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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERSON OF GOD IN THE BIBLE AND ALLAH IN THE QURAN

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ABSTRACT

The paper: "A Comparative Study of the Person of God in the Bible and Allah in the Quran argues that the Supreme God of the universe is very well known to African Traditional religions through the gods who are considered as intermediaries working for Him to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and humans through the lesser gods. However, with the coming of Abrahamic faith in Africa, the interpretation of God has become a bone of contention between Christians and Moslems in Nigeria to the effect that several lives and properties have been destroyed on religious riots. Against this backdrop, this writer embarks on a comparative study of God in the Bible and Allah in the Quran, as understood and viewed by adherents, with a mindset to explore the similarities and disparity, or points of departure, between the two concepts as basis for functional dialogue between adherents of Islam and Christianity.

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INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of Abrahamic faith into Yoruba land in the southern part of Nigeria, people have been conscious of the Supreme God of the universe known and addressed as *Olodumare* in the various religious expressions of the people. Such religious expressions are known as: *Sango, Oya, Obatala, Orunmila, Ogun, Ayelala* etc. These are regarded as small gods, who serve as intermediary between people and the Supreme God, *Olodumare*. It is believed in Nigerian religious expressions that *Olodumare* is so transcendent that he cannot be assessed except through his intermediaries like *Ogun* and others. Then, there was never controversy about God till the coming of Abrahamic faith into Nigerian society. Now religion has become so volatile that the interpretation of who God is has torn homes and states in Nigeria into pieces; while thousands have lost their lives. As far as religion is concerned, Christianity and Islam are asterisked in their monotheistic claim of the supremacy of God in all matters of faith and practice, yet their interpretation of this one God by each of the adherents has fundamentally polarized them around the world! This interpretation of the supremacy of God have given birth to differences of opinion and belief in matters of doctrines and practice, yet the claim of the supremacy of God by both religions is an authentication of the unity of God (Jala 2014).

Against this background, this writer embarks on a comparative study of God in the Bible and Allah in the Quran, as understood and viewed by adherents, with a mindset to explore the similarities and disparity, or points of departure, between the two concepts as basis for functional dialogue between adherents of Islam and Christianity. Nobody has seen this God, yet by faith, adherents of Abrahamic faith hold on to the fact and reality of God. Most claims that can be made to God are all deduced from the Holy Books: the Bible and the Quran. The Bible for example is the word of God. It is a self revelation of Him to human race. Nobody has seen God yet; he has revealed himself as Father. We never see God, but we know He exists in our consciousness, and His activities we can see around us for those who care to know Him. For some, "there is no God," but to such the Bible has come out very clear that:

even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (NKV Romans 1:28-32).

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From the above Bible passage, it is clear that God remains in a class of his own, yet He did not leave Himself without a witness. He bombarded our consciousness with the reality of his existence. The vegetation, the weather, and the complicated human body, even “*the heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utter speech...*” (Ps. 19:1-2). When we are in doubt, there is a witness in our heart, but when we want to prove difficult, the Bible is there as a gift to our generation to learn about the creator of the entire universe. Some people deny the Bible, because, they think it is the work of men. Yes, the Bible is the work of men who have walked very closely with God in their life’s pilgrimage, yet when they write, they did not just write what they think they want to write. They did on instruction of what to write as led by the spirit of the Lord. Even then none of them were told that they were writing the Bible. No. But God, out of His own magnanimity has deemed it fit to organize the writing into a book called the Bible over a long period of time. When God was writing the Bible, he involved men, because the book is actually meant for men and not for the angels. Perhaps His book will not meet our need, or may not be acceptable to us if it were to be written all alone by Him. However, out of His generosity of spirit, the Bible is the work of men who fear God and allow Him to work through them. The above criteria are a proof that the Bible is the word of God, and that is briefly summarized as: personal experience, scientific claims (Isa. 55:10; Job 36:27, Psalm 135:7; Isa. 40:12), archaeology, and fulfilled prophecy. In his own testimony, B.B. McKinney, 1886-1952 penned down the poem:

*I know the Bible was sent from God
The Old, as well as the New;
Inspired and holy, the living Word,
I know the Bible is true¹*

