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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I probe the question of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God primarily through the discipline of philosophy of language. Though a multifaceted question at its core (e.g., theological, historical), the question directly ties into how language operates in relation to God. That is, the ways in which Muslims and Christians make predications of God have a significant role in delineating whether they worship the same God. By working from the perspective of predication, I argue that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God. In this sense, Muslims and Christians refer to the same God with the use of generic predicates (e.g., God is good); however, they do not worship same God given that worship entails the use of specific predicates (e.g., God is Triune). Muslims and Christians thus meet the criteria for common reference but cannot be regarded as maintaining the same referent in their worship.

Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God: A Philosophical Approach

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Zachary W. Casey

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من منطلق الصداقة. إلى أصدقائي وأعواني:
علي، إزدهار، حسين، حسن

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCCION

Research Question

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? One way to pursue this question is through the discipline of philosophy.¹ For example, philosophy of language clarifies what is entailed in predication and, as a result, may contribute to its theological application in worship. Because worship entails linguistic elements (e.g., an informative function) that necessitate theological predication, it is important to understand how predicates function as they relate to the question at hand. In this respect, predication plays a fundamental role when deciding whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

Toward an Account of Reference and Predication

In *An Interpretation of Religion*, John Hick reflects on the plurality of religious experience² and its reliability to orient people toward contemplation of God.³ He argues that various religious experiences arise because God is universally presupposed and thus

1. It should be noted this question cannot be reduced to areas of philosophical inquiry alone, which includes several subdisciplines (e.g., philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, epistemology). Instead, embedded in the question are also theological, historical, and linguistic aspects that necessarily facilitate any decision of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. That is, these areas of research would need to be addressed to offer systematic account of the issue at hand.

2. See John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

3. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Divine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). See also John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation" in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54–66.

God receives different predicates (e.g., Shiva, Trinity, Allah) depending on the religious tradition. Hick's hypothesis maintains that (1) God's essence is unknowable and (2) humans are only capable of basic predications of God grounded in their religious experiences in the phenomenal world. In this respect, God is presupposed to exist through religious experiences and only varies in predication insofar as these experiences are influenced by one's religious tradition that is contrived in a particular environment and culture (e.g., beliefs, liturgical rites). In other words, theological predicates are grammatical, rather than referential, concepts that are determined by religious experience; such experiences are exclusively phenomenological.⁴ This creates an ontological gulf between God and humanity that makes theological predicates, whether from a cataphatic or apophatic perspective, irrelevant for assessing the normative value of religious experience. The result of this dissimilarity between God and humanity makes any decision on the question at hand unwarranted, given that theological predicates are grounded in phenomenology.

In his essay, "Christians, Muslims, and the Name of God," Denys Turner questions the ontological gulf created in Hick's hypothesis based on apophatic theology. If theological predicates are irrelevant even from an apophatic perspective, Turner argues this creates "an equivocal dividedness" in which God becomes utterly imperceptible. In situations where God is utterly imperceptible, there is no basis from which to conclude

4. Hick is clear on this point. Religious experiences are analogous across major religious lines. They differ, however, only because the phenomenology of these experiences are adapted based on religious tradition. To clarify this point, take the following example: Two people looking at the same abstract painting have the same experience perceiving the painting. However, the painting will be interpreted differently by the two individuals based on the environmental and cultural factors influencing their phenomenal experience.

whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.⁵ That is, if humans are unable to approach God *via negativa*, then there is no positive content to base a normative analysis on the question at hand.

Turner tries to resolve this problem by deeming predicates useful insofar as they illuminate that God lacks spatial, temporal, and metaphysical parts (i.e., divine simplicity). In this way, predicates contain positive content insofar as they illustrate that God is beyond spatial, temporal, and metaphysical composition, which separates God from finite concepts. For example, Turner maintains that the Islamic predicate of *Tawhid* (i.e., oneness or unification) and the Christian predicate of God as Triune are useful because they illuminate that there is “no plurality of gods and no plurality in God.”⁶ Therefore Turner’s line of argumentation is that the predicates of *Tawhid* and the Trinity have positive content because they illuminate that God is beyond human categorization.

Turner thus concludes that *Tawhid* and the Trinity are not divergent theological claims since they highlight God’s simplicity that transcends the complexities of created composition. Given that Islam and Christianity maintain God’s utter transcendence, embedded in the predicates of *Tawhid* and the Trinity are analogous theological perspectives and therefore do not contradict each other from a numerical standpoint (i.e., God as exclusively one or God as Triune). In this way, Turner justifies that Muslims and

5. This and other critiques of Hick’s hypothesis can be found in Sumner B. Twiss, “The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics,” in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–98.

6. Denys Turner, “Christians, Muslims, and the Name of God: Who Owns It, and How Would We Know?” in *Do we Worship the Same God?* ed. by Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 35.

Christians worship the same God because they rely on an apophatic qualifier.⁷ Thus the essence of Turner's argument is that if Muslims and Christians maintain that God is not made of spatial, temporal, or metaphysical parts, then they must worship the same God.

In this sense, Turner tries to dial back the ontological gulf created in Hick's hypothesis between God and humanity by relying on apophatic theology. However, an appeal to apophatic theology seems to forfeit the normative value of his argument since predication *via negativa* is metaphysically thin. That is, it is not particularly clear what Muslims and Christians agree on if there is little correspondence between God and humanity from which to assess the question at hand.⁸

Miroslav Volf takes up a more cataphatic approach in *Allah: A Christian Response*. Volf introduces what he terms *sufficient similarity* with regards to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Moving away from an apophatic extreme, *sufficient similarity* compares predicates of God and determines whether these "thoughts and utterances" refer to the same God. For Volf, to the extent that Muslims and Christians maintain that God is one, creator, good, love, and entirely different from creation, "it follows that" both traditions necessarily refer to the same God irrespective of doctrines such as *Tawhid* and the Trinity.⁹ Though the idea of *sufficient similarity* is

7. It should be noted that Turner thinks the apophatic qualifier demonstrates only a *necessary* (though not sufficient) condition that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Because he argues from an apophatic perspective, his argument can never be conclusive on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

8. For a similar argument, see Reza Shah-Kazemi, "Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?" in *Do we Worship the Same God?* ed. Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 76–147.

9. Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 110, 145.

never robustly developed in *Allah*, Volf argues that Islamic and Christian predicates satisfy such sufficiency.

He argues that Muslims and Christians not only refer to but subsequently worship the same God. Given that Muslims and Christians predicate similar (and at times identical) characteristics of God, their ability to refer to the same God entails that they worship the same God. Referring and worshiping are almost, if not entirely, synonymous terms.¹⁰ As he says, “*When* Christians and Muslims agree on the [five predications above], *then* in their worship of God they refer to the same object” (original emphasis).¹¹ In this way, Muslims and Christians worship the same God provided that their predicates of God are sufficiently similar. The argument here is similar to Turner’s, though from a cataphatic perspective, in that theological predicates are the basis for assessing that Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

In his book *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?*, Timothy George takes up Hick’s account and anticipates the latter two accounts.¹² With respect to the question, George argues both “yes and no.” On the one hand, George affirms that Muslims and Christians share a set of fundamental predicates such as “oneness, eternity, power” and so

10. It should be noted that Volf is not clear on the relationship between reference and worship. In fact, one cannot deduce whether predicates alone are enough for concluding that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Though he seemingly makes that point in chapter 5, to be fair to Volf, he spends an entire chapter linking common practice (i.e., love of God and neighbor) as a sign that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Therefore, it seems Volf is making two general arguments for why Muslims and Christians worship the same God: they share (1) a set of predicates of God and (2) common practices. That said, it seems to me that Volf thinks common predicates of God *alone* are enough for concluding that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, based on what is said in chapter 5. For specifics on this point, see Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 95–124.

11. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 110.

12. Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). It should be noted that Timothy George wrote this book in 2002 prior to both Denys Turner’s essay (2012) and Miroslav Volf’s book (2011). Though his book is a critique of neither Turner nor Volf, he poses some serious problems for both of their projects.

forth. These and other predicates are affirmed by both traditions and represent a common entity in their speech acts. On the other hand, George argues that Trinity is an irreducible predicate that unavoidably conflicts with the predicate of *Tawhid*. Because it is irreducible in the life of God, Christianity “stands or falls” with the Trinity. Exclude the Trinity and Christianity’s fundamental doctrine—the Incarnation—is compromised. In this light, he argues that *Tawhid* and the Trinity are numerically and theologically divergent and cannot be easily resolved by an apophatic qualifier. Given the irreducible nature of *Tawhid* and the Trinity, George couples his earlier “yes” with an emphatic “no.” Thus he concludes that the Father of Jesus is not the God of Muhammad because the Trinity is irreducible in the life of God.¹³

George makes a distinction between predicates shared by two (or more) religious traditions and predicates irreducible of a given religious tradition.¹⁴ For example, he clearly agrees with Turner and others that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God provided that they affirm a set of predicates. However, these predicates do not undermine or diminish predicates such as *Tawhid* and the Trinity. Thus his argument is that affirmation of a common entity of reference does not always have to invalidate predicates that are particular among a community. Instead one can affirm predicates that are

13. For a similar argument, see Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1984).

14. Though it is unclear exactly what George means by irreducible, I take him to mean that Christianity is upheld almost exclusively on divine revelation in the Incarnation. If the Trinity is removed, then the fundamental basis of Christianity is omitted. According to this construal, the Trinity is not an irreducible attribute in the life of God. That would be irrational and unjustifiable. Instead the Trinity (and subsequently *Tawhid*) are irreducible conceptions of God that demonstrate the particularities of each tradition.

common across religious lines and still maintain theological positions that are irreducible in one's own tradition.

More in agreement with George than the others, my claim is that Muslims and Christians do *not* worship the same God. I plan to establish that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God with the use of a proper name; however, the referential use of a proper name does not entail that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Taking into consideration recent work in philosophy of language and the previous expositions, we must make two major distinctions with respect to the question: (a₁) The ability for two (or more) people to refer to the same entity is not contingent upon an agreement over a detailed and exhaustive list of predicates. Rather, an entity can be cooperatively referenced by the use of a proper name provided that (i) both parties have a common causal-historical account (name-calling practice) and (ii) they share *a set* of predicates.¹⁵ (a₂) In light of (i) and clarification on (ii), both groups are able to refer to a given entity with the use of a proper name provided that the name connotes a similar set of generic predicates for both groups.¹⁶ That is, a proper name does not need to elucidate specific predicates to establish the referent. Given (a¹) and (a²), I distinguish between reference by generic predication and worship by specific predication.

(b) Provided that worship is multifaceted (e.g., words, movements, symbols), liturgy is the most robust expression of worship, given that it interweaves several elements into a collective whole. In this sense, liturgical rites constitute thick forms of

15. See Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" in *Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 265–77; Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Gareth Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names" in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 314–25.

16. John R. Searle, "Proper Names," *Mind* 67.267 (1958): 166–73.

worship insofar as they incorporate concrete and particular words, movements, and symbols. Therefore, I restrict my project exclusively to liturgical rites and do not wade into minute (or thin) forms of worship.

Note that distinctions (a) and (b) converge and diverge with the previous expositions. For instance, my response runs contrary to Hick's hypothesis provided that my project maintains that reference and predication correspond (whether directly or indirectly) to an ontological reality (i.e., God). Furthermore, my argument goes contrary to Turner's and Volf's because they conflate philosophical terms such as predication, reference, and worship. Though their expositions are more balanced than Hick's, there remains room for improvement with regard to what is entailed in predication, reference, and worship. And lastly, my response converges with George's exposition, given that he makes an intuitive distinction between two types of predication. Though his argument is not primarily a philosophical analysis, his intuition to distinguish between predicates that are irreducible and ones that are not is the closest exposition to my own.

Methodology

My thesis employs insights from analytic philosophy and systematic theology. In relation to analytic philosophy, I draw from recent work in philosophy of language (i.e., Saul Kripke, John Searle, Keith Donnellan, Gareth Evans, and E. J. Lowe). In particular, I seek to establish the functions of reference and predication as they relate to a divine reality. Once these are established, I evaluate whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God, considering that reference and predication are embedded in the question. As for systematic theology, my thesis focuses on the loci of ecclesiology, Christology, and most importantly theology proper. I use systematic theology in these particular areas

to inform my perspective on how Muslims and Christians speak of God. In the end, my thesis is primarily regulated by philosophy interspersed with theological elements. In a technical sense, my methodology tracks as philosophical theology.

Structure of the Thesis

In this chapter I have clarified the question that guides the structure and scope of this thesis. I have also included a brief account of the scholarly discussion of the question. In the second chapter I will make a basic distinction between reference and predication and clarify their particular functions. Accordingly, the chapter will also make a distinction between generic and specific predication. By building on these distinctions, the third chapter will develop an account of reference as it relates to the question. This account will primarily show that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God. In the concluding chapter, I will sum up my overall argument while mentioning how this project does not necessitate intolerance and violence.

Contributions to Scholarship

My aim for this thesis is modest since philosophy is but one of several relevant areas of research (e.g., theology, history) that contributes to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Even so, this thesis makes two important contributions. The first contribution is that my thesis cleans up some technical language associated with the question. It has become apparent in the research that there is misunderstanding on what exactly is entailed in reference and predication as they relate to God. To mitigate such misunderstanding, this thesis seeks to create space for analytic philosophy to inform and clarify what is entailed in the question. That is, I hope my thesis contributes to scholarship insofar as it develops a more ideal language for answering the question.

