



## Faith In God and Implications for Believers: A Comparative Survey of Islam and African Indigenous Religions

Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan dan Implikasinya Bagi Para Pemeluk: Survei Perbandingan Antara Islam dan Agama-Adat Afrika

*Hussein I.I. Ibrahim & Mustapha Abdullah Kuyateh*

**Abstract:** *Most Muslims, including even Africans who accepted the faith, seem to have cultivated the same attitude of mind that African Indigenous Religions are not monotheistic in any form. Non-Muslim Africans, who have kept to their indigenous heritage, are seen as bereft of any abiding values; they have no culture because any culture other than Islam is no culture. Therefore, all Africans who wanted to become Muslims were often prevailed upon to shed their traditional culture and take on the Islamic culture. In some communities in Northern Ghana, Muslims are looked upon and described as “white” contrasted with non-Muslim indigenes who are labeled “black”. The colours here refer to knowledge and lack of knowledge. It is for this reason that this paper takes up the issue to see whether the indigenous religions of Africa, like Islam, are not God friendly and whether, like Muslims also, the knowledge of God, as held by Africans, do have implications for believers. The essay intends to look at the concept of God in both Islam and African Traditional Religions and go on to examine some implications of this belief on individual believers of these two faiths.*

**Keywords:** Faith; God; Islam; African Indigenous Religions; Comparative.

**Abstrak:** *Sebagian besar umat Muslim, termasuk bahkan orang-orang Afrika yang menerima agama tersebut, tampaknya telah mengembangkan sikap bahwa Agama Tradisional Afrika tidak monoteistik dalam bentuk apa pun. Orang Afrika non-Muslim, yang mempertahankan warisan tradisional mereka, dianggap tidak memiliki nilai-nilai yang berkelanjutan; mereka tidak memiliki budaya karena budaya apa pun selain Islam dianggap bukan budaya. Oleh karena itu, semua orang Afrika yang ingin menjadi Muslim sering kali didesak untuk meninggalkan budaya tradisional mereka dan mengambil budaya Islam. Di beberapa komunitas di Afrika Utara, Muslim dipandang dan digambarkan sebagai “putih” dibandingkan dengan penduduk asli non-Muslim yang diberi label “hitam”. Warna di sini merujuk pada pengetahuan dan kurangnya pengetahuan. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini membahas masalah ini untuk melihat apakah agama tradisional Afrika, seperti Islam, tidak bersahabat dengan Tuhan dan apakah, seperti halnya Muslim, pengetahuan tentang Tuhan yang dimiliki oleh orang Afrika juga memiliki implikasi bagi para penganutnya. Tulisan ini bermaksud untuk melihat konsep Tuhan dalam Islam dan Agama Tradisional Afrika dan kemudian memeriksa beberapa implikasi dari kepercayaan ini bagi para penganut kedua agama tersebut.*

**Kata Kunci:** Iman; Tuhan; Islam; Agama Tradisional Afrika; Komparatif.

## Introduction

Belief in God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is a worldwide phenomenon and constitute a realistic part and parcel of the history of humanity on earth. From all indications, God has left knowledge of His being with every being and culture or community of the world. In other words, all human societies possess and exhibit symptoms of the knowledge of a Creator since they neither created themselves nor are they products of chance.

The belief that creation is the result of a single Deity is referred to as monotheism. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the three most classical monotheistic traditions known to man. Islam and Christianity as revealed religions exist globally today, including spots where this philosophy is said not to have existed before. In Africa, according to Kwame Gyekye<sup>1</sup> and others, some European writers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century generally thought that the idea of God which they encountered among Africans could not have been original to the people.

In other words, according to these writers, cultures in Africa that they encountered were too naïve to have known of a single Creator Deity. Where some of them encountered obvious facts to the contrary, they justified this by saying that these were borrowed. However, the fact of Africans not having knowledge of God by themselves has been controverted. As members of humanity, Africans have been aware of a Supreme Mind to which they owe their existence and life.

Islam and Christianity did teach that there is no salvation for man except through monotheism as espoused in their scriptures. These scriptures taught that

monotheism, as the highest form of spirituality, is the only religious philosophy that God has prescribed for mankind; that the beliefs and practices of monotheism are the best evolved for attaining salvation; that the best way of developing human character that is approved by God is through monotheism because it is home to ideal ethical standards necessary for the nurturing of the human soul. Islam, for instance, is considered by Muslims as the best spirituality ever evolved for mankind and Muslims are considered lights that illumine otherwise dark and ignorant communities and peoples. Local cultures and peoples, especially those in Africa, were and are still considered as the reverse of this.

