironically, Shah-Kazemi’s gulf between human-conceived doctrinal expressions and the one ultimate Essence remains itself an expression of doctrine.

⁵⁵ See *exegésato* in John 1:18. For an observation that Jesus is the exegesis of the Father, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 114 n. 122.

⁵⁶ Torrance and Athanasius turn apophaticism (which argues for a great gulf between God and the created order; and that ultimately one can only speak of God in negation) on its head by stating that the incarnate life of Jesus brings knowledge of the Father to us. Ironically, through the historic condescension of God to us in Jesus, taking place in the created order, we have knowledge that God the Father transcends our abilities to grasp him in his full reality as Father (though he is not distant or hidden from us). On this ground we can affirm “not the negative ineffability of mere apophaticism, but the ineffability of God who in making himself known to us through the Son reveals that he infinitely transcends the grasp of our minds” (Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 237–38; see Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54). Torrance states, “It is, therefore, in the hypostatic reality of Jesus Christ who is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the ultimate Being of God as he is in himself, that human theological inquiry may by the grace of God find its point of entry into genuine knowledge of God” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 255).

⁵⁷ Torrance states that “our knowing of the Father through the Son, who is correlated with the Father in a relation of mutual knowing and being, is objectively grounded within the eternal being of God himself” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 223). See later in this essay Athanasius’s observation based on Luke 10:22, where knowledge of the Father and knowledge of the Son arise together, not one before or after the other.

and man is the doctrine of the Father⁵⁸ and is, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the concrete metaphysical referent to all we can know of the triune God.

Christians thus should reject Shah-Kazemi's argument that "we [can] look beyond the theological definition of the Trinitarian conception of God, and focus instead on its supratheological or metaphysical referent—the 'superessential One.'" It is on the foundation of the incarnation of God the Son revealing the Father to us in history that Christian doctrine opposes Shah-Kazemi and others echoing his doctrinal dichotomous way of thinking about "God."⁵⁹

2. *Sense and reference, the erroneous epistemological starting point.* The second error occurs in the context of the proper epistemological starting point. With an abstract or generalized notion of "God," a popular argument goes like this: "There is only one object of prayer—God. Christians and Muslims are reaching up in prayer to God. Therefore, since God is the only one 'answering the phone,' both Christians and Muslims worship the same God and are praying to the same God, though they understand God differently."

Volf states in the *Christianity Today* interview, "I think that Muslims and Christians who embrace the normative traditions of their faith refer to the same object, to the same Being, when they pray, when they worship, when they talk about God. The referent is the same."⁶⁰ Volf also states in *Allah*, "Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God. They understand God's character partly differently, but the object of their worship is the same."⁶¹ A popular example employed to illustrate this point concerns the planet Venus, labeled by some "the morning star" and by others "the evening star."⁶² Both actually refer to the same object, which is Venus, even though the senses communicated by the two labels differ.⁶³

If one employs the Venus example of sense and reference to demonstrate that Christians and Muslims worship the same God,⁶⁴ two fundamental issues arise: (a)

⁵⁸ Not exhaustively. For example, we cannot call the Son the Father. Athanasius: "And so, since they are one, and the Godhead itself one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except His being said to be Father" (*Against the Arians* 3.4).

⁵⁹ In his *Theology in Reconciliation*, Torrance discusses the problem of a radical dichotomy between God and the world. Such a dualistic framework, he asserts, leads to mythology, wherein "our attempts to think of God are only *epinoetic* acts grounded in our own this-worldly self-knowledge and projected into God across the great gulf between us" (240). This is precisely the problem with Shah-Kazemi and others of his paradigm. Recall Volf's claim, mentioned earlier in a note, that there is a "radical divide between creature [creator?] and creation."

⁶⁰ Galli interview, "Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?"

⁶¹ Volf, *Allah*, 14. Readers should note again that Volf's argument here echoes that of Shah-Kazemi, who is influenced by Islamic *ṣūfī* mysticism and its dichotomous differentiation between Essence and human-expressed divine characteristics (see earlier in this essay).

⁶² Thanks to Steve Blakemore, Professor of Christian Thought at Wesley Biblical Seminary, Jackson, MS, for bringing this to my attention and for conversation around it.

⁶³ The philosophical notion providing the context for this argument is "sense and reference," which philosopher and mathematician Gottlob Frege explored using the planet Venus as an example. Gottlob Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100 (1892): 25–50.

⁶⁴ See Daniel Lattier, "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/blog/do-christians-and-muslims-worship-same-god>. In his piece, Lattier mentions one scholar who appeals to Frege, philosopher Edward Feser, who utilizes Frege to

to repeat the earlier problem, lack of careful use of predicates; and (b) the starting point is erroneous.

a. *Venus and predicates.* First, the two senses, “morning star” and “evening star,” though different linguistically, in actuality point to the same object. Venus, which is the referent,⁶⁵ is the planet called Venus, is the second planet from the Sun in the solar system, with such and such a circumference, with such and such an average distance from the sun, etc. Further, the planet Venus itself as just described is called by some “the morning star” and by others “the evening star”; that is, the planet itself appears as both morning star and evening star.⁶⁶ Both senses are correct because they really point to the same object that possesses predicates (“second planet from the sun,” etc.) proper to it, not to some other object, for example, Saturn (with predicates proper to it such as sixth planet from the sun, of such and such a circumference, such and such an average distance from the sun, a giant ring formed of such and such, etc.).