The second and more important contribution is that my thesis develops a response to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Though this has been done countless times in the research, my thesis tries to develop an argument influenced by analytic philosophy. By building on the current research with analytic philosophy, I hope to make an original contribution by arguing that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God.

CHAPTER II

THE ENTAILMENTS OF REFERENCE AND PREDICATION

Introduction

The primary aim of this chapter is to clarify what is entailed in reference and predication as they relate to God. Since this thesis seeks to answer whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God from a philosophical perspective, clarifying the ways in which language and its various parts function is of utmost importance. Of those parts, reference and predication are most significant, given that an answer to the question must track with the philosophical parameters of how to speak of God. Thus this chapter tries to identify the exactitudes of reference and predication since they are essential for answering whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

There is also increasing need to identify the exactitudes of reference and predication, given that the wider research on the topic has inadequately assumed what they entail. For example, Tomas Bogardus and Mallorie Urban introduce a philosophical roadmap for how to decide whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.¹ They maintain that a decision on this matter has everything to do with what determines the reference of a proper name (e.g., God, Nikola Jokic). More specifically, they argue that the way proper names acquire their referents influences how we decide if Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Bogardus and Urban in this way pinpoint the

1. Tomas Bogardus and Malorie Urban, "How to Tell Whether Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God," *Faith and Philosophy* 34.2 (2017): 176–200.

major issues regarding reference when it comes to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. However, they neither define nor describe the function of reference, which makes their use of reference liable to misappropriation.

In a similar way, there are some like George, Volf, and Turner who look beyond reference and argue that predication plays a fundamental role in deciding whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.² They argue the characteristics (e.g., attributes, modes) in which Muslims and Christians predicate of God determines whether they worship the same God. As such, inquiry into whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God depends on whether their conceptions of God are compatible. However, much in the same way as Bogardus and Urban, these scholars do not describe what is entailed in predication. The consequence is that ill-defined terms (i.e., reference and predication) lead to misguided decisions on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

Therefore I clarify the functions of reference and predication to mend these inconsistencies in the research. This explication will demonstrate that reference and predication are distinct linguistic and cognitional functions that generate radically different outcomes that, if conflated, detract from the pragmatism of using philosophy of language to answer the question at hand. Therefore by clarifying what is entailed in reference and predication, this chapter is a preliminary step for assessing whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

2. Turner, "Christians, Muslims, and the Name of God"; Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*; George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad*.

By drawing upon Lowe and Evans and their depictions of reference and predication, I determine that reference primarily tracks, picks out, and states and acquires information about entities while predication elucidates entities by their ontological character. By determining the functions of reference and predication, I am able to make two distinctions that aid my decision of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. First, though reference and predication help create meaningful statements out physical and theoretical realities, they are unique and independent functions that cannot be conflated.

Second, predication should be consigned into two distinct but related categories. The first category I call generic predication. Generic predication is understood as a linguistic or cognitional function that alludes to entities in a vague sense. The second category is what I call specific predication. Like generic predication, specific predication is a linguistic or cognitional function. However, instead of alluding to entities in a vague sense, specific predicates do so in an irreducible and unique sense. Thus by consigning predication into two distinct yet related categories, I seek to develop a more ideal use of predication.

Clarifying Reference

Reference, classically conceived, holds between a linguistic or cognitional element on the one hand and a physical or theoretical reality on the other hand.³ By pairing or linking a word or thought with an entity, referential relations allow for particular entities to be tracked, picked out, and have information stated or acquired about

3. Michael Devitt, "Reference," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 8:153–64, and Timothy Williamson, "Reference," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 8:290–95.

them. For example, when Nikola Jokic is asserted, the proper name (i.e., the linguistic or cognitional element) refers to a particular individual that plays professional basketball and not to some other individual. As such, referential relations rule out entities so that the appropriate entity can be properly referenced. Though reference is generally more complex than the previous example illustrates, the basic components of referential relations hold between a linguistic or cognitional element and an entity.

The underlining intent of referential relations is to create meaningful statements or concepts by tracking, picking out, and stating or acquiring information about entities. By pairing or linking a word or thought with an entity, reality is logically configured in such a way that generates meaningful statements or concepts. For this reason, referential relations are considered the core of linguistic and cognitional meaning.⁴ Given its particular function, referential relations generate meaningful statements or concepts insofar as the word or thought remains properly paired or linked to the entity. For instance, “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player” is a meaningful statement only to the extent that the proper name remains paired or linked to the individual associated with “is a Serbian basketball player.” For any reason the referential relation fails and the proper name is not linked or paired to the entity, the statement “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player” becomes meaningless. This function is characterized in the following deductive terms:

‘x is y’ is meaningful if and only if the entity referred to by x is entity y.

4. Devitt, “Reference,” 8:153–64.

Eliminate this relation between the linguistic or cognitional element, and the entity and the statement or concept becomes meaningless. The contours of reference thus hold between a linguistic or cognitional element and an entity with the function of tracking, picking out, stating or acquiring information about a particular entity.⁵

To ensure clarity of thought, I take it that the ability to track or pick out an entity is intuitive with respect to referential relations; however, it is not clear what kind of information is stated or acquired during referential relations. Moreover, it is not clear what within a referential relation generates information. In other words, when a word or thought is paired or linked to an entity, what about that relationship is informative and how does it happen?

In its most basic form, information is generated when a word or thought is paired or linked with an entity, though the caveat is that the relationship between a word or thought and the entity does not always elucidate information. The only time when referential relations are informative is when reference is fixed by description.⁶ Reference by description takes place when a word or a thought contains descriptive content and is paired or linked to an entity. This elucidates information about the entity given that the word or thought (when properly paired or linked) is associated with descriptive content about the entity. A different way of explaining this dynamic is to say that words and thoughts contain *sense*. On this construal, names and thoughts often contain sensible content that when properly paired or linked with an entity, the name or thought elucidates

5. It should be noted that these examples are not the only way to refer to entities. These examples feature what is commonly called the referential theory of proper names. Though this theory demonstrates the basic structure of referential relations, there are several other theories of reference. These cannot be explained in the immediate context, but they will be touched upon in chapter 3.

6. Gareth Evans, "Reference and Contingency," *The Monist* 62.2 (1979): 161–89.

the descriptive content and thus generates information. Explained as either accentuating descriptive content or sense, when a word or thought is paired or linked to an entity, the likely result is that information is generated.

For example, take my association with Nikola Jokic. Upon use of Nikola Jokic, it is more plausible the proper name will invoke “the basketball player from Serbia” rather than some other entity.⁷ This is because my association with Nikola Jokic is tied to the individual that satisfies the description “the basketball player from Serbia.”⁸ In other words, the only (or more dominant) association with Nikola Jokic is the entity that satisfies “the basketball player from Serbia.” My association thus accentuates information about the entity denoted by Nikola Jokic because the proper name is connected to descriptive content or sense.⁹

Clarifying Predication

Unlike reference, predication neither tracks, picks out, nor states or acquires information about entities. Rather predication is a relation between two (or more) entities (e.g., objects, individuals, attributes, modes) that, in light of their relationship, clarify the kind of ‘thing’ each of these entities is. Predication occurs when either one entity is *said of* or *inheres in* another entity with the intent to categorize these entities into a categorial

7. Evans, “Reference and Contingency,” 161–67.

8. An interesting exception to this referential relation is if an individual does not have access to the only (or dominant) association with the entity. Though I cannot say much about this exception, it is helpful to note that the entity intending to be referenced will be unidentifiable until other association are added to the entity’s dossier in a way that properly elucidates the entity

9. Proper names are not the only linguistic or cognitional elements that are informative with regards to reference. Descriptions can also be informational within the contours of reference. Simply by pairing or linking a description (the linguistic or cognitional element) with an entity accentuates information much like proper names can do.

(an *a priori*) structure of reality.¹⁰ As a basic example, take the previous statement, “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player.” In this example, the individual denoted by Nikola Jokic represents the linguistic or cognitional element while “a Serbian basketball player” represents the predicate. From an ontological perspective, Nikola Jokic represents a substance since humans are traditionally categorized as a species while “a Serbian basketball player” is a property because it represents an attribute of being. Therefore, as a result of its relational quality (i.e., entity is predicate), predication helps ontologically categorize entities by their respective kinds. Understood as a relation between two (or more) independent entities, predication helps locate entities by ontological category.

Though predicates neither track, pick out, nor state or acquire information about entities, they help referential relations accomplish this function. Given that predication primarily accentuates the ontological category of entities, when done properly, it helps pair and link words or thoughts with entities. For example, in the statement “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player,” the predicate clarifies the individual denoted by the proper name and the cluster information associated with that individual. In a sense, predicates aid referential relations because they clarify which entity a linguistic or cognitional element is referencing. The outcome of elucidating the ontological character of entities makes it more viable to track, pick out, and state or acquire information about entities such as Nikola Jokic. Therefore predicates aid referential relations because they clarify entities by ontological category (e.g., type, genus, attribute, mode).

10. A categorial structure of reality simply divides reality into essential ontological categories and comments on their relationships between them.

In other words, predicates *individuate* entities and, as a result, entities are more readily referenced.¹¹ For example, take the previous statement “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player.” As said already, upon use of Nikola Jokic, the proper name intends to refer to a particular individual. Yet simply asserting Nikola Jokic does not always mean that the individual denoted by the proper name has been referenced. There are, of course, ways that reference can be interrupted or redirected.¹² One way to increase the possibilities that reference is not interrupted or redirected is to clarify the ontological character of the individual denoted by Nikola Jokic. By clarifying the ontological character of Nikola Jokic, there is a greater likelihood that the correct individual is referenced.

To illustrate this inference, say a colleague and I are attending a basketball game with the intent to watch Nikola Jokic. To my colleague’s dismay, she is unfamiliar with the National Basketball Association (NBA) and has little clue as to who we have come to watch. From this point on, most statements that I make about Nikola Jokic lack meaning for my colleague given that she is unfamiliar with which individual is being referenced. Even a statement such as “Nikola Jokic is a Serbian basketball player” is void of meaning for my colleague because it lacks reference to a particular individual.¹³ Every statement

11. Evans, “Reference and Contingency,” 162–66.

12. Though there are several ways reference can be interrupted or redirected, I will explain two in order to illustrate this point. (1) Reference can be interrupted simply in the case where two entities share the same word (e.g., name) or thought (e.g., idea). For example, there could be two individuals with the same name Nikola Jokic. In cases such as this, there is no way to know, outside of acquiring more information about the individuals, what individual is being referenced when the name Nikola Jokic is used. (2) Reference can also be interrupted or redirected in virtue of the fact that the entity is unknown. For instance, if the proper name Nikola Jokic is asserted and I do not know anyone (or anything) with that name, reference will be interrupted or redirected.

13. Furthermore, it could also be the case that my colleague is unfamiliar with the NBA, thus this too would lack meaning for her.

in this sense that does not clarify the ontological character of Nikola Jokic lacks meaning for my colleague.

So to draw attention to Nikola Jokic, I would need to first determine his ontological character. This, of course, could be done by predicating various characteristics held true about him (e.g., jersey number, height). In terms of deductive logic, predicates operate in the following way:

predicate p helps identify entity e if and only if p elucidates the ontological status of e in light of a linguistic or cognitional element w .

Often without the assistance of a p , a w is unable to refer to an e . Though not indispensable for referential relations, predication is significant for elucidating the ontological character of entities that facilitates referential relations.¹⁴

Not unlike reference, however, the aim of predication is to make sense of reality through ontological categories. By helping elucidate the type, genus, attribute, or mode of entities that are otherwise ambiguous, predicates make physical or theoretical realities meaningful.¹⁵ That is, predicates individuate entities so that they can be set apart from all

14. It should be noted that predicates do *not* only assist referential relations. Rather a predicate in and of itself can act as the linguistic or cognitional element in the framework of reference. Known as the demonstrative use, predicates can be paired or linked with an entity by simply pointing to it. For instance, without using the linguistic or cognitional element Nikola Jokic, I could simply point to the individual denoted by Nikola Jokic and say, “That is a Serbian basketball player.” In this way, I would be directly pairing or linking an individual with the predicate (i.e., “a Serbian basketball player”) and thus bypassing the proper name all together.

15. E. J. Lowe, “Categorical Predication,” *Ratio* 25 (2012): 383–86.

other entities.¹⁶ Thus the principle function of predication is to categorize entities by their ontological character.

Common Mistake Made with Reference and Predication

The ability to make the distinction between the functions of reference and predication is paramount for any argument that uses a philosophy of language. Failure to make this distinction leads to the notion that predication is primarily used to establish the identity of entities with the intent to refer to them.¹⁷ This is conceived in simple dyadic terms: $p = e$,¹⁸ where p is stated about e exclusively with the aim to establish e 's identity in order that it can be referenced. Under these pretenses, predication retains its relational character between two (or more) entities but does so to exclusively elucidate the identity of entities so that they can be referenced.