### The concept of God in Islam

According to *The World Book Encyclopedia* (2001), “Religions that acknowledge only one true are monotheistic. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are examples of monotheistic religions”.<sup>2</sup>

Islam is monotheism of the highest order, said to be the most monotheistic of the monotheistic traditions known to man. Islam came as a culmination of monotheism represented in Judaism and Christianity, both of which are considered to portray some warped forms of monotheism. While Judaism presented nationalistic inclinations and tended to recognize God as the exclusive Deity of the Israeli nation and people, post-Christ Christianity introduced certain beliefs about God that Muslims generally consider anathema to the true concept of a monotheistic God. As the last of the monotheistic religions, Islam had to set the requisite standards around the real nature of God. Muslims therefore believe that it is Allah Himself, who through Prophet Muhammad (SAW) describes His own true nature in the Qur’an. Therefore, He states categorically in the Qur’an chapter 112, Verses 1-4 thus:

*“Say, He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the eternally besought of all; He begets not nor is He begotten and there is none like unto Him.*

This chapter, known as the purity of faith, succinctly presents an absolute rendition of monotheism in Islam. It completely divests the Divine Essence of all biological considerations and physical similitude, both of which, in the view of Muslims, compromise the very monotheistic nature of Allah.

In Islamic understanding, Allah is an absolute Unity. This Unity, according to Mirza Mehdi Pooya (2000) means,

*“Belief in absolute Oneness of God, in the sense that He is not composite and divisible in any sense of composition and divisibility. It implies negation of all limitations because limitation in any sense implies composition, and a composite being is not self-existent. A self-existent unlimited being is not definable, so any attempt to conceive by any external or internal means of our limited power of understanding is fu-*

*tile. But He is realizable by every being, in the sense, that every limited being can realize His Existence and Essence as manifested in His Attributes. His Attributes can be presented in two ways-Affirmative and Negative. All His Affirmative Attributes refer to assertion of Absolute Unity. All His Negative Attributes refer to negation of limitation and composition. Thus, they are reducible to negation of limitation and composition.*"<sup>3</sup>

Another Muslim scholar, Sayyid Hassan Ali Nadwi (2006) writes on the same subject as follows:

*"In Islam a believer clearly confesses that there is no god but Allah, the Almighty, the Independent. He alone is the Creator of the universe, exercises complete administration of the world, and holds full control of the land and the sky. He does not need help from anybody."*<sup>4</sup>

These attestations on Islamic monotheism are not misplaced nor do they constitute personal scholarly viewpoints on subject. They are based on Allah's presentation of Himself in the Qur'an. In several verses of the Qur'an, including the famous 'Verse of the Throne of Allah', the Divine Essence in Islam is presented as follows:

*"Allah-there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of (all) existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Who is it that intercedes with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what will be after them and they encompass not a thing for what He wills. His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires him not. And He is the Highest, the Greatest"* (Qur'an Chapter 2, Verse 255).

## **The concept of God in African Traditional Religions**

As stated already, belief in God as the Creator and the final authority in all matters is original to all peoples of the world, including Africans. The concept was not imported or brought here by the monotheistic traditions. Landmarks in the cultures of Africa indicate that long before the advent of Islam and Christianity in African communities the indigenes had perfect, unambiguous conception of a Supreme Deity to whom they trace their being and sustenance and to whom they hinge all their expectations here and the hereafter. Proofs of their belief in God include the following:

### **1. Names of God**

Africans have special names for Him which are unique predications only of this Deity. In other words, the name of God in any African language is not applicable to any other deity in the pantheon of deities in any area. *"He is the creator and con-*

troller of the universe. The Akan, Yoruba and Ibo respectively call him Onyame, Eleda and Chineke, all meaning creator, the supernatural ultimate and the final arbiter and point of appeal".<sup>5</sup> Onyame, Eleda and Chineke etc. are original and can, in no way, be used for other deities of the respective peoples. These names were in vogue long before Islam and Christianity.

## 2. *Stories of creation*

Peoples of Africa also possess some important stories to tell about the beginning of creation and how God put in everything to ensure the order and purpose we observe today. These are referred to as Myths of creation and separation by God and humanity. Creation Myths are classified into two, i.e. the one that has to do with the creation of the universe by the God and the other which has to do with the withdrawal of God from the realm of human beings as a result of some apparent failings and inadequacies of man who was created by God.

