

# THEISM IN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM AND SIKHISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

God is usually taken to be a necessarily existing being who is unsurpassably powerful, knowledgeable and good. Theism is conceptualized in a single being that is monotheism in some religions and polytheism that is more than one being in some others. Yet some others see theism in everything of human concern that is pantheism. The doctrine of God is strong-minded by means of the religious experiences of men and evident in the conduct of such religious persons. This work intends to show here, the points of similarities and dissimilarities between the concept of theism in Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. This work exposed among others that their major point of way out is that in Christianity, there is a distinctive and central teaching concerning Jesus Christ as unique incarnations, the word of God, pre-eminently manifested in a historic person, on the ground that his moral character perfectly represents the character and purpose of the invisible holy God. While Islam, and Sikhism, have no such doctrine, or theory of incarnation.

## INTRODUCTION

Theism stems from the Greek word *Theos* meaning God or from the Latin word *dues* meaning Deity or God. But we are concerned here with the idea of God that is sacred power or different conceptions of God or deity in different world religions.

Theism in some religions is conceptualized in a single being that is monotheism. While some others conceptualized theism in more than one being that is polytheism, and yet some others perceive theism in everything of human concern that is pantheism. Still, there are others whose understanding of their world theism hinges on those who perceive the world as

constituted by the ordering of two co-equal and often co-eternal sacred powers (Dualism), who are locked in perpetual conflict of supremacy (good God/gods and Evil God/gods).

This paper shall therefore examine theism in three world religions via Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. We shall also x-ray their similarities and dissimilarities.

## **DEFINITION AND MEANING OF THEISM**

Uduigwomen has defined theism as the view that there is a God who is both transcendent (beyond) and immanent (present) in the world (56). This perception is common to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Some of the basic elements of the theistic concept of God are as follows:

The first is that God is transcendent and immanent. God is beyond, present and active in creation.

The second is that God is the creator of the universe. In other word the universe was created by God out of nothing – Creatio-ex nihilo.

Supporting the above assertion, Belford writes that theism is generally equated with monotheism as the belief in one God who is personal and moral and has created and sustains the universe. God transcend the creation and is not dependent on it, yet is immanent, acting within and on it” (625). We can also define theism as belief in a personal God who transcends and preserver of the universe.

The doctrine of God is determined by the religious experience of men and evident in the conduct of such religious persons. In other words, the perception of deity deeply affects a society’s understanding of nature, of the human condition, and of what constitutes human salvation or liberation (Livingston 165).

## **SOME SCHOLARS’ VIEW OF THEISM**

Andrew Lang, a Scottish Litterateur drew our attention to the High God, a Supreme Being who created himself and the earth and dwell at one time on earth. Great thinkers like British theist, James Ward, a psychologist and F. R. Tennant, a philosophical theologian of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries sought to establish man’s knowledge of God as suggested through his understanding of himself and the world (Wotogbe-Weneka 86-87).

Rene Descartes, a major philosopher of the seventeenth century and Vance that the ideas of God imply his existence. Also St. Anselm, the first of the scholastic philosopher, has opined through his Ontological proof for the existence of God that using God's Essence, if we have idea of a perfect Being then we immediately recognize that the idea of a perfect being entails the idea of the existence of that Being (Wotogbe-Weneka 85).

## **THEISM IN WORLD RELIGIONS**

### **THEISM IN CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity is a monotheistic religion. But its Monotheism according to Omoregbe can be described as a liberal monotheism, against those of Islam and Judaism each of which is a rigid monotheism. The monotheism of Christianity is called a liberal one because it accommodates the idea of three persons being in one God, and the idea of God having a divine son which the rigid monotheism of Islam or Judaism would not accommodate (23). This means that Christian God is a triune God which consists of three personalities via the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Christian scripture (Bible) reaches that these three persons are separate, equal, and distinct, yet one God. For instance the father is called God (1 Cor. 8:6, Matt. 6:9), the Son, Jesus is called God (Isaiah 9:7, John 20:28), and the Holy Spirit is called God (Heb.3:7-9; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

Uduigwomen writes that the unity of the Godhead is biblically evidenced in the execution of all divine plans and purposes. At creation, a significant fact about the Godhead emerged with the use of the plural noun – “us” by God Himself (Gen.1:26) (63). It is in this vein that McNeillk writes cradled as it was in Judaism, Christianity from the first showed a deep consciousness of the reality of God. Christian teaching about God took from Judaism its motions of divine creation and providence, but it was also marked by increased emphasis on the fatherhood of God, a theme vividly presented in the recorded teaching and prayers of Jesus (648).