Though an important aim, the inability to understand the particular functions of reference and predication obscures their particular uses. For instance, the dyadic nature often used to secure the identity of entities maintains little to no recognition of an ontological structure of reality. This is because a $p = e$ structure does not qualify entities by ontological category, which leaves entities with little (if any) independent and distinct characteristics that keep them from being confused with other entities. A dyadic structure obscures referential relations because it does not accommodate any notion of “what there is” in reality. Simply attributing p of e does not say anything ontological about p or e

16. Evans, “Reference and Contingency,” 162–66.

17. This is not to say that failure to make the current distinction results only in predicates being used dyadically. There could be an alternate result by failing to make this distinction. However, my inference is that failure to make this distinction *primarily* results in dyadic form.

18. Lowe, “Categorial Predication,” 369–71.

given that neither is qualified. The result is that *e* is not identified and *p* maintains little (if any) meaning. The claims about reality that arise from this “thin and superficial” understanding of reference and predication are what Lowe calls “ontology lite” since there is nothing remotely ontological about a dyadic structure.¹⁹

In less analytical terms, failure to make this distinction is epitomized in Volf’s construal of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Building his argument on *sufficient similarity*, he concludes that Muslims and Christians worship the same God given that they predicate similar and at times identical “things” of God. However, the way in which he maintains this argument does not appeal to a categorial structure of reality. When he argues that Muslims and Christians agree that God is one, creator, good, love, and entirely different from creation, it is unclear what exactly Volf believes they agree on.²⁰ The simple fact that he does not commit himself to an ontological structure of reality makes his claim that Muslims and Christians maintain “agreement on these [five predicates]” ambiguous at best.²¹

The outcome is that without a formal commitment to an ontological structure of reality, his argument that Muslims and Christians share a common set of predicates is, in Lowe’s mind, superficial. What arises from this ambiguous claim is that Muslims and Christians agree upon five predicative “things” but it does not qualify what exactly those “things” happen to be. For instance, he argues that Islam and Christianity agree that God

19. Lowe, “Categorial Predication,” 369–71.

20. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 95–110.

21. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 110.

is good.²² However, outside of a thin scriptural witness (1 John 4:16; *Al Buruj*, 85:14), Volf establishes neither the exactitudes of the Islamic nor the Christian conception of God's goodness.²³ All that arises from his claim is that Islam and Christianity agree upon a predicative "thing" that they mutually call "goodness." But what Muslims and Christians agree upon about the predicative "thing" they call "goodness" is arbitrary given that Volf's construal lacks a categorial structure of reality.

One must infer from this lack of philosophical analysis that Volf's project has little (if any) normative value in assessing whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. If basic distinctions such as the current one are conflated, the use of philosophical terms such as reference and predication can only be misleading.²⁴ Many find Volf's argument convincing largely because he claims that Muslims and Christians agree upon *many* key theological truths.²⁵ As determined, however, Volf uses philosophical terms like reference and predication, yet does not understand their particular functions. Therefore because he is unable to ascertain nuanced distinctions, his project remains, on the one hand, imprecise and uncritical and, on the other hand, misleading.

22. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 99–101.

23. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 101.

24. Remember what he says toward the apex of his argument: "When Christians and Muslims agree [that God is one, creator, good, love, and entirely different from creation], then in their worship of God they refer to the same object" (original emphasis).

25. This is not to say that further evaluation of the subdisciplines of philosophy (e.g., philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, epistemology) and, more broadly, the fields of theology and history will not lead one to say that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. However, this is to say that imprecise and "superficial" arguments have no place in this area or any area of inquiry.

People who have read Volf on this topic will point to the fact that his argument appeals to scriptural witness rather than philosophical evidence. Under these pretenses, it would be emphasized that Muslims and Christians maintain a similar scriptural perspective and thus share several common predicates of God (e.g., good, love). However, this position seems question begging insofar as the argument relies upon the premise that Scripture develops and maintains a formal commitment to a categorial structure of reality. Though I am not in a position to formally make this argument, it is unlikely that Scripture upholds a formal commitment on ontology. Regardless of his appeal to a Scriptural witness, there remains no ontological commitment that supports his position that Muslims and Christians share a common set of theological predicates.²⁶

Toward Further Clarity of Predication

With a proper understanding of reference and predication and the dangers that accompany their conflation, I am in a position to determine more precisely how predicates function. By employing a categorial structure of reality, the following section works toward a two-part distinction in predication. Because predicates clarify what constitutes a particular entity by ontological character (i.e., type, genus, attribute, mode), it is intuitive that some predicates would do this in a more irreducible and unique way than others. Take, for example, the difference between what I am calling generic and specific predicates. Generic predicates are exemplified in statements such as “Nikola Jokic is tall.” Here we have a linguistic or cognitional element (i.e., the proper name) and a

26. For more on this point, see Jon McGinnis, “The hiddenness of ‘divine hiddenness’: divine love in medieval Islamic lands,” in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 157–74. In his essay, he presents convincing evidence that the Islamic and Christian conceptions of God’s love are different claims. He thinks that the theological and philosophical conceptions of the Trinity and *Tawhid* greatly affect how predicates (particularly the predicate of love) operate in the life of God.

predicate (i.e., the characteristic) that informs us about a specific individual. In this example, however, the characteristic (i.e., tall) is not an irreducible or unique predicate exclusively of Nikola Jokic. Instead the predicate remains nonspecific with regards to quality and extent and clarifies only a particular entity's ontological character in a *vague sense*. Therefore, generic predicates primarily convey the ontological type, genus, attribute, or mode of entities that are not indicative exclusively of only one entity.

To explain further, say my colleague and I are at the same sporting event as previously discussed. My colleague, at this point, has apparently come to recognize Nikola Jokic and says, "Nikola Jokic is large." Here my colleague is using a generic predicate (i.e., large) with the intent to categorize the individual she believes we have come to watch by his ontological character. By alluding to the individual with a nonspecific predicate, my colleague has said something ontologically true but not irreducible or unique of Nikola Jokic.

Yet someone might ask, "Why does 'large' constitute a generic predicate if we have reason to suppose that your colleague is referencing the correct individual and 'large' is contextually indicative of that individual?" Put differently, if by indication Nikola Jokic is large, why does it constitute a generic predicate?

Though a reasonable question, there are nevertheless convincing reasons to suggest otherwise: (1) Even though large is indicative of Nikola Jokic, the predicate lacks any qualification on the extent or quality of his *individual* largeness. Simply predicating large, though informative, is not precise exclusively of Nikola Jokic. In a different sense, large is a relative claim given that it merely determines that Nikola Jokic is not short (whatever that may imply). Therefore my colleague uses a predicate without further

qualification. (2) Provided that this is a professional sporting event, large is not, by all likelihood, specific to one individual. There are other individuals on the basketball court who would be considered large. Contextually speaking, the predicate is not specific to Nikola Jokic exclusively. Thus given the ontological ambiguity accompanying (1) and (2), there is adequate evidence to catalogue large as a generic predicate. In other words, if there is little qualification with respect to (1) and (2), then predicates like large should be regarded as generic in kind.

Yet someone might reply, “True, large qualifies as a generic predicate in this situation given (1) and (2); however, what if the context changes and Nikola Jokic is playing basketball in a ‘vacuum.’ Would large not specify something irreducible and unique of Nikola Jokic?” That is, if one and only one individual satisfies the predicate large from a contextual perspective, can it not be said that the predicate is irreducible and unique of the individual? Not necessarily. At best this scenario bypasses (2).²⁷ Yet there still remains no resolve with (1) given that there is little clarification with respect to extent or quality accompanying a statement such as “Nikola Jokic is large.”

As for specific predication, take the following example: “Nikola Jokic is the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft.” Like several of the previous examples, there is linguistic or cognitional element (i.e., Nikola Jokic) that is further clarified by a predicate (i.e., the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft). Unlike in previous examples, this predicate is irreducible and unique to a particular individual that cannot be true of any other entity. Instead of vaguely alluding to Nikola Jokic with generic predicates, a

27. Though I think this specific example does not bypass inference (2), I want to keep the possibility open that an example like it could actually do so. It seems that a more accurate predicate in a similar example could bypass inference (2).

specific predicate refers to Nikola Jokic in a *noncontingent* manner. By drawing attention to one specific individual, this kind of predicate rules out *all* other entities. So specific predicates clarify, like their generic counterpart, by ontological type, genus, attribute, and mode, though specific predicates do so by what is irreducible and unique of an entity.

To illustrate what is entailed in specific predicates, take the following criteria. The first is that specific predicates express the ontological type, genus, attribute, or mode held true about a specific entity. As the previous example illuminates, Nikola Jokic is the only individual that satisfies the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft.²⁸ No other individual, properly speaking, is able to satisfy such a predicate. It is irreducible and unique exclusively of Nikola Jokic given that he is *in fact* the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft. Thus as the first criterion, specific predicates are true of one and only one entity.

The second criterion is best articulated in what Bruce Marshall calls “communal centrality and epistemic primacy.”²⁹ According to Marshall, there are certain beliefs in a community that maintain precedence over other beliefs. Largely based on their normativity, some beliefs are privileged, given that a community’s identity is built around

28. It should be noted that while the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft is particular to the individual represented by Nikola Jokic, there are ways that the predicate could be indicative of a different individual altogether. For instance, instead of reflecting the individual represented by Nikola Jokic, this predicate could be used in the context of a fictional character (e.g., Saturday Night Live) where the predicate would be indicative of someone who is not the actual individual. In other words, there are exceptions to this example, though I would argue that such examples are rare and thus unwarranted objections against the current argument.

29. Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44–49. Provided that this project is specifically focused on a philosophy of language, the terminology of epistemology in Marshall’s project should not be confused as being indicative of my project. Though epistemology has implications for the current topic, I am not specifically dealing those in my project. Therefore, even though Marshall’s project uses epistemology, I am still using his current terminology, given that it highlights what is entailed in specific predication.

a limited set of core beliefs. Though this “sound[s] arcane,” Marshall nevertheless argues that this notion is a presupposition among most thinking people.³⁰ To prove this inference, take the following example: Suppose my colleague believes (A) that Nikola Jokic is a top twenty-five basketball player and (B) no top twenty-five basketball player is European.³¹ Both of these beliefs, of course, cannot be maintained under the rules of logic because Nikola Jokic is regarded as a top twenty-five basketball player and is ethnically Serb. Given the apparent conflict, one belief must be modified in relation to the other if either (or both) of them is to be maintained. In this instance, belief (B) must change provided that Nikola Jokic is, on the one hand, a top twenty-five basketball player and, on the other hand, belief (A) is primary between the two beliefs.³²

The importance of this concept for the current thesis is why beliefs such as (A) are fundamental for communal identity. In the simplest of terms, Marshall maintains that beliefs such as (A) are fundamental for communal identity because they are what he terms *essential* and *central* beliefs.³³ In light of the first, beliefs like (A) are essential because the identity (or authenticity) of a community depends upon them for its own preservation. If essential beliefs are not preserved in a community, its identity and subsequently the community will cease to exist. That is because beliefs like (A) orient members of a community to embrace a common vision that is representative of their

30. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, 46.

31. This is modified from Marshall’s example. For the original example, see *Trinity and Truth*, 46–47.

32. I take it that belief (A) is more dominant simply by intuition. There could be instances, I suppose, where belief (B) is more dominant than belief (A). Of course, some of this will depend upon the content of the beliefs and some of it will depend upon the identity of the community making the delineation between two (or more) beliefs.

33. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, 44–49.

identity. Without an agreed upon list of essential beliefs, a community does not have common vision to unite on that would preserve its existence. Second, beliefs like (A) are central because they are indispensable for the preservation of a community and become the “most characteristic among [a] particular collection of beliefs.” These kinds of beliefs become central to the community because they are the core convictions among its members. Since omission of beliefs such as (A) results in the loss of a community’s identity, they are maintained unapologetically. Understood in this way, a community maintains certain beliefs as essential for its existence and in turn protects them by making them central within its belief structure.

If Marshall is correct, the outcome of holding some beliefs as essential and central is paramount for understanding the second criterion of specific predicates. As stated above, if a conflict arises between two beliefs (e.g., beliefs (A) and (B) above), it necessitates a reorganization of the beliefs maintained in a community. This can be done in one of two ways. The first way is to reject outright the less important of the two beliefs. In the situation that two beliefs are incompatible, the more essential and central of the two beliefs is kept while the other one is omitted from the belief structure. The second way is more nuanced where the less important belief is modified with the intent to establish congruency between it and the more essential and central belief. By working toward the harmonization of the belief structure, the more essential and central belief holds precedence over the less important belief. As such, the less important belief is modified while the more essential and central belief is maintained in its original sense. Either situation restructures beliefs in a way that circumvents inconsistency by complying with the more essential and central of the beliefs.

To succinctly articulate the distinction between generic and specific predication, being *said of* is characteristic of specific predicates, while being *in* (or *inhering in*) is characteristic of generic predicates.³⁴ That is, specific predicates express what is irreducible and unique of an entity while generic predicates are more universal in reality. The distinction between generic and specific predication, then, is primarily ontological where entities are configured into a categorial structure of reality. From this perspective, generic and specific predicates comprise (in the technical sense) predication; however, they elucidate entities by different ontological means that make sense of physical or theoretical realities in their own respective way.

Predication as It Relates to Theology

It is now essential to identify the theological implications of generic and specific predication. Given their categorial distinction, generic and specific predication accommodate implications for how to speak of God. I thus seek to determine the predicates that Muslims and Christians attribute to God as they relate to this categorial distinction. As illustrated in the example offered by Volf, it is not enough to simply say that Muslims and Christians agree upon a set of theological predicates apart from a categorial structure of reality. Therefore, I outline the various theological implications of generic and specific predication that ultimately safeguards my project from a “thin and superficial” ontological perspective.