Second, when two persons in conversation describe “Venus,” one of them could be wrong. If two persons are in conversation using the designator “Venus” and person A describes “Venus” with the first description just given and person B describes “Venus” as an ice-cold planet the size of all the other lights in the sky, then person B simply is wrong because the predicates expressed are not proper to Venus.

On another point unrelated to Venus, it is possible that two people in conversation about a presumed-to-be-similar object could be describing two real but different objects when predicates finally surface. To illustrate this point, Mortimer Adler writes about the common name “Julius Caesar.” He mentions three characters, each called “Julius Caesar.” One is Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar; another a historical person referred to in Plutarch’s *Lives*; and yet another a Roman general who conquered Gaul, wrote a history of certain battles, crossed the Rubicon, and so on. From here Adler observes,

If we wish to talk about the character and actions of Julius Caesar as portrayed in the play of that title by Shakespeare, we must identify the imaginary object of our discourse by a definite description of it as “the character of that name in a play by Shakespeare, with the title Julius Caesar, first produced on such a date, etc.”⁶⁷ It would be confusion, indeed, if one of the two persons who are en-

argue “yes.” Lattier calls Feser “an expert in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.” Readers might want to read this brief article for an exercise in lack of predicates.

⁶⁵ “Venus” is a word that serves as a designator of an object in space. People give to that object the designation “Venus.” As a designator, it serves to refer to or point to an actual object. On words as designators of objects, see Mortimer J. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 60–62.

⁶⁶ “When Venus is at its brightest, it becomes visible just minutes after the Sun goes down. This is when Venus is seen as the Evening Star. When Venus is on the other side of the Sun, it leads the Sun as it travels across the sky. Venus will rise in the morning a few hours before the Sun. Then as the Sun rises, the sky brightens and Venus fades away in the daytime sky. This is Venus the Morning Star.” (<https://www.universetoday.com/22570/venus-the-morning-star>).

⁶⁷ These are correct or proper predicates describing this particular Julius Caesar.

gaged in a conversation about Julius Caesar used that proper name to refer to Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and the other used it to refer to Plutarch's Caesar. They might get to the point of making contradictory statements about the apparently common object of their discourse, but were in fact talking about two different objects.⁶⁸

Take the last half of Adler's words and replace Julius Caesar with God, Shakespeare with Christianity, and Plutarch with Islam:

It would be confusion, indeed, if one of the two persons who are engaged in a conversation about God used that proper name⁶⁹ to refer to Christianity's God and the other used it to refer to Islam's God. They might get to the point of making contradictory statements about the apparently common object of their discourse, but were in fact talking about two different objects.

Volf's assertion that "Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God," that "they understand God's character partly differently," and that "the object of their worship is the same" does not hold when proper predicates—being essentially and inextricably linked⁷⁰ to the being, identity, acts, and attributes of God⁷¹—are put in use.⁷²

b. *The erroneous starting point.* Predicates are considered proper to the object "Venus" when the sense(s) communicated to us by the planet itself are acknowledged and articulated within the boundaries of its revelation of itself to us. In other words, Venus has inherent in itself certain attributes that make it what it really is, and Venus reveals itself to us through and with those attributes.

Epistemologically, Venus first reveals itself (although certainly the planet was given the name "Venus" by observers in order to serve as a designator for the ob-

⁶⁸ Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, 71.

⁶⁹ "God" is a proper noun functioning as a name when capitalized. At the very least, scholars of the "same God" view see "God" as a personal, monotheistic Being.

⁷⁰ Linked in a *non-dichotomous* way, in a way that essentially and inextricably connects sense with referent. Torrance often emphasizes the error of divorcing the being of God from his internal relations as Trinity. He recalls Basil's "distinction between the divine being and the divine energies, which had the effect of restricting knowledge of God [only] to his divine energies, and ruling out any real access to knowledge of God in the intrinsic relations of his eternal triune being" (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 336). Torrance then mentions "the claim of Pseudo-Dionysius that mystical theology must reach beyond the revealed concept of *Fatherhood* in its thought of God as supersensual undifferentiated *ousia* [here transliterated] not nameable or knowable at all in its internal relations." Volf in particular gravitates to this view, quite prevalent in *ṣūfī* thought, as we have seen.

⁷¹ As discussed earlier concerning so-called common attributes such as "creator," "all powerful," etc.

⁷² An example of omitting a predicate for "God" and relegating predicates to the peripheral (as if they are ultimately not important to the identity and being of the one God), occurs in a piece written by Lamin Sanneh. Though Sanneh calls attention to the issue of predicates when examining whether or not Christians and Muslims worship the same God, note in the following (1) his lack of predicates for "God"; and (2) his dichotomous way of thinking, divorcing predicates from "God" in a way that Christians and Muslims can have unity over "God" while differing over predicates: "Muslims and Christians agree on the great subject that God exists and that God is one. They disagree, however, about the predicates they use of God." He goes on to state, "The question, then, is whether their differences condemn Muslims and Christians to estrangement before God as subject. If predicates divide, the subject unites, or should unite" ("Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?," 35).

ject) with specific predicated characteristics (mentioned above) that define and describe what it is. Thus, the starting point is revelatory disclosure on the part of the object called Venus. After that, certain words are assigned to Venus that help describe what it reveals about itself, what it first disclosed to us.⁷³