Also, the Quran is the Miracle of Allah and Final Testament to Humankind. “The Quran: literally, ‘that which is often recited.’ A web of rhythm and meaning, the words of which throb through Muslim worship and which, at every point in the believer’s life-, break surface, sanctifying existence with the scent of eternity.” (Abdul Wadod Shalabi in “Islam – Religion of Life”). The Quran represents the fountainhead of Divine guidance for every Muslim. Its revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his practical execution of the revelation, completed God’s blessing for humankind, in providing us with a belief and value system that is applicable for all times (Shalabi). The Quran authenticates the revelations given to earlier Prophets, though these might not be available to us, in the form they were originally revealed. The most inspiring language and a rational message that directly appeals to the human heart have caused this Divine book to move nations and civilizations. It will persist to guide those who turn to God with a genuine heart, for all era (Bahaa Elaidi). According to Elaidi, Muslims often claim that they have the original Qur’an, but it was in the head of Muhammad and he is dead so there is no original. The first edition of the Qur’an was written by the then Abu Bakr who also made a copy to be available to Hefsa, Muhammad’s widow, for safe keeping. About 20 years later Uthman did a revision, and burnt all the other Qur’ans including the unaltered Qur’an that Hefsa possessed, because it was deemed, there was no possibility of it being contaminated! Two copies of the Uthman third revision exists in the Topkapi Museum in Turkey and the other in the Al-Majid Al-Kaberrd in Yemen under lock and key.

Through this Holy Book, it is understood that Allah created the Quran, He is the only one that is to be worshiped.

The Person of God in the Bible

God is eternal and self existence (Berkhof, 1988). He was not created, but He created all things named or unnamed (Clark 1987). He has life, and He shares that life with all His creation. He is independent, while His creation depends on Him. He is infinite Spirit. That is to say He is not both spiritual and physical like a man. Expression of God as one having eyes, hand, and place of sit etc are simply anthropomorphic expressions to suggest in human term “the senses that these physical parts conveyed,” without which, we have no basis to talk about God. He is unlimited in power, knowledge and nature; as to time he is eternal. He is beyond time and space. Of course he created time. As for space, He is omnipresent, omniscient in knowledge, and omnipotent in power (Clark 427). He is personally rational, self-conscious, self-determining, intelligent moral agent, and supremely coherent in character. He is sovereign, so much that none of His plan can be disannulled by any human manipulation. He is highly organized in His relationship with His creatures (Anderson 1989). As a Father, He is known and addressed commonly by Christ as Father who is relational. Four aspect of this relationship is revealed in the scripture namely: His creational Fatherhood, theocratic Fatherhood, generative Fatherhood, and adoptive Fatherhood. Fundamental truth about His creational Fatherhood is that He created all and gives life having created them in His own image.

The prophet Malachi graphically expressed this in chapter 2:10 in the question: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? In his own appeal, the prophet Isaiah cried: “Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8), (Filayson 1988). His theocratic Fatherhood reveals His relationship with the covenant people, Israel. It is a collective relationship showing Israel as a child of God. This filial relationship became obligatory for Israel to be faithful to the divine gesture. This is clearly seen in the Yahweh’s question via Malachi in 1:6 that “If then I am a Father, where is my honour.” This becomes so significant that it foreshadowed the New Testament revelation of His divine Fatherhood (Filayson). In the New Testament era, Christ spoke of His Father, so much that the reference to God as Father is overwhelming. In the resurrection appearances, when Mary saw Him. He referred to God as “My Father, and your Father, and my God and your God” (John 20:17 ASV) indicating that the ground upon which He is her Father is on the premise of the unique Sonship and Fatherism that licensed disciples as sons of God. That has been referred as generative Fatherhood. On the other hand, the adoptive Fatherhood indicate the redeeming relationship which belongs to believers generally in the context of redemption since they are standing in Christ, and the Holy Spirit reenactment of divine life in them. Against this backdrop, believers in the Lord Jesus attain to special son-Father relationship with God on the basis of the cross (Filayson). Paul says to the Galatians 3:26 “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. In other word, they are adopted into the family of God, and they have become subjects of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is the standing which qualifies the individual to be partakers of divine nature and a member of the family of God. This is underscored by the Jesus teaching the disciples on prayer

addresses God not only as "our Father," but as "our Father in heaven." Against this background, we shall examine the teachings of Jesus, which reflect the essential unity of God as the Father of the entire universe and that of man (Filayson).

The person of Allah in the Quran

Allah, *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* (Praise to Him in His Highness), as He has described Himself in the Holy Quran starts with some of the verses which deal with the topic directly, then a list of God's Names called the Attributes of Allah, follows with interpretation of their meanings from some of the renowned Islamic scholars (Hassan Ali El-Najjar). The word 'Allah' in Arabic calligraphy is the Arabic word referring to God in Abrahamic religions. The word is thought to be derived by contraction from *al il h*, which means "the God", and has cognates in other Semitic languages, including *Elah* in Aramaic, *l* in Canaanite and *Elohim* in Hebrew. The word *Allah* has been used by Arabs of diverse religions since pre-Islamic times (Kabir 2007: 98). More specifically, it has been used as a term to refer to God by Arab-Muslims, Arab-Christians and non-Arab Muslims over time. It is now mainly used by Muslims and Arab Christians to refer to God (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah>). Moreover it is also used in this way by Bábists, Bahá'ís, Indonesian and Maltese Christians, and Mizrahi Jews (Gardet 2007). Similar usage by Christians and Sikhs in West Malaysia has recently led to political and legal controversies (Malaysia Islamic Authority 2013). The etymology of the word *All h* has been discussed extensively by classical Arab philologists (Gardet 2007). Grammarians of the Basra school regarded it as either formed "spontaneously" (*murtajal*) or as the definite form of *l h* (from the verbal root *lyh* with the meaning of "lofty" or "hidden").