The first is that predicative phrases such as “God is good” or “God, you are loving” are, under my categorial distinction, generic in kind.³⁵ On the one hand, neither

34. Lowe, “Categorial Predication,” 369–86.

35. In the Islamic tradition, this would entail the ninety-nine beautiful names of God. For a list and philosophical explanation of them, see Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David

“God is love” nor “God, you are good” is irreducible or unique exclusively of God. Because there is little (if any) qualification with respect to extent or quality, these predicates cannot be attributed exclusively to God. For instance, it is not unreasonable to say that “Nikola Jokic is good” or “Nikola Jokic, you are loving” when the context lends such predicative phrases. On the other hand, though predicative phrases such as “God is good” and “God, you are loving” are significant from a theological perspective, neither is essential or central as Marshall describes.³⁶ That is, predicative phrases like “God is good” and “God, you are loving” are not the most fundamental beliefs for either the Islamic or Christian communities. There are still other beliefs that are more essential and central that would hold sway over God’s goodness and love. Therefore, predicative phrases such as these should be regarded as generic in kind since they clarify what is neither irreducible nor unique exclusively of God.

The second of the predicative phrases “God is Triune” and “God is *Tawhid*” should be regarded as specific in kind.³⁷ Unsurprisingly antithetical to the contours of

B. Burrell (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992). One might also see Nader El-Bizri, “God: essence and attributes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 121–40.

36. This, of course, is with orthodox Muslims and Christians in mind. I am thus bracketing off nonorthodox communities and their particular theological outlooks for logistical reasons. Given the project’s length, I do not have room to explain the factors that would be entailed with unorthodox positions.

37. This may be shortsighted; however, I do not think there are any other predicates that maintain the contours of specific predicates. Though I think the Incarnation (and subsequently the crucifixion) is primary and could be argued to be a specific predicate, it seems that Trinity is an all-incompassing claim about God. It is the incarnation that leads to Trinitarian theology. The incarnation focuses on the second person of the Triune God, not the Triune God in and of Godself. Thus I find the Trinity to be a more basic claim about God in and of Godself than the incarnation. The Trinity is a more totalizing claim about God than the incarnation. In light of such a construal, I think the Trinity is the only predicate that is specific in kind.

As for the Islamic tradition, it seems that *Tawhid* is scripturally and theologically the apex of the Islamic conception of God. All other predicates seem peripheral. If God is in anyway numerically compounded, then all other predicates do not have an operative basis in the life of God given that God would be unable to subsist. Thus to reflect this theological perspective, God is always affirmed in God’s oneness in the Islamic tradition (though it could be argued that even oneness is numerical).

generic predication, these predicative phrases would be considered specific for two reasons. The first is that, for their corresponding communities, “God is Trinity” and “God is *Tawhid*” are irreducible and unique exclusively of God. There is nothing from the standpoint of philosophical theology that could satisfy the ontological character of either the Trinity or *Tawhid* other than God. They are so specific with regard to extent and quality that neither could be embodied by anything other than God. In other words, the Trinity and *Tawhid* are so philosophically and theologically particular that it is inconceivable that they could be indicative of any other entity aside from God.

The second is that the Trinity and *Tawhid* qualify as theologically essential and central for their corresponding communities. One way of illustrating their essential and central character is showcasing their rudimentary quality in liturgical rites.³⁸ For instance, the Trinity is not only invoked for Christians in eucharistic practice, but it is also saturated throughout the liturgy (e.g., creedal statements, *signum crucis*). Remove Trinitarian language and imagery from the liturgy, and the community no longer has the theological basis that unites them. As argued by George, exclusion of the Trinity also excludes doctrines and beliefs such as the incarnation and crucifixion from these liturgical rites. The Trinity in this sense binds together several core Christian beliefs that are not easily omitted from the community. Likewise, *Tawhid* is the theological basis

It also should be noted that “low churches” (Protestant in kind) will probably deemphasize the central and essential quality of the Trinity as depicted here. For reasons of emphasis, the incarnation (and subsequently the crucifixion) will probably assume primacy. This, however, should not cause any confusion when it comes to evaluating my argument. As I said above, I take the Trinity to be the only predicate irreducible and unique of God, with the assumption that the incarnation reflects in the Trinity. That is, my thesis focuses on God in God’s totality (i.e., Father, Son, and Spirit). Though the Incarnation is paramount for Trinitarian theology, it nevertheless focuses *primarily* on the second person of a Triune God.

38. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, 24.

within Islamic liturgical rites. Invoked not only during the *Shahada* (profession of faith), it is also recited at the beginning and end of each liturgical cycle.³⁹ Moreover, the elimination of *Tawhid* would result in the negation or adaption of *Adhan* (the call to prayer) that united Muslims everywhere at least three to five times per day. The doctrine of *Tawhid* in this way upholds Islamic identity. Depicted in the rhythms of liturgy then, the Trinity and *Tawhid* are essential and central because their corresponding communities are built on and promoted by them.⁴⁰

An initial objection to the distinction between generic and specific predicates as they relate to God is what I call an argument from mysticism. The argument goes as follows:

- (3) If God is mysterious, then God's ontological status is unknown.
- (4) God is mysterious as maintained by Muslims and Christians.
- (5) Thus neither Muslims nor Christians have access to God's ontological status.
- (6) Thus any distinction made between generic and specific predicates is pointless because God is utterly mysterious.

39. *Shahada* in its religious sense denotes the Islamic profession of faith: "I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God."

40. If there still remains doubt concerning specific predicates as they relate to God, take one more example of how Islam and Christianity promote the Trinity and *Tawhid*. As illustrated by Meghan Sullivan, Islam and Christianity concern themselves with the misattribution of belief about God. Both traditions agree on the prohibition of sacrilegious speech epitomized in Exod 20: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." In this sense, Islam and Christianity maintain a keen interest in upholding right belief about God that their moral fabric reflects. See Meghan Sullivan, "Semiotics for Blasphemy," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* vol 4, ed. Jonathan L Kvanvig (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 159–72.

By enlarging the ontological dissimilarity between God and humanity, this argument downplays doctrinal insights to mitigate conflicting theological insights. Though an appealing argument, this approach overstates the mysterious character of God. From the beginning of the argument in premise (3), the claim seems to be built on the assumption that mystery entails ontological obscurity in the life of God. This results in the deemphasis of justified belief (e.g., revelation, sensory perception). Such an assumption makes it difficult for religious communities to construct a theological basis that unites people because a theological basis requires warranted beliefs. Thus it is difficult to imagine how a community would maintain its identity aside from retaining warranted beliefs.

A more substantive objection is to argue that predicative phrases such as “God is good” and “God, you are loving” qualify as essential and central beliefs. Goodness and love are fundamental attributes in God’s essence as maintained by Muslims and Christians, so much so that if neither were true, God would cease to subsist and subsequently creation would lack the sustenance for its preservation (i.e., providence). Thus the objection is that the goodness and love of God must be essential and central beliefs because the phenomenal world remains stable and intact.

Though attentive to detail, such an objection misunderstands what is entailed in beliefs that are essential and central. As previously mentioned, beliefs that are essential and central maintain precedence over other beliefs. However, precedence does not always mean that other less fundamental beliefs must be omitted. Instead, when one belief maintains precedence over another belief, the less fundamental of the two needs only to be modified in relation to the belief that is essential and central. Though occasionally two

beliefs will be incompatible with one another, it does not necessarily follow that they cannot be modified in a way that makes them harmonious. For instance, if the Trinity or *Tawhid* is maintained as primary in a belief structure, less rudimentary beliefs such as goodness and love do not necessarily need to be omitted. Instead beliefs such as goodness and love need only to be modified to fit a Trinitarian or *Tawhidian* conception of God.⁴¹

Conclusion

Within this chapter I have outlined and developed two major distinctions in philosophy of language as it relates to God. The first was between reference and predication. I claimed that reference primarily holds between a linguistic or cognitional element and a physical or theoretical entity that allow for entities to be tracked, picked out, and information stated or acquired about them. On the flip side, I argued that predication clarifies what kind of “thing” an entity is from an ontological perspective. The second was between generic and specific predicates. I argued that generic predicates are nonspecific with regard to quality and extent and clarify only by ontological type, genus, attribute, or mode in a vague sense. As for specific predicates, I claimed that they express, on the one hand, what is irreducible and unique of an entity while, on the other hand, they are the most essential and central claims about an entity. Thus generic predicates are more universal in reality while specific predicates are indicative of only one entity.

41. This should make good sense to those who are familiar with contemporary theology. For example, as recent scholarship has tried to show, it makes good philosophical sense that if God is Triune, then God must necessarily be a *relational* sort of being. Given that God is conceived as three persons in one Godhead, it must necessarily follow that God is relational in and of the three persons of the Trinity. As such, scholars in this sense have predicated the notion of relation to God in light of a Trinitarian conviction. In this way, scholars have modified the ways in which we predicate characteristics of God to fit a Trinitarian conception such as the predicate of relation. For a good first read on this point, see Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 1994), 170–91.

Serving as preliminary distinctions for my forthcoming argument, I am in a position to answer whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Thus in the next chapter I turn to answer the question based on philosophy of language.

CHAPTER III

THEY REFER TO BUT DO NOT WORSHIP

Introduction

In this chapter, I determine that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God. I advance this claim with two lines of argumentation. The first illustrates that reference takes hold at the junction between a causal-historical account and a list of descriptions held true about a particular entity. I determine from this that Muslims and Christians cooperatively meet both conditions for reference and thus refer to the same God. This conclusion primarily hinges upon a shared monotheism and a common set of generic predicates. The second determines that reference is not equivalent to worship. Most vividly illustrated in liturgical rites, worship entails particular and concrete predicates held true about entities. Between these arguments, I establish that reference primarily operates with respect to generic predication while worship entails specific predicates. My argument thus is that reference is common between Muslims and Christians while worship is not.

Setting the Scene

Prior to establishing these arguments, I need to highlight three theories for developing a response to whether Muslims and Christians refer to and subsequently worship the same God. By locating my project in terms of philosophy of language, my line of argumentation grapples with the particularities of what establishes reference. In a

sense, these theories provide the backdrop from which my argument emerges. Thus a proper understanding of each is a vital preliminary step for making sense of my claim.

The first of these theories is called the *descriptive theory of reference* (DTR), also known as descriptivism. Epitomized in Donnellan's analysis, the theory follows as:¹

a *n* refers to an *e* when said by a *s* if and only if the descriptive content associated with the *n* applies exclusively to *e* and only *e* for the *s*.²

In less deductive terms, reference by description holds between a proper name and an entity when the entity satisfies the descriptive content associated with the proper name. For instance, upon use of Nikola Jokic, the proper name intends to refer to the individual that satisfies "the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft." That is, reference holds between the proper name and the individual if and only if Nikola Jokic is the individual that satisfies the description (i.e., the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft). A rather simple example, DTR is often more complex since entities are usually associated with various descriptions. For example, it is not unlikely that predicates other than "the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft" will be associated with Nikola Jokic (e.g., large, Serb). In situations where multiple descriptions are associated with an *e*, the *n* refers to

1. For other construal's of the descriptive theory of reference, see Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *Mind* 114:873–87; Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).

2. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" 265–77. I adapted this version from Meghan Sullivan's construal of the theory. See Sullivan, "Semantics for Blasphemy," 159–72.

whatever e that satisfies all, most, or the more important of the possible descriptions. In this sense, DTR holds between descriptive content and entities.³

An alternate theory to DTR, the second theory establishes reference by testimonial exchange rather than by description. Developed by Kripke, the *causal-historical theory of reference* (CHTR) operates in the following way:

a n refers to e when said by a s if and only if either (1) s “baptized” e with n or (2) s was told by another member of the testimonial chain that n stands for e and thus uses n with the intent to refer to e .⁴

For routes (1) and (2), the basic phenomenon is that an e is associated with a n in order that members along the testimonial chain will be able to refer to e . Beginning with route (1), Kripke believes that an e can acquire a n when a s has a unique perceptible experience (i.e., baptismal moment) of the e in such a way that s names the e . Once this initial perceptible experience has occurred, it is then passed from member to member along the testimonial chain as illustrated in (2). Kripke’s theory thus is a cooperative exchange between members of a community that consistently invoke the initial perceptible experience of the e by the original s with the use of the n .⁵

3. Donnellan’s construal of DTR is important in light of several of its unique contributions. One such contribution made by Donnellan is that a name can still refer to an entity regardless of whether the description(s) are indicative of the entity. For more on this point, read the famous example of the man holding the martini glass. See Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions” 265–77.

4. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 80–86. See also Sullivan, “Semantics for Blasphemy,” 159–72.