Translating this dynamic to our context, Volf and others holding his view err in the epistemological starting point. They start with Christians and Muslims praying, worshipping, and talking about “God.” They start from the bottom and work upward, because in this instance the bottom is more important to them methodologically, rather than from the top down. They presuppose that God has not revealed himself in concretely specific and unique ways⁷⁴ and work their way upward to an abstract or generalized notion of a “God” that ultimately transcends any human-constructed conceptions, even contradictory ones. The results: (1) “God” may be referred to by some as Trinity and by others as not Trinity, incarnate and not incarnate; (2) particulars ultimately do not matter as to identity, for, as is the case with Shah-Kazemi and others influenced by his view, there is an “absolutely ineffable and thus unnameable” Essence, or “God,” upon which all can agree.

Just as the planet Venus has first revealed to us certain predicates about itself, predicates inextricably linked to what it is, so it is with the triune God—it is he who first reveals himself to humanity, whereby it is then appropriate to predicatize according to that revelation, and then to address him in prayer specifically as the Being revealed by himself to us intrinsically as he is in his internal Trinitarian relations. The same notion should hold with Qur’anic Muslims within their theological frame. Their holy writings reveal something of the characteristics of their God, and so they talk of their God, using the characteristics their God reveals as intrinsic to being (or they talk about what their God is *not*, as seen often in the Qur’an⁷⁵). Those in the “same God” camp ignore this. Yet, only when this is acknowledged will persons be in the proper position to proceed with truly honest conversation over the question.

⁷³ Torrance is helpful here in exploring the notion of a “disclosure model” of inquiry. Some epistemologies of natural science proceed on this model: A person comes to a phenomenon and puts productive, truth-conducive questions to it, allowing the phenomenon to disclose itself to the person (see *Ground and Grammar*, 125–26; *Theology in Reconciliation*, 264). See Torrance’s excellent section on Athanasius’s use of language for expressing reality (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 241–47). As Torrance puts it, “We are forced to adapt our common language to the nature and reality of God who is disclosed to us in Jesus Christ” (241).

⁷⁴ And, from the view of Islam, they talk as though the Qur’anic Allāh is not revealed in a specific and unique way.

⁷⁵ For example, Qur’an 4:171.

III. *HOMOOUSIOS* AS FOUNDATIONAL AND THE BEST QUESTION TO ASK: DO MUSLIMS⁷⁶ WORSHIP GOD THE FATHER?

The third error is ignoring or dismissing the doctrine of *homoousios*. *Homoousios* translates “[of the] same substance” or “[of] one substance.”⁷⁷ The Council of Nicaea in AD 325 used the word, asserting that the Son is *homoousion tō patri*—“of one substance with the Father.”⁷⁸ By ignoring the doctrine of *homoousios* one can fall prey to partitive theological thinking. Conversely, when exploring theology within the framework of the *homoousion*, non-partitive theological method arises, along with the best question to ask: “Do Muslims worship God the Father?”

1. *Theology abhors partition*. What sometimes occurs (more often than not?) in theological studies, and what occurs with the “same God” advocates, is severing theological categories from their ontological and theological mooring—which is the triune God—and thus doing theology partitively. Torrance calls upon the unitary model of Athanasius, which guards against any partitive thinking.⁷⁹ In light of the *homoousion*, Athanasius abhorred partitive theological language.⁸⁰ Torrance also argues that Trinity is the ground and grammar of theology, meaning that the doctrine

⁷⁶ Implied here and following is the predicate “qur’anic” before “Muslims.”

⁷⁷ Following biblical, historic orthodoxy. The general meaning is “[of the] same essence / nature / substance.” In the Father-Son, Son-Father relation, the term refers to the Son being of the same essence with the Father.

⁷⁸ After the council of Nicaea in AD 325 there soon arose discussion over the issue of including (or not) the Holy Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father and the Son. At the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, more was added to the Nicene abrupt ending mentioning the Holy Spirit. Added was the following: “the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.” However, the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father and the Son was left out. This did not sit well with Gregory Nazianzen, who “regretted that the Council had not been more forthright in some of its clauses, presumably about the Deity and consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit” (Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 332). In order to give formal consent to the respected bishops assembled at Nicaea, “the Council made as little change as possible in the Creed, and took an uncontroversial line in keeping close to Biblical statements in the additional clauses on the Holy Spirit” (ibid.).

⁷⁹ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 222. Torrance is well known for his grasp of natural science and scientific epistemological procedure, and translating what he sees as proper science-related epistemology into “theological science.” For example, Torrance discusses Newtonian science, which eventually led to a deeply embedded deism, which, Torrance argues, also dwells “menacingly in the background of Western and especially Protestant thought” (*Ground and Grammar*, 68–71; this is the dualistic model that posits an abstract notion of “God” divorced from his acts and his attributes in dynamic interaction with the world). However, with James Clerk Maxwell (19th cent.) and Albert Einstein (20th cent.), a modern change from a deistic and dualistic outlook to a unitary approach to science took place (the latter paradigm existed earlier in some ancient Christian theologians, but was virtually lost). Torrance takes this scientific unitary model, which weds the Transcendent (for Maxwell, the Christian God; for Einstein, some sort of intelligence incarnate in nature) to the workings of nature in a relational, interactive, and dynamic way (ibid., 72–73), and translates it into “theological science,” which places all theology within the life of the triune God (ibid., 110–78). It is therefore theologically fatal to sever the incarnation of the Son in our world from the life of the triune God.