The Akan of Ghana has a Myth which reveals that in the beginning there was complete rapport between the spiritual world (the domain of God) and the physical world (the domain of humans). Indeed, God was so closed to the domain of mankind that those who needed did Him to intervene in their affairs did not have to labour to get Him. His proximity to the world of humans made Him see at first hand all those who were victims of the evil machinations of others, which enabled Him to defend the defenseless. Unfortunately, there was a particular notorious old lady who destroyed the rapport between heaven and earth. Anytime she pounded fufu (pounded yam), she hit God with her pestle. The numerous complaints of God fell on death ears as she continually carried out this provocative behavior. Finally, God became fed up and decided to withdraw higher up. The old lady was saddened by this development as the withdrawal deprived her and her people of the indispensable services of God. She resolved to reach God and possibly prevail on Him to return. She began by gathering all the mortars in the village and placing one on top of another. She nearly accomplishes the task but for the fact that she was short of just one mortar and none could be found in the village. She therefore instructed that the mortar at the bottom of the pile be removed and placed on top so that she could achieve her aim. The action led to a collapse of the entire bridge structure, making her efforts fruitless. However, the urge to reach God persisted and so the old lady continues to build the bridge of mortars everyday of her life up to this day with the same result.

The Mende of Sierra Leone have a variant of the Akan Myth. Here, God lived with all creatures, including man, happily in a Great Cave. Anytime the cave became crowded the Great Spirit turned Himself round for more space to be created. For happiness in the Cave God made laws and guidelines. He also created food for

the inmates of the Cave and His own food and made a law that under no circumstance must other creatures taste His food. Anyone who violated the order and tasted God's food immediately appeared before the Spirit who sacked the offender from the serenity of the Cave. The problem was that the food of the Spirit was tastier than the food of the creatures. Therefore, one by one the inmates stole God's food thinking that they will not be caught. One by one all the animals were removed from the cave including man who was the last to be evicted.

### Proverbs

Every African community has proverbs which are condensed wise sayings of individual cultures whose origin dates back to remotes periods of the community's history. Proverbs are said to be the embellishments of a culture and covers all aspects of the culture including religion. Therefore, proverbs dwell on God and His relationship with the created order. A few of them are as follows:

- a. *Because God hates immorality and dirt that is why He gives every human being a name*
- b. *Those we cannot catch or control we leave in the hands of God*
- c. *If you want to talk to God, tell it to the wind*
- d. *No one shows a child God*

### 3. Everyday saying, greetings, wishes, and pledges

An everyday saying, greetings, wishes, pledges etc. apart from proverbs all Africans also have everyday sayings, greetings, wishes and pledges in which the name of God features prominently. A few examples are:

- a. *I will come if God wills*
- b. *God will never permit it*
- c. *God will "ask" you i.e. ask you to render account. It is said by a victim of an aggression or injustice to perpetrator who is more powerful and cannot be handled by the victim alone.*
- d. *God has seen and heard (the same as above)*
- e. *Good will give us tomorrow. This is a parting wish for the night and those who say it are recognizing the fact that the destiny of people lies in the hands of God.*
- f. *God forbid is another way of saying that something can't happen when God, the ultimate director of human, is ever present.*

### How is God conceived among Africans

Africans therefore conceive of God as a non-physical entity, a Great Spirit, the Chief Deity, Father, Grandfather; the One who, when you have Him, you are sat-

isfied. He is the Lord of the universe and of the earth; Creator of the world and man, giver of life, light and sufficiency. God sees and hears all but is Himself not seen or heard by others except in forms different from the normal. He is timeless, eternal and everywhere. That explains why the Akan's of Ghana have a proverb that translates as anyone who wants to communicate with God should do so to the wind.

God is invisible and this invisibility is indicated by the fact that no visible images are made of Him unlike the smaller deities. The Yoruba of Nigeria assert that God is a pervasive force in the life of every man.<sup>6</sup> He is everywhere and therefore building shrines for Him amounts to trying to restrict Him to a particular place. Other deities do not only have images carved for them but they are also limited in their powers, functions and indeed created by the Supreme Being. He is never worshipped directly in most communities. Worship is reserved only for the smaller deities and ancestors, considered as the intermediaries between the Supreme Being and man. However, recourse is always made to Him directly during periods of crisis. He is the One to whom ultimate thanks for favours received by humans are made and lamentations for afflictions attributed.