5. If the causal-historical theory of reference (CHTR) seems far-fetched, given that information is transmitted by testimonial exchange, read Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. Also see Benjamin McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Kripke develops this theory in opposition to DTR because he determines that descriptivism is unable to account for irregularities common among referential relations. To illustrate DTR's inability to account for these irregularities, Kripke develops an objection called Gödel-Schmidt. The objection goes as follows:

Kurt Friedrich Gödel is associated with the predicate "proved mathematical theorem x." Gödel, however, was not the founder of the theorem given that he stole the theorem from a person by the name of Schmidt. Subsequently, he took exclusive credit for the theorem. Thus when "proved mathematical theorem x" is predicated of Gödel, there is a propensity to say (in light of DTR) that Gödel "proved mathematical theorem x." This, however, is false because Gödel did not prove the theorem but rather stole it from Schmidt.⁶

About this objection, Kripke argues that DTR can refer only to one of two things. Either the predicate "proved mathematical theorem x" refers to Gödel (the thief) or it refers to nobody at all. It cannot refer to the individual that proved the theorem if, under the pretense of Gödel-Schmidt, there is no adequate reason to link Schmidt with the predicate "proved mathematical theorem x." As long as Schmidt remains in obscurity, there is insufficient reason to link or pair him with theorem x in light of DTR. Therefore, according to Kripke, Schmidt is left in obscurity and false claims are propagated about Gödel under DTR.

6. The Gödel-Schmidt objection is adapted from Kripke. For the full version of the objection, see Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 83–4.

Lastly, an alternate theory to DTR and CHTR is often called the *hybrid theory of reference* (HTR), which was developed by Evans.⁷ Under this theory of reference, a proper name is causally-historically handed from member to member much like CHTR but does not exclude descriptive content (i.e., DTR) when assessing referential relations. In this sense, *s* attributes *n* to an *e* during her initial and unique perceptible experience while also perceiving and thus attaching a catalogue of information (i.e., dossier) to the *e*. When the *s* says (or thinks) the *n*, it not only draws attention to the *e*, but it also accentuates the descriptive content attached to the *e* during her perceptible experience.⁸

In the situation when the *n* is handed off to another member of the community, the *s* is not responsible for indicating the *e* that *n* refers to but rather which proper name she intends to use. Without indicating the correct *n*, the *s* is incapable of saying anything about the proper *e*. Simply predicating *p* of *e* does not specify which entity *s* intends to reference. As illustrated in the example of Volf, simply saying that “something” is *p* does not determine anything positive about that “something.” A better way forward, according to Evans, is for the *s* to confirm the proper name she intends to use by corroborating the proper name with its causal-historical chain and the descriptive content associated with it. The argument here is that to refer to *e*, the *s* must confirm which proper name is connected to *e* by corroborating it with its causal-historical account and the descriptive content gained during *s*’s initial and unique perceptible experience.

7. For an initial notion see Gareth Evans, “Causal Theory of Names,” 314–25 and for a more robust notion look at Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 373–404. It should be noted that Evans never finished the latter of these works.

8. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 394–95.

As an alternate theory, Evans has reason for why DTR and CHTR are inadequate for accounting for reference. To highlight these inadequacies, Evans agrees with Kripke's Gödel-Schmidt objection but disputes how CHTR does any better at accounting for the irregularities common among referential relations. To articulate his dispute, Evans develops an objection to CHTR by the title of Drifting Turnip. Evans outlines his objection in the following way:

Young boy A by the name of Turnip leaves his small village to find his fortunes. Many years later, a man B comes to the village to live as a hermit. Upon his arrival, several of the original villagers believe that B is A who departed the village years prior. The original villagers thus begin to say things such as, "Turnip is coming to get coffee" or "Turnip lives over the hill." These mistaken claims make their way into circulation among the younger set of villagers. Once the original villagers die off, the younger villagers will, in light of CHTR, use Turnip to refer to B rather than A.⁹

As with this objection, CHTR is unable to account for drift (or change) in reference. Since proper names (e.g., Turnip) are transmitted from member to member in a causal-historical chain, it is not unlikely that reference can be altered in way that the name no longer refers to the original entity. As exemplified in Drifting Turnip, false inferences are made by the original villagers that results in the mistake between A and B. So misleading

9. The objection of Drifting Turnip is adapted from Evans. For the full version of the objection, see Evans, "Causal Theory of Names," 206–7.

are these inferences, the original villagers mistake (over time) a young fortune seeker with an old religious recluse. Much like the Gödel-Schmidt objection, Turnip can refer either to B or to nobody at all. The proper name cannot refer to A (the correct individual) given that the cluster of information associated with B (i.e., young fortune seeker) has been altered with predicates like “lives over the hill” and “is a hermit.”

Beside including the combined strengths of DTR and CHTR, the importance of HTR is that it considers the appropriate information for establishing reference. According to Evans, descriptive content (in light of causal-historical chain) establishes reference not by descriptive *fit* but by what is most *dominant* in the body of information about an entity.¹⁰ Though Evans argues that dominance often pinpoints something particular in an entity’s dossier, he also leaves open the possibility that informational spread can be dominant. As he says, “Dominance is not simply a function of *amount* of information” though “detail in a particular area can be outweighed by [informational] spread” (original emphasis).¹¹ I take this to mean that, in the example of Nikola Jokic, “the 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft” is not always more dominant than predicative spread that includes descriptions such as “tall,” “large,” and “European.”

Thus with respect to the forthcoming argument, I presume predicative spread is generally most dominant during the referential use of proper names. Though there are

10. Evans, “Causal Theory of Names,” 201.

11. Evans, “Causal Theory of Names,” 201. To further comment on this quotation, Evans’s theory is primarily concerned with what is most central within an entity’s dossier. That is why Evans rules out descriptive fit in exchange for what is truly dominant in the dossier of an entity. He argues thus for descriptive dominance over descriptive fit; however, he does not rule out what he calls informational spread. Thus I am offering fair warning that descriptive fit should not be mistaken for information spread.

bound to be exceptions to this rule, as my upcoming argument illustrates, proper names in everyday use tend to refer with respect to what is neither irreducible nor unique of an entity. In other words, proper names are inclined to refer to their intended entity (in light of a causal-historical account) because they are connected to descriptive content that does not pinpoint something particular in an entity.

A Common God in Reference

At this point I believe HTR is a more substantive theory of reference because it maintains the strengths of DTR and CHTR. By utilizing a causal-historical exchange and descriptive content, HTR appeals to a wider deposit of evidence for establishing reference. As such, HTR bypasses the objections of Gödel-Schmidt and Drifting Turnip because DTR and CHTR facilitate each other by appealing to different facets for what establishes reference.

To illustrate just how HTR bypasses the objections of Gödel-Schmidt and Drifting Turnip, take once again how DTR and CHTR are occasionally unable to establish reference. As seen in the Gödel-Schmidt objection, DTR has an inability to link Schmidt with “proved mathematical theorem x.” DTR either references the incorrect individual or no individual at all. It cannot, in any justifiable capacity, refer to Schmidt (i.e., the correct individual) because he has no causal-historical connection to the theorem. Likewise, CHTR is also unable to refer to young boy A since it appeals to a causal-historical exchange. As the objection of Drifting Turnip illustrates, a causal-historical exchange either, under these circumstances, refers to the incorrect individual or no individual at all. It too cannot refer to the correct individual (i.e., A) because the

original villagers cannot verify B's ontological character without assessing the cluster of information associate with B.

By contrast, HTR mends these incongruences by incorporating the strengths of DTR and CHTR. This permits Schmidt and young boy A to be properly referenced. For instance, if there had been a causal-historical connection between Schmidt and "proved mathematical theorem x," then it is unlikely that Gödel could have acquired unscrupulous credit for the theorem. If the name Schmidt invoked "proved mathematical theorem x" or "proven mathematical theorem x" invoked Schmidt and either one were linked with a causal-historical chain, it is unlikely that Gödel could have acquired accreditation for the theorem. Likewise in Drifting Turnip, if descriptive content had been connected to the causal-historical exchange, it is improbable A would be mistake for B. If descriptions such as "lives in the city" and "does not like coffee" had been added to the preexisting causal-historical exchange, it is improbable that A would have been mistaken for B.

In either Gödel-Schmidt or Drifting Turnip, HTR is a better theory when establishing reference. This is confirmed by Bogardus and Urban, who believe that the combined benefit of DTR and CHTR is favored when deciding whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.¹² They argue that combining a causal-historical exchange with descriptive content not only establishes reference, but it also considers how reference drifts over time. They believe the ways in which HTR accounts for reference and referential drift plays a fundamental role when judging whether Muslims

12. I think it is reasonable to note that others, including Meghan Sullivan, find HTR to be the most well-rounded theory of reference. This is to say, I think there has been plenty of thought done on HTR that attributes to its legitimacy.

and Christians worship the same God.¹³ To make this argument, Bogardus and Urban introduce an example that, according to HTR, illustrates what is entailed in deciding whether Muslims and Christians refer to and also worship the same God. This example I call Saint or Claus:

Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus corefer to the same individual associated with predicates like “3rd and 4th century Christian saint,” “born in Myra,” and “celebrated for his anonymous gift giving.” Over time, however, the cluster of information attached to Santa Claus begins to be associated with predicates like “white bearded man,” “Nordic elf,” and “delivers gifts on Christmas.” In this sense, Santa Claus undergoes referential drift in such a way that it becomes ambiguous whether Santa Claus refers to the same entity associated with the individual with the predicative phrase “Christian saint born in Myra.” In light of referential drift, the question becomes whether Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus corefer to the same individual after the original cluster of information has been altered.¹⁴

13. Bogardus and Urban (including others and I) assume that reference is a prerequisite for worship. That is, it cannot be established that Muslims and Christians worship the same God without first establishing that they refer to the same God. As Bogardus and Urban put it, “We assume that . . . Muslims and Christians worship the same God only if they refer to the same God.” The sequence thus for developing a response to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God is that it must first be established that they refer to the same God. For more on this point, see Bogardus and Urban, “How to Tell” and Jeroen Ridder and René Woudenberg, “Referring to, Believing in, and Worshiping the Same God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 31 (2014): 46–67.

14. The example of Saint or Claus is adapted from Bogardus and Urban. For the full articulation of example, see Bogardus and Urban, “How to Tell,” 185–94. Moreover, you can also find another articulation of the example of Saint or Claus in Jerry Walls, “None Worship the Same God: A Different Conception View,” in *Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews Worship the Same God?: Four Views*, ed. Ronnie Campbell and Christopher Gnanakan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academics, 2019), 160–81.

Much like other examples in previous sections, Saint or Claus portrays an individual that is associated with descriptive content and is named. However, over time the body of descriptive content associated with the individual begins to be altered with the incorporation of different predicates. In the example, Santa Claus is originally associated with “Christian saint born in Myra.” But over time, Santa Claus begins to be associated with “Nordic elf who delivers gifts on Christmas.” In light of these alternate predicates, the question becomes whether Santa Claus refers to the same individual as Saint Nicholas or whether reference has been bifurcated. Toward these considerations, Bogardus and Urban argue that HTR positions us in a way that informs our judgment on such questions.

More importantly, Bogardus and Urban make the point that Saint or Claus illustrates what is entailed in whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. In relation to the previous point, they argue that HTR positions us to decide whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God given that it resembles the example of Saint or Claus. For instance, in the same way that Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus are originally associated with “Christian saint born in Myra,” Bogardus and Urban argue that the Islamic and Christian conceptions of God originated from the same referent.¹⁵ They believe that Islam and Christianity, largely drawn from the Abrahamic tradition, maintain that God is an “omniscient, omnipotent creator, who spoke to Abraham.” With

15. Notice the language I am using here. Though not evident in the article of Bogardus and Urban, I think it is safe to say that the Islamic and Christian conceptions of God evolved over an extended period of time. I think it is a more logical sequence that Muslims and Christians originally conceived of God in terms of the Abrahamic tradition. But, over time, it is likely that Muslims and Christians began to interpret God’s activities in terms of their own particular experiences. It is in light of this evolutionary sequence that I think we get theologies such as *Tawhid* and Trinity that are particular to their own traditions.

time, however, either the Islamic, Christian, or both their understandings of God began to incorporate alternate predicates. This, of course, jeopardizes reference by increasing the chances of referential drift.

As the title of their work indicates (i.e., “How to Tell Whether Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God”), Bogardus and Urban *do not* establish whether they believe Muslims and Christians refer to and possibly worship the same God. Their article exclusively establishes the conditions under which reference drifts and how we might decide whether this has happened in the situation of Muslims and Christians. In this way, Bogardus and Urban should not be understood as making normative claims on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Bogardus and Urban simply establish the conditions under which reference and referential drift occur.

To ensure clarity of thought, however, Bogardus and Urban *do not* believe that Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus corefer to the same entity as they once did.¹⁶ Given the contemporary associations with Santa Claus (e.g., Nordic elf who delivers gifts on Christmas), they argue that the predicative discrepancies between Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus are too significant for coreference. According to them, Santa Claus in the minds of contemporary children and parents almost exclusively refers to the individual associated with “Nordic elf who delivers gifts on Christmas.” This is so much so that Santa Claus cannot possibly refer to the individual associated with “Christian saint born in Myra.” Thus Bogardus and Urban argue that the cluster of information associated with Santa Claus has been altered to such an extent that the name cannot refer to Saint Nicholas.