⁸⁰ In *On Luke 10:22*, Athanasius constantly theologizes that the being of the Son is “proper” to the being of the Father. See also Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.3, 66. See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 306.

of the Trinity is the ground upon which theological categories are to be understood, and the grammar with which to articulate theology. Due to the Father, Son, and Spirit being *homoousios*, Trinity must govern theological reflection and articulation. If not, partitive theology arises and imposes its influence.⁸¹ The following sections explain this.

2. *Predicate-related homoousios and the Trinitarian matrix.* The *homoousios* is the foundation of the Christian faith, including its gospel. With the *homoousios* as foundational, Torrance argues that a “unitary model,” or “Trinitarian matrix,” is the ground and grammar of theology, not the fatal “dualistic model.”⁸² By “dualistic” Torrance means both severing and isolating theological categories (including creation and incarnation) from the Trinitarian *homoousion*-related ontological matrix in which they occur.

Father, Son, and Spirit are the undivided (*homoousios*) Trinity. One cannot believe in or worship the Father without the Son and the Spirit.⁸³ In light of this, rather than posing the question as “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” the best question to ask is “Do Muslims worship God the Father?”

3. *Do Muslims worship God the Father?*⁸⁴ Phrasing the question this way guards against (1) positing a predicate-less “God”; (2) ignoring the *homoousion*; and (3) articulating Christology in a partitive sense.⁸⁵ Moreover, putting the question this way invites, by theological necessity, an answer from those in the “same God” camp who claim to be Christians, because it calls them to account for the intimate relation of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son.

a. *Partitive Christology.* To partition or sever Christology from Patrology and Pneumatology, that is, from the life of the Trinity, is to isolate the person of the Son from the Father and the Spirit and therefore to make a fundamental epistemological mistake.⁸⁶ To sever the incarnation from an abstract or generalized concept of “God,” as certain thinkers like Volf do,⁸⁷ does not honor the triune God.

⁸¹ For example, Volf makes a separation between “socially relevant knowledge of God” and “saving knowledge of God” (*Allah*, 13). Predicates for “God” aside, should one dichotomize between socially relevant knowledge and saving knowledge as if the two are not inextricably linked? It appears that Volf would answer yes: “I leave the questions of salvation and eternal destiny aside” (*ibid.*).

⁸² E.g. *Ground and Grammar*, 148.

⁸³ Or the Son without the Father and the Spirit, or the Spirit without the Father and the Son.

⁸⁴ For Muslims holding to the teaching of the Qur’ān, the answer should be “no” from the outset, for “(far exalted is He) above having a son” (Qur’ān 4:171, in A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Translation and Commentary* [Brentwood, MD: Amana Corp., 1983]).

⁸⁵ Phrasing the question as “Do Christians and Muslims worship the triune God?” also guards against these three ills (see section II).

⁸⁶ Torrance writes of Athanasius “making clear ... the inseparability of the Son from the Father, in being as in act” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 225). As an aside, the disciplines of Christology of Religions and Pneumatology of Religions can be problematic from the very start. We should opt for a Trinitology of Religions. For an argument proposing a Trinitology of religions, see Gerald R. McDermott, “How the Trinity Should Govern Our Approach to World Religions,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 49–64, esp. pp. 55–56 where he lists a few theologians who divide the Spirit from the Son. He mentions Raimundo Panikkar, Jacques Dupuis, and Paul Knitter.

⁸⁷ Volf mentions the Trinity in his *Christianity Today* interview and several times in *Allah*, but the following from Volf demonstrates his view that the doctrine of the Trinity does not provide a line drawn in

From ignorance, apathy, or outright rejection relating to the *homoousion*, the identity of the Son is plucked out and examined without the Patrological and Pneumatological context⁸⁸ in which this identity occurs. When practiced, it can lead to the heretical conclusion that although one denies the identity of the Son, one still has a proper view of “God.” This also leads to the conclusion that the Qur’ān has a “defective Christology,” a “partially correct Christology,” or an “inadequate Christology,”⁸⁹ not a heretical Christology.

For example, Volf employs “inadequate” language when it comes to “God” and Jesus Christ. He writes of a Muslim named Saladin, who “would have explicitly denied that God is the Holy Trinity and that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sin of the world. Why would his inadequate convictions about God ...?”⁹⁰ Volf is right to say that Saladin would have denied the Trinity (along with the *homoousios*). In strongly implicit denial of the doctrine of the *homoousion*, Qur’ān 4:171 identifies Jesus as no more than an apostle, that Allāh is above having a son, and, to use A. Yusuf Ali’s translation, “Say not ‘Trinity’: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah.” (Note that the Qur’ān is making an affirmation people like Volf seize upon—that there is one God; yet with this verse the Qur’ān is rejecting the Trinity when it claims there is one God.⁹¹)

Volf talks of people who “love their neighbor” and “worship the one true God, even if their understanding of God is inadequate and their worship is seriously lacking in other regards.”⁹² Pneumatologically, Volf implies one of two positions: (1) The acts of loving one’s neighbor and worshiping the “one true God” take place with people who are in communion with God the Holy Spirit (Christians) and with people who are not in communion with the Holy Spirit (non-Christians who reject who Jesus is); (2) Muslims are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, are in the Body of Christ, and are the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells and therefore on

the sand. In the context of a question to Volf about Christians and Muslims disagreeing over the doctrine “God is one,” Volf answers, “Jews and Christians worship the same God. They just understand God in a different way—Christians in a Trinitarian way, and Jews not” (*Christianity Today* interview). Volf also states, “If ... Muslims have a common God with Christians, then their denial of the Trinity doesn’t provide sufficient grounds to say that Muslims don’t believe in the same God” (*Allah*, 145). For scholarly evidence of his view, Volf appeals to Roman Catholic theologians (*ibid.*, 27) and Martin Luther (*ibid.*, 60–76).