John 1:14 states that, God came to the world in flesh and blood in the person of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This means that Christ, the eternal God, became a human being

(incarnation Phil.2:5-9). The Holy Trinity is one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity which teaches emphatically that there is only one God.

### **THEISM IN ISLAM**

The Muslim word for God is “Allah” which is an abbreviation of the Arabic words “Al-ilah” that means “the God” that is, the real God distinct from the polytheistic gods. Wotogbe-Weneka writes being influenced by the Jewish and Christian concepts, Islam centres its teaching on transcendent personal deity (God) but as pertaining to holiness, oneness, and majesty of God, rejects the theory of incarnation, trinity but asserts that God is all in all (88). Islam teaches emphatically that there is only one God (Allah). The monotheism of Islam like that of Judaism is a rigid one.

It makes no room for the doctrine of the “divine Sonship.” God is absolutely unique and transcendent. He has no equal and no companion, no son. He is the omnipotent creator of all things and the absolute controller of all things. The whole universe is under God absolute sovereignty and control (Omogegbe 55).

Islam recognizes the attributes of God and it often addresses God as All-seeing, All-hearing, All-wise, Omnipotent, Omniscient, the merciful and compassionate. Islam submits to God as all in all.

### **THEISM IN SIKHISM**

Mystic monotheism was the chief theoretical teaching of the founder, and has been of his followers ever since. Guru Nanak of Sikh in his mission says “As there is only one God, He is our father, therefore, we must all be brothers” (Wotogbe-Weneka 88) like the Muslims, the Sikhs, believes in one God and forbid the use of idols.

There is but one God, whose name is True, creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existence, great and bountiful. The True one was in the beginning the True one is, was, and also shall be. The Lord is one. There is none other, my brethren! Thou hast no partner who is brought near. Whom shall I call the second? There is none! In all is that one

spotless supreme. Like thee there is no other. Thou art in all ages the only one. Without thee there is no other (Hume 100).

In Sikh, the sovereignty of God is absolute and inscrutable. He doeth what pleaseth Himself. No order may be issued to Him. He is King of kings. All remain subject to His will. As it pleaseth God, He directeth them by His order. He beholdeth, but is not seen by them (Hume 100). Thus Sikhism is unique among the religions of the world in the fact that its sacred scriptures refers to the Supreme Being as “Teacher.”

## **SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES**

### **POINT OF SIMILARITIES**

Christianity, Islam and Sikhism are all monotheistic religion. They all teach that there is only one God and that he alone should be worshipped. This one God according to the three religions, is the creator and ruler of the universe.

These three religions emphasize the compassion, mercy and forgiveness of God, whom the Qur’an calls on men to rely on the “grace and mercy” of God (Suna 10:53). God’s infinite mercy and readiness to forgive sinners who repented also occupy a central place in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In the same vein the sacred scripture of Sikhism also says... The kind one saveth those on whom He looketh with favour.

The three religions teach that God is absolutely transcendent, but that He is at the same time immanent and controls the universe. They also agree that He is Almighty, omnipotent, omniscient all just. They also teach that God is unique, supreme and has no equal. Finally, these three religions teach that God’s will is supreme and men must submit to it.

### **POINT OF DISSIMILARITIES**

Christianity and Sikhism founders are not so ruthless or violent as Islam’s founder. Neither Islam nor Sikhism present a deity who in his own character is self-sacrificingly seeking the redemption of the world, and who in human history has been represented by a person of that same moral character.

In Christianity, there is a distinctive and central teaching concerning Jesus Christ as, unique incarnations, the word of God, pre-eminently manifested in a historic person, on the ground that his moral character perfectly represents the character and purpose of the invisible holy God. While Islam and Sikhism have no such doctrine or theory of incarnation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Genuine monotheism, that is, a definite belief in and as worship of one supreme cosmic power by all people, can be found in only four religions which are Christianity, Islam and Sikhism and Judaism. These three religions namely Christianity, Islam and Sikhism in specific sense, conceive of God as personal and active in the governance and organization of the world and universe.

We will finally conclude that the use of the word theism as indicating a particular doctrine of monotheism arose in the wake of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century to contrast with the then emerging deism which contend that God-though transcendent and supreme-did not intervene in the natural world and could be known rationally but not via revelation.

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