16. Bogardus and Urban, “How to Tell,” 192.

Application of Bogardus and Urban

In relation to Bogardus and Urban, several have developed responses on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.¹⁷ One such and particularly important response for this thesis is developed by Jerry Walls. In conjunction with Bogardus and Urban, Walls makes the argument that Muslims have so “radically” altered the information associated with God that they no longer refer to God. He says,

As someone who thinks Christianity is true, I am inclined to think there has in fact been a reference shift in the case of Islam but not Christianity. That is, the dossier for ‘Allah’ includes claims that are so radically at odds with core Christian truth claims that a reference shift has occurred such that ‘Allah’ does not refer to God. Since Christians and Muslims do not even refer to the same God, they do not worship the same God.¹⁸

Much like Bogardus and Urban do with Saint or Claus, Walls mimics their reasoning as it relates to the question at hand. In the same way that Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus originally referenced the same entity, Walls argues that God in the minds of Muslims and

17. Though Walls is not the only philosopher or theologian utilizing Bogardus and Urban, some have critique their article. For example, see Francis J. Beckwith, “All Worship the same God: Referring to the same God View,” in *Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews Worship the Same God?: Four Views*, ed. Ronnie Campbell and Christopher Gnanakan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academics, 2019), 66–86.

18. Walls, “None Worship the Same God,” 167.

Christians did the same thing.¹⁹ However, much in the same way that Santa Claus underwent referential drift (i.e., from historical to fictional figure), Allah underwent the same sort of change. Under this analysis, upon use of Allah by Muslims, the proper name does not refer to the God attested in the Abrahamic tradition; rather, it refers to some fictional reality.²⁰

The underscore of his delimitation is that the Trinity (and subsequently the incarnation) is primary in the life of God.²¹ His claim is that the God of the Abrahamic tradition is Triune and thus any claim about God that is not regarded as such cannot conceivably refer to the entity perceived by Abraham. Walls says, The Abrahamic God “is the Trinitarian God . . . [and consequently], no alleged revelation that denies that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, such as the Qur’an, could be revelation from God.”²² His argument thus is that Muslims have altered their conception of Allah away from the Abrahamic tradition and have embraced an Islamic conception of monotheism (i.e., *Tawhid*); therefore, they no longer refer to God as Christians *in fact* do.²³

To locate Walls in the current thesis, recall from the previous chapter what I labeled as generic and specific predicates. Walls appears to think that reference and

19. To ensure clarity, the reader must not confuse Allah as being an alternative name for God. Rather Allah translates to God from the Arabic. Moreover, it is firmly held within scholarship that etymologically Allah and God trace back to Judeo-Christian roots.

20. Walls, “None Worship the Same God,” 166.

21. I assume Walls would say on the flip side that *Tawhid* constitutes the most dominant information in God’s dossier for Muslims. Though he never explicitly says that, I think for the sake of maintaining consistency, he would make this claim.

22. Walls, “None Worship the Same God,” 165.

23. Notice the title of Walls chapter (i.e., “None Worship the Same God”). Not only does Walls argument apply to Muslims, but also to Jews. As he says, “I shall take the negative answer [that all three do not worship the same God] because I think it is true.” See Walls, “None Worship the Same God,” 160–61.

referential drift rely primarily (if not exclusively) upon specific predicates in light of a causal-historical exchange. Namely, only predicates that are irreducible and unique of an entity (e.g., Nichola Jokic is 41st overall pick in the 2014 NBA draft) account for reference and referential drift. When it comes to the question at hand, he relies on specific predicative phases such as “God is Triune” rather than what I call generic predicates (e.g., goodness, love). His argument thus tracks nicely with Bogardus and Urban and their explanation of HTR, given that they argue that dominance pinpoints something particular about an entity. In the same way that Santa Claus does not corefer with Saint Nicholas, Walls argues that Allah no longer refers to the God of the Abrahamic tradition because Muslims deny God as Triune. For Walls, the outcome of their denial proves that reference has drifted in a way where Muslims and Christians no longer refer to much less worship, the same God.

His line of argumentation is important because it frames the way in which I develop my argument in the immediate pages. Though I agree neither with his conception of dominance nor his overall conclusion on the question, he nevertheless illustrates how one can use HTR to decide whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. In accord with Walls, the fact that HTR can assist our decision on Saint or Claus is enough reason to use the theory for the current question. My argument thus uses HTR much in the same as Walls; however, by focusing on the connection between proper names and descriptive content, my argument diverges and even challenges Walls’ analysis.

Argument 1: Common God in Reference

What I have articulated so far is that HTR positions us to decide whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God since the theory bypasses the objections of Gödel-

Schmidt and Drifting Turnip. This is epitomized in Saint or Claus where HTR accounts for reference and referential drift. Because I seek to argue that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God, the logical sequence of my argument is to establish the conditions of reference before undertaking those related to worship.²⁴ All of this depends, of course, upon the legitimacy of HTR and its ability to determine whether a proper name refers to its intended entity. Given that I think the HTR is legitimate for my purposes, I attempt to determine whether Muslims and Christians meet the appropriate conditions to refer to the same God.

Of course, any attempt to establish that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God requires that they meet two conditions, according to HTR. The first is that Muslims and Christians must share a causal-historical account that originates from the same initial and unique perceptible experience. The second is that Muslims and Christians must agree upon a dominant body of information about God. For any reason that either of these cannot be agreed upon, reference and subsequently worship cannot be established between Muslims and Christians. Thus any claim maintaining that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God must validate that Muslims and Christians share both conditions.

24. Once again, my project assumes that reference precedes worship. That is, we must first be able to refer to an entity before we could ever worship that entity. Though several have supported this claim (including Walls, Bogardus, and Urban), there are great philosophical challenges associated with this inference. I do not have space or time to take up these philosophical challenges. But it is important to note that I am assuming that reference precedes worship. See Walls, "None Worship the Same God," 161.

The First Condition of HTR

To begin with the first, it is nearly univocal in current research that Muslims and Christians share a causal-historical account that traces back to the Abrahamic tradition.²⁵ As Bogardus and Urban put it, “[T]here is no doubt that the use of Allah by Muslims traces back to . . . the divine-name-using practice of Jews and Christians.”²⁶ Primarily a historical question (e.g., etymology, historical theology), there is sufficient evidence that Allah when used by Muslims is primarily prompted by Jewish thought that permeated the Gulf region through the infusion of Christianity. Thus Islam inherited Allah from the same etymological origins as Christianity, which has links with the Abrahamic tradition. This is an essential point because it demonstrates that God in the mouth of Muslims and Christians springs from the same name-calling practice and not from “two distinct practices involving the use of the [same] name.”²⁷ Though this is an important research topic that deserves greater attention, given the parameters of this thesis are primarily philosophical, I do not have adequate space to deal with the historicity of this question. However, I think it is safe to rely on the scholarly input on this point provided that the research is nearly univocal with few outliers; thus there is adequate evidence that Muslims and Christians share the same causal-historical chain.

This univocity is significant because it points to the fact that Muslims and Christians share at least one of two conditions that determine common reference. However, the question still remains whether Muslims and Christians share a dominant

25. For more on this point, see Bogardus and Urban, “How to Tell,” 192.

26. Bogardus and Urban, “How to Tell,” 192.

27. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 380–82.

cluster of information about God. In recent research, whether Muslims and Christians share a body of information about God that qualifies as dominant has been the primary dispute among philosophers and theologians. As illustrated earlier, there are several different and conflicting expositions on this point (e.g., Volf, Turner, George). In light of this variety and conflict, I devote the remainder of this section to argue that Muslims and Christians agree upon the second condition of reference.

The Second Condition of HTR

As outlined in Evans, once a proper name has been associated with descriptive content, that content is accentuated whenever the name is used by those in the name-calling practice. He demonstrates this with a simple example: “[E]veryone who is introduced to the [name-calling practice of] ‘Robin Hood’ learns more or less the legend.”²⁸ Once people have been properly integrated into a name-calling practice (e.g., Robin Hood), the original descriptive content attached to the name (e.g., “bandit,” “uses a longbow”) is elucidated in the minds of members of the community whenever the name is used. This original descriptive content is unlikely to change in the name-calling practice because it eventually becomes “common knowledge between members of the practice.”²⁹ Once the original descriptive content has become common knowledge among members of the community, it should adjust only when new information is added since the community’s identity is built on what is common among all members.³⁰

28. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 394.

29. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 394–95.

30. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 394–95.

Evans' point illustrates the innate quality of proper names to elucidate descriptive content. However, this does not specify *how* exactly proper names do so. Even within Evans' theory of reference, it is unclear how a proper name such as Robin Hood elucidates a predicative phrase such as "a bandit who robs the rich to feed the poor." Thus even within a robust exposition such as HTR, the question still remains: how do proper names, from the perspective of philosophy of language, elucidate descriptive content upon use? From an intuitive perspective, proper names elucidate descriptive content according to the previous example. However, intuition is not a robust analysis of proper names and their ability to elucidate descriptive content for assessing whether Muslims and Christians meet the second condition of reference.

Thus to explain how proper names accentuate descriptive content, take Searle and his explication of this dynamic.³¹ As a preliminary step for his explanation, Searle asks how proper names refer to entities and how this differs from reference by definite descriptions and demonstratives. That is, what unique linguistic mechanisms do proper names maintain that permits them to refer to entities, and how do they differ from singular expression like definite descriptions or demonstratives?³² On the one hand, unlike proper names, definite descriptions refer because they are typically said about an entity.³³ For instance, "The 43rd president of United States" refers to the entity that satisfies the description: the individual represented by George W. Bush. On the other

31. Searle, "Proper Names," 166–73.

32. Searle, "Proper Names," 170.

33. This dynamic is often called the Frege-Russell view given that Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell used the idea of sense and descriptive content to make this connection between words and thoughts with entities.

hand, demonstratives secure reference by specific contextual conditions that have been linked or paired with utterances such as “This is . . .” For example, when George W. Bush stands in the South Lawn prior to the invasion of Afghanistan, he can be referenced by saying, “This is George W. Bush.”

The referential use of proper names, however, is not as clear cut as it is with definite descriptions and demonstratives. Even within a robust theory of reference like HTR, it is not clear what within a proper name generates reference. Certainly the combination of a causal-historical chain and descriptive content verifies the proper name in use. But HTR does not qualify what linguistic mechanism within in a proper name generates reference. In light of such obscurity, Searle investigates the referential use of proper names to uncover what in them is generating reference.

To begin, Searle launches his inquiry on whether proper names elucidate descriptive content with the following proposition: Suppose, for instance, that members of the name-calling practice of George W. Bush are asked to list a set of characteristics about the individual represented by the name. In such a situation, members of the name-calling practice would list descriptive content that intends to “uniquely” refer to George W. Bush.³⁴ That is because George W. Bush has been previously associated with descriptive content that inevitably connects the name to a particular individual. When asked, members of the name-calling practice would elucidate a “sufficient but so far unspecific” set of characteristics that intend to refer to George W. Bush.³⁵ Thus the

34. Searle, “Proper Names,” 171.

35. Searle, “Proper Names,” 171.

assumption here is that the referential use of proper names presupposes the existence of entities that satisfy a list of characteristics.

However, the primary difficulty when using the referential use of proper names is assessing what kind of descriptive content establishes the second condition of reference. That is, the imprecision that accompanies the referential use of proper names creates difficulties when judging whether a set of predicates sufficiently establishes the second condition of reference. The question thus looms as to what in a proper name elucidates descriptive content and how does that establish reference.

To clarify what in a proper name contains descriptive content, Searle makes a distinction between the referential functions of descriptivism and proper names with the following proposition:³⁶ Suppose, for example, George W. Bush came to be associated with a detailed and exhaustive set of descriptions. For example, George W. Bush is associated with a precise set of predicates such as ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$ ’ where p_n is a finite number of predicates. In such instances, when George W. Bush is used, reference would be achieved by corroborating predicates ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$ ’ with the individual represented by his name. George W. Bush in this sense would be associated with such a precise and rigid set of characteristics that it could refer only at the expense of being corroborated with the individual that satisfies predicates ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$.’ In instances that the individual represented by George W. Bush and predicates ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$ ’ could not be corroborated, reference is unlikely to occur. Therefore, under such parameters, a proper name that has been associated with a detailed and exhaustive set of predicates cannot refer to an entity that does not satisfy those characteristics.

36. Searle, “Proper Names,” 171.

However, as a result of the association between George W. Bush and a detailed and exhaustive set of predicates, the name appears to be an unnecessary criterion of reference. If the proper name refers only because it is associated with a precise and rigid set of predicates, the name serves little to no purpose for establishing reference other than being a shorthand for elucidating predicates ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$.’ As said by Searle, “the name itself would become superfluous for it would become logically equivalent to this set of descriptions.”³⁷ Since George W. Bush is associated with a rigid and precise set of predicates, the name is doing nothing unique apart from a describing function. The consequence of this is that George W. Bush functions basically in the same way as predicates ‘ $p_1, p_2 \dots p_n$,’ which makes the name a superfluous criterion. Under this misguided conception, the referential functions of descriptivism and proper names have been conflated in such a way that proper names do not have a unique referential function.

Proper names, however, almost never operate in such a precise and rigid way as depicted above. Rather, in Searle’s mind, proper names allow an entity to be referenced *without* elucidating a detailed and exhaustive set of characteristics (i.e., specific predicates). He says, “the convenience of proper names [lies] precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without [coming to] agreement on what [characteristics] exactly constitute the identity of the object.”³⁸ Proper names in this way do not function by descriptive exactitudes, but rather they refer because they elucidate a sufficient and yet unspecific set of predicates held true about entities.³⁹ This means, for

37. Searle, “Proper Names,” 171.

38. Searle, “Proper Names,” 172.

39. Searle, “Proper Names,” 173.

instance, that even predicates like “the former governor of Texas” or “the son of George H. W. Bush” (or some combination of these) are likely to refer to George W. Bush. Proper names thus refer because they are logically connected to a set of predicates that are not precise in terms of either extent or quality (i.e., generic predicates).