⁸⁸ “Context” in the singular is intentional.

⁸⁹ For example, on the heels of the claim that Islam sees Jesus as a great prophet.

⁹⁰ *Allah*, 122.

⁹¹ As an argument against the claim that the Qur’ān denies the Trinity, some assert that the Qur’ān is not denying the classical orthodox doctrine of the Trinity but is instead correcting the erroneous view that the Trinity is God, Jesus and Mary (Qur’ān 5:116; 6:101). Volf states in the *Christianity Today* interview “that the denials of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Qur’an are denials of an inappropriately understood version of the Trinity.” However, *any* explanation of the Trinity will be rejected by qur’ānic Muslims, based on the teachings of the Qur’ān. The Trinity is straightforwardly denied when belief in Jesus as God the Son, Son of God, is denied (Qur’ān 4:171; 18:4; 19:35). See Qur’ān 19:88–89, where we read that the doctrine that God “has begotten a son” is “a thing most monstrous.” In his comments on this verse, A. Yusuf Ali states that this doctrine is “stupendous blasphemy against God” (*The Holy Qur’an*, 785).

⁹² *Allah*, 122. See also 145, where Volf employs the term “misunderstanding.”

that ground can love God and neighbor. Volf most likely affirms the first. Either way, Volf engages in partitive theology and ignores the *homoousion*.

Following is examination of the doctrines of the *homoousios* and the *perichōrēsis*, which remedy the ills of theological partitioning and lead to the answer that Muslims (who are faithful to the teaching of the Qurʾān) do not worship God the Father.

b. *Homoousios in John*. Though the word *homoousios* does not appear in the Gospel of John, the content communicated by the word is explicit in John 1:1c, where the anarthrous predicate nominative *theos* in relation to the *logos*, who is the eternally preexistent Word of God the Father, was (and is) eternally of the same essence as the Father.⁹³ This Johannine *homoousios*, which is part of the Prologue to the Gospel, is reflected in John 1:18 (the last verse of the Prologue), wherein the only-begotten, who is *theos* by nature as declared in John 1:1, is eternally in the bosom of the Father—he eternally possesses a unique filial and inseparable relationship with the Father.⁹⁴ As the Gospel unfolds, the *homoousios* between the Father and the Son is extended, illustrated, or “played out”⁹⁵ in the words and life of Jesus. For example, in John 5:18 John recalls the instance where Jesus called God his own Father, making himself equal (*ison*) with God the Father; and in John 10:30 Jesus asserts “I and the Father are one” on the virtual heels of his declaration “I am” in John 8:58. The confession of Jesus as God the Son (implying that he is *homoousios* with the Father) flows worshipfully from the lips of Thomas in John 20:28: “My Lord and my God.”⁹⁶

Keeping with this orthodoxy in the Gospel of John, Athanasius defended the sense of the doctrine of *homoousios* in describing the ontological identity of the Father and the Son—the Son shares with the Father an absolute, unchangeable, and eternal nature, that of uncompromised and undivided *theos*.⁹⁷ Following are significant aspects of this.

Athanasius composed a brief treatise entitled *On Luke 10:22*, in which he argued for the undivided sharing of essence between the Father and the Son. Luke 10:22b reads, “No one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son wills to reveal him.” Torrance offers conclusions on this verse, recalling the teaching of Athanasius.⁹⁸

First, the Father-Son relation falls within the very being of God. Second, if the Father-Son relation falls within the very being of God, then the incarnation of

⁹³ For in-depth analysis, see Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 65–67.

⁹⁴ See Harris, *Jesus as God*, 96.

⁹⁵ For the Prologue as an “overture,” see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:cxviii. Leon Morris states of the Prologue: “These verses bring before us some of the great thoughts that will be developed as the narrative unfolds” (*Gospel According to John*, 71).

⁹⁶ See Harris, *Jesus as God*, 124–29, for treatment of these verses.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., *Against the Arians* 1.9, 22, 41; *de Decretis* 3, 23.