Kofi Asare Opoku (1978) quotes Lucas as stating that Olorun is: *“a being of unique character, possessing attributes far too noble; far too abstract and refined to have originated from the thought of a primitive people. He is credited with Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence. He is the Just and impartial Judge, sometimes meting out judgment on the wicked in this world and certainly bringing all men to Judgment in the next world.”*

Another exponent of African Traditional Religion asserts: *“God is the giver of moral laws. He punishes offenders and rewards the good. He alone is the Supreme judge and the discernor or searcher of hearts. The soul of man returns to him for judgment after death. He is the only reliable helper when other spirits fail man”*.<sup>8</sup>

God has love, compassion and cares for His creatures and therefore provides for their needs and expectations even though this fact may not be so manifest to receivers. A Ghanaian maxim quoted by Prof. Kwame Gyekye (1996) has it that *“it is God who drives away the flies for the tailless animal”* or *“it is God who pounds fufu for the one-armed person”* or *“if God gives you sickness, He also gives you medicine (cure)”*

God is just and fair and His justice is pervasive, impartial and continual as the following proverbs from Ghana and Nigeria teach *“since God does not like wickedness, He gives every creature a name”* and *“those whom we cannot catch, we leave in the hands of God.”*<sup>10</sup>

God is merciful and kind and therefore called “the Lord of Pity”, “the merciful One” or “God of Mercy”. He is holy and pure, not associated with wrong or evil,

dirt, failure and fault. In some communities in Nigeria, according to John S. Mbiti (1975), God is referred to as *“the pure King”, “the king without blemish”, “the whiteness without patterns”*. In Kenya God is described as *“the Possessor of whiteness”* and usually associated with the snowy top of Mount Kenya.<sup>11</sup>

The conception of God as a spotlessly clean Entity means that people, in their dealings with Him, must do so in absolute reverence. They should act not only in reverence, but also with fear, respect and honour. The pure and unadulterated nature of God is shown in the colours of animals sacrificed to Him among some Africans. Such animals must be of only one colour and not multi. Officials who superintend over sacrifices to Him must be those with the requisite moral rectitude, those not guilty of crimes such as murder, theft, adultery etc.

According to Kwame Gyekye (1996), Africans everywhere look upon God as the Wise One, He who knows or sees all. The Yoruba, for instance, have a maxim that translates as *“only God is wise”* or God is the: *“Discerner of hearts”* or *“God sees both the inside and outside of man”*. In other communities *He is described as the Great Eye, the Watcher of everything, able to hear and see everything; the Sun that beams Its light everywhere; the Omniscient One from whom nothing is hidden because nothing can escape His vision, hearing or knowledge. Since He knows and observes everything and also hears everything without limitation and without exception, wrong doers cannot escape His judgment.*<sup>12</sup>

Africans conceive of God as essentially good. Some make categorical statements to the effect that God does only what is fair, just and good and therefore they have no reason to complain especially about calamities or problems visited on them. In such instances, deliverance or protection is traced or attributed only to Him. At crises periods, recourse is normally made direct to Him. Therefore, most Africans may not thank God for mercies received from Him because they consider the doing of good as part of the nature and duty of God.

From the discussions so far, it can be realized that the concept of God in the two religions under consideration, is virtually the same in many respects even though one (Islam) is described as a revealed religion and the other (ATR) is non-revealed. Through revelation, Allah presented His own nature to mankind through Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Throughout the Qur’an, therefore, the oneness of the divine essence is a central, recurring theme.

Wonderful enough almost similar monotheistic undertones underpin the concept of God among Africans even though it is said that African Indigenous Religions are neither revealed nor do they constitute one faith like Islam or Christianity. The obvious question that comes up is how did the knowledge of God come Africans, when there has never been an African prophet or prophets to whom God revealed Himself. Isaac Kwesi Otabil (1999) therefore asserts against the back-



ground of these similarities that *“traditional religion is therefore monotheistic as there is a belief in only one Supreme God. He is the only one cohesive factor in traditional religion.”*<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that religion among Africans cannot be said to be one because every culture has its own unique expression of religion. Scholars of African Indigenous Religions are, therefore, unanimous that Africa has no one religion like Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, knowledge of God is not only obvious, but general and almost taken for granted among all African peoples. An important feature here is that God is neither preached nor worshiped directly. Notwithstanding this, the issue of religion (God) is so obvious that it does not need to be taught elsewhere like Islam and Christianity. In this direction Kwame Gyekye (1996) states:

*“it seems to me that the African idea or practice of confining a religious system to a particular people and the reluctance to spread to others a specific form of religious belief and practice evolved by a particular people derive from the African conviction that the human being, irrespective of the culture to which he or she belongs, is essentially a religious being who will, sooner or later, come to see himself or herself as a created being and to appreciate the need not only to look for his or her creator but also to depend on the omnipotence and bounty of that creator.”*<sup>14</sup>

### Commonalities

A close look at the concept of God in the two religions reveals a striking similarity. In both:

1. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all its myriad contents.
2. Both assert that God has interest in His creation especially human kind and therefore endows them with a best possible world. This means that, like Muslims, indigenous African believers know and believe that there is an orderly, purposeful universe. This fact can only mean that there is an intelligent mind behind the order and purpose. By reflecting on this natural phenomenon man comes to know the Creator. Africans say that no one shows a child God. Kwame Gyekye (1996) proposes that this saying does not mean that as a child grows up it gets the knowledge of God automatically. It rather means that as a child lies on its back facing skywards, it sees the starry heavens and interprets this spectacle as the abode of God. It means it is on the basis of the reflection by Africans, using the universe as the focus, that they come to know God. Other channels of this knowledge are their own *createdness* before the Supreme Being and the fact that they observe themselves to be mortal with all limitations, fears and anxieties.

In a similar fashion, the Qur'an in Chapter 3, Verse 190 draws a parallel when He says: *most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day are signs for a people who reflect.* A more expanded form of this is in Qur'an 2:164.

### Implications for believers

For Muslims, monotheism does not end with mere recognition of the oneness of God. If God is one and the sole Creator of the universe including the believer, a necessary implication is that His acknowledgement on the part of the believer becomes a compelling necessity. Faith in Islam is a heart-felt belief which, alone, is not complete to attain satisfaction here on earth and eternity in the hereafter. The believer is obliged to act in consequence of faith else faith becomes hypocrisy. In Islam there are some obligations on the believer that constitute the consequences of faith. This is why the religion is a double face of beliefs and practices, both of which are important in the life of a Muslim. One (practice) confirms the effective presence of the other (belief or faith).

In one of the early verses revealed to the Prophet Muhammad with regard to the twin nature of faith and practice in Islam, Qur'an Chapter 103, Verse 1-3, Allah states: *“By time, Indeed, mankind is in a state of loss, Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds and advise one another to truth and advise one another to patience”*. In Surat-Tin, Qur'an Chapter 95 Allah asserts that a reward that is unfailing is reserved for those who believe and carry out good deeds.

Acknowledgement of Allah through worship is supposed to be holistic in Islam. Prayer, especially, the five daily obligatory ones, is central to worship in Islam. However, prayer alone does not constitute worship in Islam because prayer alone, according to the Qur'an, does not necessarily lead to righteousness in the believer. It is a holistic concept in the Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an Chapter 2, Verse 177 says:

*“righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but true righteousness is to believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and to give wealth, in spite of the love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask for help and for freeing slaves; and who establishes prayer and gives zakat; those who fulfill their promise when they promise; and those who are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous.”*

In other words, true worship in Islam is supposed to be all-embracing and not limited to only prayer which many Muslims are guilty of. The practice of Islam that has the approval of Allah is one carried without hypocrisy and with the absolute fear and love of the Creator.

Unlike Islam African Indigenous Religions do not admit direct worship of God. With the exception of a very few communities, it is not part of the African religious heritage to worship God direct. In African Religion, the Supreme Being is not the object of any organized worship. Worship is rather directed at nature objects and yet it is not nature religion because the objects are themselves not the focus of the worship.<sup>15</sup> They are supposed to be the domicile of the deities and the ancestors who serve intermediary roles between God and man. God is everywhere; therefore, building places of worship for Him falls short of the ubiquitous nature He is held among Africans.

Kofi Asare Opoku (1978) asserts that Africans worship God directly and indirectly. Directly some communities invoke, sacrifice or make offerings to Him especially during crisis periods when recourse is made direct to Him. *“The sacrifices made to directly to God are usually intended to draw His attention to human needs. Some however, are expressions of joy”*.