Others held that it was borrowed from Syriac or Hebrew, but most considered it to be derived from a contraction of the Arabic definite article *al-* "the" and *il h* "deity, god" to *al-l h* meaning "the deity", or "the God" (Brown, and Driver). The majority of modern scholars subscribes to the latter theory, and view the loan word hypothesis with skepticism. Regional variants of the word *Allah* occur in both pagan and Christian pre-Islamic inscriptions. Different theories have been proposed regarding the role of Allah in pre-Islamic polytheistic cults. Some authors have suggested that polytheistic Arabs used the name as a reference to a creator god or a supreme deity of their pantheon. The term may have been vague in the Meccan religion (Peters 1994). According to Julius Wellhausen, Allah (the supreme deity of the tribal federation around Quraysh) was a designation that consecrated the superiority of Hubal (the supreme deity of Quraysh) over the other gods. However, there is also evidence that Allah and Hubal were two distinct deities. According to that hypothesis, the Kaaba was first consecrated to a supreme deity named Allah and then hosted the pantheon of Quraysh after their conquest of Mecca, about a century before the time of Muhammad. Some scholars have suggested that Allah may have represented a remote creator god who was gradually eclipsed by more particularized local deities. There is disagreement on whether Allah played a major role in the Meccan religious cult. No iconic representation of Allah is known to have existed. Muhammad's father's name was Abd-All h meaning "the slave of All h". The name Allah can be found countless times in the reports and the lists of names of Christian martyrs in South Arabia, as reported by antique Syriac documents of the names of those martyrs from the era of the Himyarite and

Aksumite kingdoms (Macdonald). A Christian leader named Abd Allah ibn Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad was martyred in Najran in 523, as he had worn a ring that said "Allah is my lord". In an inscription of Christian martyr dated back to 512, references to Allah can be found in both Arabic and Aramaic, which called him "Allah" and "Alaha", and the inscription starts with the statement "By the Help of Allah". In pre-Islamic Gospels, the name used for God was "Allah", as evidenced by some discovered Arabic versions of the New Testament written by Arab Christians during the pre-Islamic era in Northern and Southern Arabia. Pre-Islamic Arab Christians have been reported to have raised the battle cry "*Ya La Ibad Allah*" (O slaves of Allah) to invoke each other into battle. "Allah" was also mentioned in pre-Islamic Christian poems by some Ghassanid and Tanukhid poets in Syria and Northern Arabia.

According to Islamic belief, Allah is the most common word to represent God, and humble submission to his will, divine ordinances and commandments is the pivot of the Muslim faith. "He is the only God, creator of the universe, and the judge of humankind." "He is unique (*w id*) and inherently one (*a ad*), all-merciful and omnipotent." The Qur'an declares "the reality of Allah, His inaccessible mystery, His various names, and His actions on behalf of His creatures." The history of the name *All h* in English was probably influenced by the study of comparative religion in the 19th century; for example, Thomas Carlyle (1840) sometimes used the term Allah, but without an implication that Allah was anything different from God. However, in his biography of Muhammad (1934), Tor Andræ always used the term *Allah*, though he allows that this "conception of God" seems to imply that it is different from that of the Jewish and Christian theologies. Languages which may not commonly use the term *Allah* to denote God may still contain popular expressions which use the word. For example, because of the centuries long Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, the word *ojalá* in the Spanish language and *oxalá* in the Portuguese language exist today, borrowed from Arabic. This phrase literally means 'if God wills' (in the sense of "I hope so"). It was said that the German poet Mahlmann used the form "Allah" as the title of a poem about the ultimate deity, though it is unclear how much Islamic thought he intended to convey. Some Muslims leave the name "All h" untranslated in English. The word has also been applied to certain living human beings as personifications of the term and concept (Berkey 2003).