⁹⁸ For the following insights, see Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 302–313; *Theology in Reconciliation*, 215–66.

the Son falls indivisibly within the very being of God. Third, there is a closed circle of knowing between the Son and the Father. Fourth, on our part, knowledge of the Father and knowledge of the Son arise together, not one apart from or before the other. Therefore, knowing the Father simultaneously comes with knowing the Son. Fifth, Christians alone enter into this “closed circle of divine knowing”⁹⁹ between the Father and the Son, which in part means entering into the uniquely intimate, transformational covenantal knowing of the Father and Jesus Christ, described by Jesus in John 17:3.¹⁰⁰

Qur’anic Islam is notionally similar to Arianism in its denial of the Word’s *homoousion* with the Father. In *Against the Arians*, Athanasius states that Arius denies the Logos as very God, denies that the Logos is of the Father’s essence, places the Logos within the order of things created, states that the Logos cannot perfectly know the Father, asserts that the essence of the Son and that of the Father are separate, and asserts that the Son and the Father do not participate in each other. Athanasius then quotes Arius saying that the Father and the Son are “utterly unlike from each other in essence and glory, unto infinity.”¹⁰¹ Qur’anic Islam echoes this.¹⁰²

Against this heresy, Athanasius argued frequently that the Son is proper to the Father’s substance,¹⁰³ which met with the great opening statement in the Gospel of John. Athanasius often applies to his apologetic the notion of negative implications if what the heretics say is true. For example, in his *Against the Arians* 3.12 he reasons that if there were no equality of essence between the Father and the Son, then the Father alone would be Giver. Because of *homoousios* Athanasius states that “there is nothing but the Father operates it through the Son, for thus is grace secure to him who receives it.”¹⁰⁴ The point of this is profound: severing the being of the Son from the Father results in no security and a mere moral sense of salvation.¹⁰⁵ If Jesus is merely a creature, he offers no divinely real and divinely substantial redemption, for God himself has not condescended in Christ. Therefore, separate the being of the Son from the being of the Father, and there can be no real, substantial love from God the Father himself in his Son Jesus Christ. Sadly, those who state

⁹⁹ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 59; *Theology in Reconciliation*, 223, 240–41. See also Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance*, 60.

¹⁰⁰ The latter point in addition to Torrance. John 17:3: “That they may know You ... and Jesus Christ.” See Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 2:752. Though he does not mention the notion of covenant, his comments on “know” reflect covenant: “a life of obedience to God’s commandments”; “loving communion with fellow Christians.” Morris: “To know Him transforms a man and introduces him to a different quality of living The only way to know God is through the revelation He has made, and He has revealed Himself in His Son” (*Gospel According to John*, 720).

¹⁰¹ Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.6.

¹⁰² Islam echoes the above if we replace “Logos” and “Son” with Jesus (or lowercase “son”), and “Father” with Allāh. See Qur’ān 42:11: “There is nothing whatever like unto Him.”

¹⁰³ E.g. *Against the Arians* 1.19–20.

¹⁰⁴ Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.12.

¹⁰⁵ As is evident in Islam and in moral and social gospels found in liberal theologies. For a thumbnail sketch of liberal theologies and their social concerns, see the Introduction in Paul Rasor, *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century* (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books, 2005).

that we along with Muslims worship the same God are at best ignorant of this, and at worst relegate this to the category of non-essential.

In this context, Torrance in his *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* calls upon the Athanasian phrase *enousios logos*: the Logos of God is inherent in the Being of God.¹⁰⁶ The right theological conclusion, noted above from Athanasius, is that “there is nothing but the Father operates it through the Son.” This is the theological fruit of the *homoousion*, and of it Torrance says, “the *homoousion* is the ontological and epistemological lynchpin of Christian theology. With it, everything hangs together; without it, everything ultimately falls apart.”¹⁰⁷ How, then, for those who answer “yes” to the question, can worship of God the Father take place except that the Father operates it through the Son in a way that there is absolute ontological identity between Father and Son?

The profound truth of the *homoousion* permeated the theology of select early church theologians, due in part to the strong sense of *homoousios* in John 1:1c. Speaking of the importance of *homoousios*, Torrance puts it this way: “the Nicene *homoousios tō patri*¹⁰⁸ was a hermeneutical as well as a theological instrument.”¹⁰⁹ They in part took their cue from John, who orchestrates the Father-Son relation recalling the words of Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders. In John 8:41–42, to those who challenged Jesus with, “We have one Father: God,” Jesus answered, “If God were your Father, you would love me.” Why? First, Jesus answers that he has proceeded forth from God the Father and has come from God the Father.¹¹⁰ This is the logical theological outcome of the *homoousion* implied in John 1:1c. Second, these religious leaders severed¹¹¹ the being of the Son from the being of the Father.¹¹² In light of the *homoousios* (and the *perichōrēsis*; see next section), John is utilizing Jesus’s statement to communicate that one cannot have the Father without love for the Son.¹¹³ This recalls Luke 10:22: “No one knows the Son but the Father; and no one knows the Father but the Son.” There is a mutual, inseparable knowing between the Father and the Son and an inseparable eternal ontological union between Father and Son (and Spirit). Torrance rightly sees that what the triune God is toward us, he is toward us in all his undivided *homoousios*-being—as Father, Son, and Spirit.¹¹⁴

c. *Perichōrēsis* in *John*. Important to this discussion is *perichōrēsis*, the eternal mutual indwelling (or coinherence) of the three distinct persons of the triune God. Working with John 17, Torrance states that *perichōrēsis* for Athanasius (though Athanasius did not use the term), meant that while each person of the Trinity eternally remains what he is, each distinct person “is wholly in the others as the others are

¹⁰⁶ Torrance, *Ground and Grammar*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 160–61.

¹⁰⁸ Here transliterated.

¹⁰⁹ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 129.

¹¹⁰ See above on the Athanasian *enousios logos*.