To clarify further, Searle goes on to describe the referential function of proper names in terms of categorical “looseness.”⁴⁰ Instead of indicating the exactitudes of an entity’s ontological character, proper names accentuate an entity’s ontology “in a loose sort of way.”⁴¹ When, for example, members of the name-calling practice assert George W. Bush, the name is bound to elucidate a set of characteristics. It is unlikely, however, that those characteristics will be detailed and exhaustive. Given the way in which proper names function in their everyday use, predicates such as “the former governor of Texas” or “the son of George H. W. Bush” are more likely to be elucidated than predicates such as “the 46th governor of Texas” or “the 43rd president of the United States.” In this way, proper names do not elucidate in accord to specific predication but rather allude by generic predication.

With this distinction, Searle has managed to separate the referential functions of descriptivism and proper names. Provided that proper names elucidate descriptive content in a less detailed and exhaustive way than descriptivism, Searle has illustrated the difference between their functions; namely, that definite descriptions refer by indicating “what an object is” while proper names refer without ever taking “issue [with] what an

40. Searle, “Proper Names,” 173.

41. Searle, “Proper Names,” 173.

object is.”⁴² As such, the difference between the referential functions of descriptivism and proper names is primarily ontological. In terms of descriptivism, the function “refers in virtue of the fact that the [descriptive content]” is linked or paired to an entity in a precise and exhaustive manner. Unlike descriptivism, proper names refer because they accentuate descriptive content in an unconditional or “loose” way.

This means that if a proper name is used and its referent is not self-evident, the proper name can be qualified by the descriptive content elucidated during the name’s use. For instance, when Robin Hood is asserted, the name should refer to the “heroic outlaw in English folklore” for every person integrated into the name-calling practice. Yet at any point that there is confusion or dispute about what individual is being referenced, the individual can be qualified by the generic predicates elucidated during the name’s use. If members of the name-calling practice elucidate the generic predicates such as “has a bow,” “robs the rich,” and “feeds the poor,” then it can be assumed there is coreference among members. However, if members of the name-calling practice accentuate radically different predicates among one another, reference has apparently drifted.

This has obvious importance for the question at hand because it clarifies the second condition of reference. Given that there is confusion and dispute on whether Muslims and Christians refer to the same God, the generic predicates accentuated during the name’s use should clarify, according to Searle, whether they meet the second condition of reference. Because they share the same name-calling practice in situations where they elucidate generic predicates like love, good, omnipotent, and omnipresent, then there is adequate evidence that they refer to the same God. However, in the situation

42. Searle, “Proper Names,” 172.

where they do not elucidate similar generic predicates, it is unlikely that they refer to the same God.

Before I consider whether Muslims and Christians meet the second condition, let us recapitulate what has been said thus far in two basic premises. The first is that proper names presuppose the existence of entities that they intend to reference. Only in rare situations are proper names used in ways that do not intend to refer to entities.⁴³ It is intuitive from this that when a proper name is used, it intends to refer to a specific entity and not some fictional reality.⁴⁴ The second and subsidiary of the first is that proper names are almost always associated with descriptive content in a generic or loose way. In the situation that proper names are not associated with descriptive content, then there is no way to confirm that a proper name refers to the appropriate entity. That said, if the former is acceptable, the latter is necessitated given that there must be a way for the former to be confirmed. Otherwise, the basic structure of language ceases to operate and the way in which the referential function of proper names (e.g., Nikola Jokic, George W. Bush) and names in general (e.g., lodgepole pine, lark bunting) work is illegitimate.

Similar Set of Generic Predicates

If these premises are satisfactory, then developing a response to whether Muslims and Christians meet the second condition of reference depends on whether they elucidate (at least) a similar set of generic predicates that, in Searle's language, are loose in their original sense. Though I presume there are several ways to determine the kinds of

43. One such way would be deception. Someone might want to trick a person into believing that there is a person with a particular name when really there is no such person.

44. Notice the word "intend." Whether the use of a proper name actually refers is beside the point. All that matters is that proper names almost always "intend" to refer to specific entities regardless if they are successful doing so.

predicates Muslims and Christians accentuate upon the use of God, one such way is to consider systematic theology, of which, predicates are ubiquitous. Theological claims, of course, cannot be made without *some* commitment to the divine predicates (or attributes). Statements such as “God is . . .” or “God, you are . . .” all presuppose, in various degrees, an obligation to divine predication.⁴⁵ In light of this inference, it appears reasonable that systematic theology for Islam and Christianity can illuminate the divine predicates common among Muslims and Christians. My presumption thus is that systematic theology can position us to determine whether Muslims and Christians accentuate the same or at least a similar set of generic predicates that meet the second condition of reference.

For those familiar with systematic theology, it is obvious that a thesis such as the current one is unable to provide a comprehensive outline and explanation of the divine predicates upheld in Islam and Christianity, the mere scope and intricacy of which is well beyond the capacity and applicability of this thesis. Regardless, if systematic theology for Islam and Christianity were explained, it would be understood that Muslims and Christians share (at least in a loose kind of way) a common set of generic predicates. To support this inference, take how the predicate of love is attested in Islam and Christianity. The Christian tradition, on the one hand, not only maintains that “love is from God” but more specifically that “God is love” (1 John 4:7–8, 16). It is out of this love that creation “might live through” God (1 John 4:9). On the other hand, the Islamic tradition in a

45. Stephen R. Holmes, “The Attributes of God,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: University of Oxford, 2007), 54–71.

similar way affirms that God is “the Most Loving,” from which, God “originates” and thus sustains “the created order” (*Al-Buruj* 11–12).⁴⁶

Moreover, later Islamic and Christian traditions expound upon what it means for God to maintain love within the life of God. Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, connects God’s love with God’s provisional care for the created order (i.e., providence). He says, “[T]hey call him . . . love because he is the power moving and lifting all things up to himself.”⁴⁷ In other words, it is God’s love that provides for and sustains all created things that ultimately prompts them to achieve their proper ends. Likewise, Al-Ghazālī makes a connection between divine love and God’s mercy and favor bestowed upon creation (i.e., providence). He says, “[T]he Loving-Kind is the one who wishes all creatures well and accordingly favors them.”⁴⁸ Much like the Pseudo-Dionysius, Al-Ghazālī maintains that God’s love underpins creation’s ability to thrive in accord with God’s mercy and favor. Thus from a scriptural and theological perspective, God’s love implicates provisional care for creation in Islam and Christianity.

Muslims and Christians thus agree at the very least that there is some positive element in the life of God that is analogous to the human emotive capacity of love. Their understandings of love illustrate the reciprocal conception that God is love and, out of love, God provides for creation. It seems sensible thus to conclude from these inferences

46. Note that the Most Loving is one of ninety-nine beautiful names (or predicates) of God upheld in Islam. Theologically the ninety-nine beautiful names are important in Islam because they are revealed in the Qur’an. Thus they hold special prominence and importance in the tradition.

47. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 47–132.

48. Al-Ghazālī. *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 118-20.

that Muslims and Christians have a similar conception of love (at least in a loose way) as it relates to God.

Though this neither constitutes a systematic account of love nor of the divine predicates in general, such examples do show how systematic theology can be used to determine whether Muslims and Christians elucidate a common set of generic predicates. While these inferences pertain specifically to the predicate of love, they illustrate how one might assess whether Muslims and Christians agree on other generic predicates (e.g., omnipotent, omnipresent). That is, systematic theology empowers us with ability to cross-reference generic predicates found in Islam with those in Christianity (and vice versa), where generic predicates can be compared and contrasted in a way that one can assess whether they share an adequate set of predicates held true about God. Systematic theology thus is a roadmap for deciding whether Muslims and Christians meet the second condition of reference.

Though I cannot offer a comprehensive explication of the divine predicates, my intuition is that Muslims and Christians meet the second condition of reference because they maintain a set of generic predicates that, in their original sense, are loose. The fact is that Muslims and Christians uphold several generic predicates that have an equal if not greater semblance to one another than that of divine love. For instance, Muslims and Christians consistently maintain that God is good, creator, omnipotent, omnipresent (etc.) that, if investigated closer, are analogous to one another. From this perspective, Muslims and Christians appear to share and uphold a common list of generic predicates that track with Searle's concept of descriptive looseness. Therefore my intuition is that Muslims

and Christians share and uphold an extensive list of generic predicates that sufficiently establishes the second condition of reference.

If my intuition is correct and Muslims and Christians share the second condition of reference, then in light of the first condition (i.e., causal-historical account), they refer to the same God. Since Muslims and Christians use the same name-calling practice and qualify its use with a common set of generic predicates (e.g., omnipotent, omnipresent), it would be inconsistent to say they do not refer to the same God. This is demonstrated by how we use proper names in everyday use. Suppose, for instance, that someone asserts Robin Hood and then qualifies the use of the name with predicates such as “has a bow,” “robs the rich,” and “feeds the poor.” Likewise, suppose someone asserts George W. Bush and then qualifies the use of the name with predicates such as “former governor of Texas” and “the son of George H. W. Bush.” There is little chance, under these circumstances, that people integrated into either name-calling practice would remain confused as to which individual is being referenced. That is, it is difficult to imagine that people with access to a name-calling practice and the descriptive content elucidated during the name’s use will not be able to refer to the appropriate entity.

Thus I infer that Muslims and Christian refer to the same God because they share the same name-calling practice and elucidate a similar set of generic predicates. My argument is that whenever Muslims and Christians share generic predicates that are loose in their original sense, they refer to the same God given that they maintain the same name-calling practice. So when Muslims and Christians say things like, “God is good,” “God, you are powerful,” or “God, we need your love,” they refer to the same God. This line of argumentation, of course, follows from the fact that reference holds between

causal-historical account and descriptive content where the descriptive content remains loose in its original sense. Streamlined, my argument comprises the following string of propositions:

- (1) Muslims and Christians have been properly introduced into the same name-calling practice that originated from the Abrahamic tradition (i.e., God) and
- (2) Muslims and Christians elucidate a list of generic predicates upon their independent uses of God thus
- (3) Muslims and Christians refer to the same God.

This argument finds its foothold insofar as these propositions are maintained by Evans' theory of reference and Searle's theory of proper names. In other words, the claim is built on the juxtaposition between HTR and the categorial looseness of proper names. The argument therefore is that reference holds between a causal-historical exchange and descriptive content where the descriptive content must only remain loose. Therefore my argument is that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God from an Evansian-Searlian perspective.

An initial objection to my argument is that if generic predicates are not specific with regards to extent or quality, then there is no real ontological basis to ground an analysis on. That is, because generic predicates are nonspecific with regard to extent and quality, they risk falling into ontological obscurity that results in dubious metaphysical

commitments. Thus to argue that Muslims and Christians meet the second condition of reference is incoherent since generic predicates retain little ontological significance.

Though this is a thought-provoking objection, it fails to understand what Muslims and Christians agree on with respect to generic predicates. It is true that generic predicates are not specific with regards to extent or quality. However, this does not mean that generic predicates are inept in an ontological sense. Take, for instance, when Muslims and Christians use predicative phrases such as “God is love” or “God, you are good.” What Muslims and Christians agree on is that there is “something” within God’s character that is loving and good (i.e., analogical predication). That is, love and goodness expressed in the life of God and reality have an analogous relationship with one another. Otherwise, if predicates are inappropriate from a theological perspective, then Muslims and Christians enter dangerous theological terrain. If it is not more adequate to use predicates like goodness and love, then there is nothing keeping other predicates (e.g., evil, bad) from being used from the perspective of theology. Thus what Muslims and Christians agree on is that there are some predicates more appropriately used of God than others.

A different objection comes in the form of what constitutes descriptive dominance. As stated previously, descriptive content (in light of a causal-historical chain) establishes reference not by descriptive fit but by what is most dominant in the body of information associated with God. On the question at hand, some have argued that Trinity and *Tawhid* are, according to their own traditions, the most dominant descriptions in God’s dossier. If this happens to be true, then Muslims and Christians cannot refer to the same God given that they are numerically and theologically oppositional. If accurate,

the consequence of this objection is that Muslims and Christians do not meet the second condition of reference; thus, my argument is incoherent.

This too is an interesting objection; however, it does not concern itself with the complexities associated with the referential use of proper names. Recall for a moment how proper names are used in a referential way. As previously outlined, proper names do not refer by descriptive exactitudes. For example, people integrated into name-calling practices do not have to accentuate a detailed and exhaustive list of predicates held true about entities to refer to them.⁴⁹ Rather, as with Robin Hood, simply elucidating things such as “the man with the bow who robs the rich” or “the bandit who gives to the poor” is likely to meet the second condition of reference.

If these inferences are correct as argued thus far, it seems the most dominant descriptive content connected with proper names is whatever is *normally* elucidated when a name is used. This I have argued is not precise with regards to extent or quality (i.e., generic predicates), given our everyday use of proper names. For example, individuals can refer to Robin Hood (or any other entity) without knowing every particular thing held true about him. If people had to accentuate particular things about Robin Hood (e.g., his height, the length of his bow) to refer to him, few individuals could do so simply from an epistemic perspective. In other words, it appears unlikely that people who casually refer to Robin Hood have access to what is irreducible and unique to his character.