Comparative Analysis of God and Allah

As earlier stated, God is supremely indivisible One. There is no controversy about this assertion by any of the Abrahamic faith, yet each of them interprets this God differently in ways that created discrepancies. However, God is one! This study therefore attempts a comparative study of the person of God in the Bible as understood by Christians and Allah in the Quran as understood by Muslims. The Quran alleges that the God of Islam, Allah, is indeed the God of Abraham and hence the God of Scripture, Yahweh Elohim. This submission may lead to issues that will need to examine what the Bible also say about Allah in the Quran so as to draw a line of agreement between the Holy Books, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the Bible is silent about the personality of Allah in the Quran. Another issue is to be sure, if it is tenable to examine the nature and attributes of Allah in order to compare them with the biblical portrait of Yahweh to do comparative

analysis. This process of examination is essential since our objective is to discover the true nature of God, a process whose outcome entails eternal consequences in regard to man's future destiny in the afterlife. After all, if Allah is the God of Abraham then Jews and Christians are wrong for not embracing Islam (Bowring). Furthermore, the Holy Bible teaches that God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself tempts no one with evil; evil being understood as referring to immorality and sin. (James 1:13 c.f. Psalm 5:4-5; Habakkuk 1:13). However, the Quran teaches that Allah is the author of evil: Verily, the hypocrites *seek to deceive Allah, but it is He Who deceives them*. And when they stand up for As-Salat (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little. Surah 4:142 (Hilali-Khan). Also (the unbelievers) *schemed* and planned, and Allah *schemed also, and the best of schemers is Allah*. Surah 3:54 Are they then secure from *Allah's scheme (makra Allahi)*? No one considers himself secure from *Allah's scheme (makra Allahi)* except those that perish. Surah 7:99. "Pickthall Remember how the unbelievers *schemed* against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or to slay thee, or get thee out of the home. They *scheme* and plot, *but the best of schemers is Allah*." (Surah 8:30).

When people taste mercy after an affliction touch them, lo! they *devise schemes (makrun)* against the will of Allah. Say: *Allah is quicker to scheme (makran)*; surely the apostles write down what He plans (Surah 10:21). And those before them did indeed *scheme (makara)*, *but all scheming (al-makru)* is Allah's; He knows what every soul earns, and the unbelievers shall come to know for whom is the (better) issue of the abode (Surah 13:42). So they *schemed a scheme*: and we *schemed a scheme*, while they perceived not (Surah 27:50). The term for scheme in Arabic is *makara* which denotes one who is a deceiver, one who is conniving, a schemer. It is always used in a negative sense. (Ayoub 1992). Moreover, there are several issues about the portrait of God and Allah in the Bible and the Quran respectively, but these are beyond the scope of this paper as earlier noted. Hence this writer simply comments briefly about some facts about the two. According to the Muslim house communication summit, Allah (God) is the one God, Who has no partner, whereas, Christians believe in God, who manifested Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The plural of Majesty in Genesis 1:26 begin the issue and it runs throughout the Old and the New Testament. This point often leads to face-off among the two, because Allah is not Triune (Emara 2014). Muslims repudiates the concept of Trinity, and Son-ship which are treasured by Christian interpretation of God. Nothing is like Him, He is the Creator, not created, nor a part of His creation. Christians believe in God-man who came for man's final redemption as a fulfillment of the law of redemption. For Muslims, God is All-Powerful, absolutely just etc. There is no controversy on this point, but Christians believe in the absolute justice of God that He will not forgive sin arbitrarily, without paying the penalty. That is the rationale for the cross, which is also a face – off between the two. The cross provides final sacrifice that a Christian has to make to obtain God's mercy, but that is not acceptable to Muslims.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we are well aware that the name Allah is used by Arab speaking Christians for the God of the Bible. In fact, the root from which the name is derived, *ilah*, stems from the ancient Semitic languages, corresponding to the

Mesopotamian IL, as well as the Hebrew-Aramaic EL, as in *Ishma-el*, *Immanu-el*, and *Isra-el*. These terms were often used to refer to any deity worshiped as a high god, especially the chief deity among a pantheon of lesser gods. Therefore, the Holy Bible uses the term as just one of the many titles for Yahweh, the only true God. Allah is the personal name of the God of Islam. This becomes problematic since according to the Holy Bible the name of the God of Abraham is Yahweh/Jehovah, not Allah. When God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am Yahweh (YHVH), and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty; "BUT BY MY NAME, YAHWEH," I did not make myself known to them." Exodus 6:2-3. Therefore, Christians can use Allah as a title or a generic noun for the true God, but not as the personal name for the God of the Bible, except there is another revelation to confirm that Allah is one of the names, which Yahweh Elohim said he did not declare to Abraham (Watt 1983). However, the fact that there is a common denominator for the Muslims and Christians is enough ground for a robust dialogue (Watt). Therefore this writer advocates that sentiments should not be allowed to take upper hand in our discussion, neither should any discussant raise issue to annoy the other on the basis of believe. Faith, and practice should be made so free that an individual is entitled, no matter how repulsive it is to the other. This is against the backdrop that all men are under test by his creator, who keeps watching daily to see how intelligent an individual is in the sense of making judgment, and decision that inform what he/she believes and why?

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