¹¹¹ As qur’anic Muslims do.

¹¹² See John 10:30–31.

¹¹³ Proper love for the Son: “You would love *me*.”

¹¹⁴ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 199.

wholly in him.”¹¹⁵ “Through the *homoousion*,” says Torrance as he expounds on Athanasius’s *Against the Arians* 3.1 and following, “the incarnational and saving self-revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was traced back to what God is enhypostatically and coinherently in himself, in his own eternal being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁶

God the Father’s being is ontologically and undividedly shared with the Lord Jesus (and with the Holy Spirit). Therefore one cannot worship the Father without the Son. The Father does not reveal himself save only through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Athanasius, working with John 17, states: “Whoso sees the Son, sees what is proper to the Father, and knows that the Son’s being, because from the Father, is therefore in the Father. . . . Whoso thus contemplates the Son,¹¹⁷ contemplates what is proper to the Father’s essence.”¹¹⁸ Athanasius continues: “He who believes in the Son, believes also in the Father, for he believes what is proper to the Father’s essence.” Belief in the Father is a function of belief in the Son. Therefore, “in the Son, one worships and honors the Father.”¹¹⁹ Athanasius, as he works with the Gospel of John, does not allow any definition of the Son except that which confesses the Son in the way just described.¹²⁰ “He who thus worships, worships one God.”¹²¹

d. *Knowing the Father, being brought to the Father, and homoousios with us*. In Luke 10:22, after declaring that “no one knows the Son but the Father; and no one knows the Father but the Son,” Jesus states, “and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him.” Not only do knowledge of the Father and knowledge of the Son arise simultaneously, not one without the other or apart from the other, but also Christians are, by the grace of God the Holy Spirit and in communion with him, those who enter into the closed circle of knowing between the Father and the Son,¹²² and this only through faith in the incarnate Son of God. This is a closed covenant-knowing that can only be actualized if, as John states in chapter 1 and near the end of the Gospel, one receives Christ as he has revealed himself.¹²³

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹⁷ “Contemplates,” not “rejects” as did the Arians and as do Qur’anic Muslims.

¹¹⁸ *Against the Arians* 3.3.

¹¹⁹ *Against the Arians* 3.6.

¹²⁰ Athanasius minced no words when he described false teachers and their heretical doctrines of Jesus, and in the context of *perichoresis* he effectively refuted Arius’s doctrine. See *Against the Arians* 3.1, 67.

¹²¹ *Against the Arians* 3.6. In John 5:23, Jesus states, “so that all might honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” Torrance sums up the theological posture of the early church: “godliness and accuracy, worship and precision” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 74–75). Accurate and precise theology went hand in hand with godliness and worship, and was part of the theological fabric of the early theologians who gave us the Nicene Creed (*ibid.*, 75).

¹²² Athanasius was careful not to omit the Spirit here. See *Against the Arians* 3.24–25, esp. 25, where “we shall be accounted to have become one in Son and in Father, because the same Spirit is in us who is in the Word who is in the Father” (quoted in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 233). Torrance discusses this in the context of Athanasius’s doctrine of the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father and the Son.

¹²³ Inferred here from the Gospel of John. “Those who received him” (1:12), i.e. “him” as described; “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that

Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* 8.4 states that the Word took to himself a nature like ours, that he may offer it to the Father. Athanasius later states that Jesus “satisfied the debt by his death” (9.2). Recognizing the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of the Son of God, his taking on humanity *for* us, the Chalcedonian Creed states that Jesus is “*homoousios* with us according to the manhood.” With this statement, Chalcedon continued in the tradition of Athanasius and instantiated formally the ground for entering into the closed circle of knowing between the Father and the Son: Jesus as fully *theos* and fully man has identified with our humanity, and as such is “the way,” the way to knowing the Father.¹²⁴

Following from the observations above is another important observation that addresses the question, “Do Muslims worship God the Father?”: We worship the Father *with* the Son.¹²⁵ In light of the Son being *homoousios* with us according to the manhood, and of us being in the *homoousios-with-us-Son*, “we pray not only in and through Christ, but with Christ.”¹²⁶ This is all the more evident when considering the great high priesthood of Christ. Drawing from Athanasius, Torrance states,

Since the Son of God was made Priest in that he was made man, without ceasing to be God, he fulfils his priesthood as one who *receives* as well as one who *offers* prayer. ... It is humanity which is the sphere of his priesthood, and it is the fulfilment of his priestly ministry as man offering himself on our behalf which becomes the focus of our worship of the Father. ... Athanasius’ conclusion to the *De Incarnatione* was typical of the underlying theological structure: ... “Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom and *with* whom, to the Father *with* the Son himself in the Holy Spirit ... be honour and power and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”¹²⁷

4. *The two senses of homoousios brought together.* In Jesus Christ alone, by virtue of his being *homoousios* with us according to his manhood and *homoousios* with the Father and the Spirit according to his deity, Christians alone by grace through faith are presented to the Father in the activity of his self-consecration and self-presentation to the Father, and in him receive the one and only redemptive movement of God toward humanity. In him alone is the one and only worship act of humanity toward God the Father sanctified, and in him alone is human worship of God the Father in the Father’s movement toward humanity accepted. All this takes place uniquely in the Son’s perfect communion with God the Holy Spirit, and with the Spirit’s indwelling communion with Christians in the Son. How, then, can Muslims worship God the Father? If the word “Muslim” is defined by the Qur’ān, they

believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Note as well Jesus’s words to those who rejected the content of who he is: “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (8:24).