49. Though I am hesitate to uphold Searle’s conception of the referential use of proper names in all circumstances, I cannot think of any proper names that do not follow his conception. Even in the case where a proper name is found not to refer by generic predicates, I think there is enough evidence to say that God in the mouth of Muslims and Christians refers in a loose way.

Therefore what is most dominant in the example of Robin Hood (and most other proper names) is largely generic rather than specific predication. Though this does not mean that specific predicates (i.e., Trinity and *Tawhid*) are not valuable for establishing reference, it does mean that reference is a more complex process than this objection lends; therefore, such an objection remains largely unfounded.

Argument 2: Different God in Worship

At this point I believe there is reasonable evidence to suggest that Muslims and Christians corefer to the same God. However, coreference does not necessarily entail common worship as worship relates to Muslims and Christians. I determine therefore that reference and worship are distinct functions. Primarily a question of philosophical theology, I seek to make this distinction in a rather ordinary manner. Rather than developing a sophisticated response for why reference and worship are distinct functions, I simply illustrate their dissimilarity with the following scenario:

Suppose that a Muslim and a Christian walk into a liturgical rite (or service). Upon the opening segment, an entity represented by God is repeatedly invoked. Every time that God is invoked, the leader predicates something of God that the community at large holds true. As the segment progresses, predicates such as love, mercy, holy, lord, creator, omniscient, omnipotent, and so on are all at one time or another attributed of God.⁵⁰ The first segment proceeds thus with the leader saying things such as, “God is love,” “God is the holy One,” and “God, you are the Creator.” These sorts of predicates continue until the end of the segment. However, as the second segment begins, the leader

50. These are not the only predicates jointly maintained within the Islamic and Christian traditions. The fact is that there are several other predicates Muslims and Christians are likely to agree upon in a generic way.

adjusts the predicates she attributes to God. Rather than predicating attributes such as love and creator, the leader predicates that God is Triune. Throughout this segment, the leader says only things like “God is Trinity” or “God is a Triune being.” So the segment proceeds and ends with affirmation that God is Triune.

Such a scenario fits nicely with the previous chapter and its distinction between generic and specific predicates. Broadly speaking, the leader moves from general to more particular claims about God as the liturgy proceeds. The leader begins with general claims like “God is love” and “God, you are the Creator.” These, of course, mimic generic predicates given that they do not clarify the extent or quality of God’s character as maintained by the community at large. As the liturgy proceeds, these generic predicates are changed to a more specific predicate (i.e., Trinity). The Triune language mimics specific predicates insofar as the community maintains the Trinity as inductive exclusively of God. There is thus a move in this scenario from generic predicates that are neither irreducible nor unique to specific predicates that are.

In light of this scenario as it relates to the previous chapter, there are two inferences that distinguish reference from worship. The first is that the Muslim and the Christian are likely, if not theologically compelled, to affirm the leader and the predicates attributed to God in the first segment. There is no reason either the Muslim or the Christian would object to statements such as “God is love,” “God is the holy One,” and “God, you are the Creator.” These predicates are maintained in the Islamic and Christian traditions as stated in the previous chapter. The second is that the Muslim in this particular scenario is unlikely to affirm the leader and her statements about God in the

latter segment.⁵¹ Unlike the Christian, the Muslim is unable to affirm that God is Triune primarily on theological grounds. Given that *Tawhid* is an irreducible and unique predicate for the Muslim, there is no way that the Muslim can affirm the Triune language without committing the most heinous of sins (i.e., *shirk*).⁵²

Though there are foreseeable limitations with this scenario, these inferences illustrate the fundamental difference between reference and worship. As argued thus far, reference appears to function by what is neither irreducible nor unique of a given entity. The function of reference largely entails abstract predicates held true about entities (e.g., Nikola Jokic is tall). As depicted in the scenario, the Muslim and the Christian meet the appropriate conditions to refer to God since they affirm the leader and the predicates in the former segment.

Simple affirmation of the former segment, however, does not necessarily equate to worship. Worship entails, unlike reference, more particular and concrete predicates held true about entities. One such reason worship entails particular and concrete predicates is that worship illuminates the most important doctrines held true by a given community.⁵³ Worship is what Graham Hughes calls a “thickly woven plenitude” where words, symbols, and movement create meaningful experiences that illuminate what a

51. Notice that this inference would also apply if the scenario were reversed, where the leader predicates *Tawhid* in the second segment rather than the Trinity. Under such circumstances the Christian would be unable to affirm that God is *Tawhid* in light of theological grounds.

52. Apart of Islamic religious vocabulary, *shirk* signifies the act of “associating” an entity with God. Often translated as “associationism,” it can be more explicitly translated as polytheism. Though *shirk* is never equated with Christians in the Qur’anic text, Christians have come to be regarded as committing *shirk* in terms of their conception of Trinity. For more on this point, see D. Gimaret, “Shirk,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition* 9:484–6.

53. Bryan D. Spinks, “Worship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: University of Oxford, 2007), 378–93.

community cares about.⁵⁴ In relation to liturgical rites, the most important beliefs a community holds will be logically interwoven into its ceremonial rituals (e.g., the Eucharist, the call to prayer) and sense impressions (e.g., sight, smell). One can envision in the previous scenario the leader undertaking the Eucharist prayer or the Rite of Baptism during the latter segment. These rites incorporate “thick” theological words, symbols, and movements. It is unlikely the Muslim in these scenarios would agree with such beliefs because these rituals (and others like them) are saturated in Triune language. In this sense, worship entails specific predicates that are built on a “thickly woven plenitude” of ritualistic practice.

The consequence must be that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God. This is depicted in the previous scenario since it moves from open-ended to more specific claims about God. Once the leader incorporates Triune language, there is no theological basis for the Muslim to continue to agree with the leader. In this sense, it is unlikely from the standpoint of philosophy of language that Muslims and Christians would agree on anything beyond generic predication. Given that reference is largely determined in relation to generic predicates, Muslims and Christians meet the conditions for common reference in this scenario. Yet because worship incorporates a “thickly woven plenitude” of ritualistic practice, there is no basis for common worship. Therefore, the argument is that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God when generic predicates are used; however, they do not worship the same God, considering that worship entails specific predicates.

54. Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (New York: Cambridge, 2003), 30-42.

One objection to the distinction between reference and worship is that the words, symbols, and movements of liturgical rites often incorporate generic predicates along with specific predicates. Though specific predicates are primary in liturgical rites, generic predicates still remain prominent. In this sense, worship is not exclusively built on specific predicates since generic predicates remain an important element. The objection thus maintains that if worship comprises generic and specific predicates, then it makes little sense why generic predicates do not meet the appropriate threshold for worship. In other words, if Muslims and Christians agree upon a set of generic predicates, why does this not count as common worship?

Though an interesting objection, this critique overlooks the distinction between generic and specific predication. As articulated in the previous chapter, communal identity is largely maintained because certain kinds of beliefs hold precedence over other beliefs. As such, primary beliefs are maintained at the expense of adapting or negating the less important beliefs. In light of the previous scenario, the assumption is that the Muslim and the Christian automatically adapt generic predication to fit their particular conceptions of specific predication. From this perspective, the Muslim and the Christian agree only in the former segment insofar as they maintain that God is loosely associated with generic predicates. So the objection is right insofar as generic predicates are essential in worship; however, it misses that specific predicates hold precedence over generic predicates. This leads to the conclusion that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God. This argument is built on two primary premises. The first premise is that, according to HTR, Muslims and Christians meet the two conditions that establish reference. I demonstrated this with two arguments. On the one hand, I determined that Muslims and Christians inherited the same original descriptive content from the Abrahamic tradition. On the other hand, I argued that, according to systematic theology, Muslims and Christians retain this original descriptive content in a generic way. It thus follows from these arguments that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God because the referential use of proper names operates by descriptive looseness (i.e., the Searlian concept). The second premise is that common reference between Muslims and Christians does not equate to worship. In a relatively straightforward argument, I claimed that worship entails particular and concrete descriptions (i.e., specific predicates) while reference entails loose description (i.e., generic predicates). Therefore, in this chapter I demonstrated that reference primarily entails generic predication that is common among Muslims and Christians, while worship entails specific predication, which cannot possibly be common among Muslims and Christians.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Muslims and Christians Do Not Worship the Same God

In this thesis, I have sought to answer whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. To answer the question, I made two important distinctions in the second chapter. The first distinction is between reference and predication. Reference primarily holds between a linguistic or cognitive element and an entity that allows that particular entity to be tracked, picked out, or associated with information. Unlike reference, predication is a relation between two (or more) entities (e.g., objects, individuals, attributes, modes) that locates these entities in their respective ontological categories. Thus by applying philosophy of language, I established that reference and predication are distinct and independent functions that render different linguistic outcomes.

As a subsidiary of the first, the second distinction is between generic and specific predication, where being *in* (or *inhering in*) is characteristic of generic predication while being *said of* is indicative of specific predication. In this sense, specific predicates illustrate the type, genus, attribute, or mode that is irreducible and unique of an entity while generic predicates express those that are more universal. The perspective here is that specific and generic predicates elucidate entities by different ontological means that logically configure reality in such a way that generates meaningful statements or concepts.

With these distinctions in mind, I argued in the third chapter that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God. This argument rested on two basic propositions. The first is that Muslims and Christians have been properly integrated into the same name-calling practice that originates with the Abrahamic tradition. Though I neither proposed nor formally demonstrated this proposition, the scholarly support backing this claim is nearly univocal. The second proposition is that Muslims and Christians share a set of generic predicates that are *dominant* in the cluster of information associated with God. I demonstrated this with two forms of argumentation. On the one front, I argued that proper names in their everyday uses refer because they are connected to descriptive content that is neither detailed nor exhaustive. Proper names refer because they elucidate a sufficient and yet unspecific set of predicates held true about entities. On the other front, I claimed that systematic theology reveals that Muslims and Christians share an extensive list of generic predicates. When systematic accounts of Islamic and Christian theology are compared and contrasted, they reveal that Muslims and Christians conceive of God in a similar way in terms of generic predication. It follows from these arguments that Muslims and Christians refer to the same God since the two conditions of HTR are adequate for establishing reference.

Finally, though Muslims and Christians refer to the same God, I concluded that this does not equate to worship of the same God. Because worship entails particular and concrete predicates held true about God, it is theoretically impossible for Muslims and Christians to worship the same God. This is true in liturgical rites where specific predicates are thickly woven into ceremonial rites. Thus if reference does not equate to

worship and my points leading up this conclusion have been adequately argued, then Muslims and Christians refer to but do not worship the same God.

Intolerance and Violence

In light of my line of argumentation, I want to take up a prominent assumption made in several circles concerning the question at hand. It has been argued that focused attention on the philosophical and theological difference between Muslims and Christians provokes intolerance and violence. The assumption here is that if Muslims and Christians fail to admit that they worship the same God, then tension and hostility between them is an inevitable consequence. Volf, for example, promotes this line of argumentation. He says, "I . . . elevate pervasive similarities, because my primary concern is the ability of Muslims and Christians to live a peaceful, well-ordered life in this world."¹ In this sense, the only way for Muslims and Christians to live in peaceful harmony together is to maintain that they worship the same God. Otherwise, they are doomed for tension and hostility.

I anticipate that some variation of this argument will at one time or another be used against my thesis. Though I do not think the argument is persuasive, I want to draw attention to two flawed assumptions that undergird the argument. First, since the methodology that underpins this argument is largely a reaction to past junctures of intolerance and violence between Muslims and Christians, it does not make an adequate distinction between truth claims and appropriating beliefs for different ends.² Though contextual circumstances are important for indicating socio-political issues, they do not

1. Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 183.

2. The Crusades (1096-1271), War in Abkhazia (1992-93) Yugoslav War (1991-2001), etc.

maintain normative value when judging whether something is true. Simply said, truth does not depend upon the particulars of context. Second, this claim is theoretically problematic at best and false at worst because the conclusion does not follow from the premise. The fact is that one can claim that Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God and still remain peaceful (e.g., the current thesis). As a sort of two-part critique, people can make truth claims that divide individuals along political, social, and religious lines and still remain peaceful; peace does not depend upon the blurring of truth claims so that all people stand equally before truth.

Areas for Additional Research

In this thesis, I employed philosophy of language to clarify predication and with the intent to answer whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. However, there are still other avenues for developing a response to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Not only are there other subdisciplines of philosophy embedded in the question (e.g., philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, epistemology), there are also alternate areas of research that should be considered (e.g., theology, history). Though I have targeted the question from the perspective of philosophy of language with particular interest in reference and predication, this neither embodies an all-encompassing synthesis of the research nor a conclusive response on the question itself. It is impossible to develop a normative response to the question at hand as long as other disciplines have not been considered. My line of argumentation and others like it are not normative in and of themselves on the question and require other loci. Therefore, there is growing need for a multidisciplinary response on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

An additional line of investigation is to explore what is entailed in worship. Though I have offered judgments on this point, neither my project nor much of the research on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God outline the philosophical or theological elements embedded in worship. The only guiding assumption offered here and elsewhere is that reference necessarily precedes worship. However, this neither clarifies what is entailed in worship nor how that should influence one's decision on the question. Because so little emphasis has been placed on worship as it relates to the current question, my assumption is that further analysis of worship would enhance this area of research.

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