¹²⁴ When by the grace of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the Father and the Son one believes, as John states, that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” one has life in his name. It is in this way, that is, by way of the deity and the humanity of Christ, that one knows God the Father.

¹²⁵ See Torrance’s discussion on the vicarious humanity of the Son in his *Theology in Reconciliation*, 175–88, esp. 228–29, where he calls upon Athanasius’s *Against the Arians* 1.41, 50; 2.7, 12, 50, 65, 74; 3.30, 38; 4.6.

¹²⁶ Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance*, 178.

¹²⁷ Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 175–76, 187; citing Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 57.

do not, for they deny the identity of Jesus as (1) the eternal preincarnate God the Son; (2) God the Son incarnate; (3) the only way to the Father; (4) great high priest; and (5) sole mediator between humanity and the Father.

IV. CONCLUSION

This essay pointed to two important theological notions necessary to answering the popular question “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?”—predicates and *homoousios*.

In theological discourse, whether formal or informal, “God” employed alone with no biblically-rooted predicates (triune, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) can be a meaningless, abstract word. Underlying the question in its popular form is the hidden presupposition of an abstract notion of “God.” The question so phrased is therefore problematic and meaningless from the start.

With the predicate “triune” preceding the word “God,” the question “Do Muslims and Christians worship the triune God?” cuts sharply to the point and exposes immediately the problematic nature of the common way of phrasing the question.

When the predicate “the Father” follows the word “God,” the best question to ask is: “Do Muslims worship God the Father?” Putting the question this way places the Son’s consubstantial (*homoousios*) relation with the Father in the center of the discussion. With this, the Father-Son relation in the concrete, historical incarnate reality of the Son takes its rightful epistemological place with primacy and overpowering intimacy. It is the dynamically profoundest of points with which to come to grips if one belongs to the “same God” camp.

The doctrine of the *homoousios* refers in one sense to the Son’s ontological relationship with the Father, and in another sense to the Son’s—by virtue of his vicarious humanity—ontological relationship with us. In the first sense, the *homoousios* of the Son with the Father, in addition to prohibiting the notion of an abstract or generalized notion of “God,” posits that the Father cannot be worshiped apart from the Son. Proponents of the “same God” view relegate Father-Son, Son-Father *homoousios* to the periphery or deny it outright. In the second sense, the doctrine that Jesus is *homoousios* with us is inextricably linked to his great high priesthood as the one and only mediator between humanity and the Father, and the only one in whom, through whom, and with whom worship of God the Father in communion with God the Holy Spirit takes place. Those in the “same God” camp relegate this to the periphery or deny it outright. Bringing these two senses together, one cannot worship, believe in, or come to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6), who is uncompromisingly and undividedly proper to the Father’s essence.

The doctrine of *homoousios* also prohibits any partitive theologizing, for the being of the Son cannot be severed from the being of the Father (and from the Holy Spirit). Yet, this is precisely what advocates of “same God” theology, whether knowingly or unknowingly, do.

The one triune God as *homoousios* and *perichōresis* breaks into real history and time¹²⁸ and acts in history in the person of Jesus. The triune God is not divorced relationally from creation, so no gulf between the triune God and creation exists. In the context of the distinct persons of the Trinity, and with the *homoousios* and *perichōresis* as foundational, the acts of Jesus in communion with the Holy Spirit and the Father *are* the acts of the triunely personal God in indissoluble union and uniquely true ontological revelatory interaction with creation.¹²⁹

Homoousios pertaining to the distinct persons of the Trinity describes what the triune God is, intrinsically in undivided relation. Therefore those who deny a relationship with God the Son by rejecting who he is do not have a relationship with the Father and do not worship the Father in communion with the Holy Spirit. Qur'ānic Muslims do not worship the triune God because they reject the triune God. They do not worship the Father or believe in the Father because they reject his Son. One's view of who Jesus is has eternal consequences.

For too long, omission of proper theological predicates and no interaction with the doctrine of *homoousios* have characterized the discussion over whether or not Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Ending this way of theologizing over the question is desperately needed for clarity and truth.

“God *is* the Trinity, and the Trinity *is* God.”¹³⁰

May Muslims come to know God the Father through our great God and Savior Jesus Christ and in communion with God the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁸ Torrance talks of the influence of “Aristotelian philosophy of nature, the receptacle or container concept of space, which especially after the twelfth and thirteenth centuries came to be built into the whole structure of medieval thought, affecting not only its cosmology but its understanding of the incarnation and the real presence of Christ.” This, says Torrance, “led Latin theology to conceive the presence of God largely in a *spatial* manner *apart from time*” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, 124).

¹²⁹ Contrast this with Volf: “The talk of ‘Persons’ captures something important about God, but is inadequate to express the full reality, because God transcends the notion of ‘person’” (*Allah*, 140). Though talk of three distinct persons as the triune God does not exhaust the full reality, it is hardly inadequate. It is quite sufficient for knowledge of the triune God as revealed uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth. The holy Trinity does not transcend the notion of “person”; the holy Trinity *is* triunely personal. Therefore, through the language of persons the full reality is expressed, pointed to.

¹³⁰ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 330.