However, most Africans worship God indirectly through the gods and the ancestors. Outsiders to the African religious experience have often taken this to mean that there is total absence of the worship of God among Africans. Some scholars have even insinuated that non-worship of God by Africans is synonymous with lack of values or that African indigenous religions cannot ensure the salvation of the human soul. Some early Christian writers looked upon the various indigenous religions they encountered for the first time as primitive, naïve and bereft of any abiding values. They did so without even trying to understand them. R. C. Zaehner (1964) points out serious gaps in this thinking and says with respect to similar Christian attitude towards non-Christian faiths: *“thus in our approach to non-Christian religions, we waste our time in pinpointing the differences that separate us since these are obvious enough; rather, we must seek to understand them from within and try to grasp how they too seek to penetrate the mystery of our being and eternal destiny; for they too have a magnificent heritage of ripped spiritually from which Christians can learn and profit.”*<sup>16</sup>

It can therefore be said that Muslims, like Christians, must also seek out the truth and idealism that can be found in even the most remote ideologies rather than to condemn outright what we have not learnt to understand

Observing the similarities involved in all the religions of the world, Zaehner asserts *“it would be strange indeed if God confined His guidance entirely to His chosen people, the Jews, and left the rest of the world in darkness”*. He quotes Cardinal Newman who knew very little about the religions of the East who said that he *“found it impossible to believe that there was any part of the world in which God had not left His impress.”*

This seems to fall in line with the Qur'anic injunction which stipulates that Allah has sent to every community of the world a messenger, otherwise where will be His justice if He does not establish the standard and make it known yet decrees that people measure up to it. The Qur'an also advised that Muslims should not insult the deities of others. Lest, in return, they will also insult Allah.

It can safely be concluded that the African's worship of God is contained in everything he or she does or says, his or actions and inactions. According to Isaac Kwesi Otobil (1999), it is in traditional religion that the fusion of all aspects of the life such as political, religious, social, economic etc. is carried to its logical extent. In other words, in pursuing all these, the African knows of the ubiquitous presence of an Unseen Eye watching him or her and that failure to conform to what is appropriate will exact divine retribution. This is also so in Islam. However, sometimes the projection of Islamic worship acts by some Muslim scholars is done at the expense of other aspects of life which are equally central to ensuring that the believer's life becomes holistic and spiritually rewarding.

Like many scholars before him, T. N. O. Quacopome (1987) also believes that morality is the fruit of religion and that social and moral patterns of behavior are reflections of this belief. According to him *"the traditional insistence on good character shows that contrary to western notions, God and the Good Life are closely connected"* among Africans. He states further that *"the character of man is of supreme importance in African life and thought. This is essentially so because it is the thing that God judges."* A Yoruba maxim states *"Gentle character is what enables the rope of life to stay unbroken in one's hand"* or *"it is good character that is a man's guard"* Therefore relationships such as chastity before marriage, hospitality, generosity and kindness, truth and moral rectitude, keeping to covenants, protecting the weak and the vulnerable, honouring and offering respect to the elderly and recognizing seniority are essentially and could be said, for lack of appropriate terminologies, to be equal to worship acts of the monotheistic faiths. In the same way, negative lifestyles such as wickedness, stealing, hypocrisy, laziness, lying, not being trustworthy are abhorred and should therefore not be touched by those who know and honour God.

Islam and, indeed all divine religions, also expect these of their adherents. In support of this view, Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi Lari (2006) asserts that *"there is no escape from the pollutions of the world, the flesh and the devil except by a resolute concentration of the attention on God"*. According to him, *"inordinate attachments to materialist considerations must be set aside in favour of the quest for personal knowledge of God's being, if human life is to be equilibrated. This is the rock on which to build the house of life. All else is shifting sand."*<sup>17</sup>

Sayyid Hassan Ali Nadwi (2006) on his part states that Allah requires from Muslims that they practiced Islam fully, not partially as they do now-a-days. Unfortunately, Muslims in general have now moved quite far away from the teachings of Islam in, for example, codes of culture, customs of marriage and traditions of inheritance. Further, according to him, some Muslims observe Islamic injunctions both in matters of faith and worship, but they remain highly untrustworthy in morals and dealings—they do not miss an opportunity to deceive: they dishonestly measure and weigh their goods less whiles selling, cheat their business partners, and cause trouble to their neighbors. Whereas the Prophet said: “*A Muslim is he from whose hands and tongue other Muslims are safe*” or “*none of you is a true believer unless his neighbor is safe from his mischief*”

Across board, therefore, some Muslims behave and act as though they have excluded dealings and morals from religion;

*They seem to “think that Islam as a religion comprises only the tenants of beliefs and rituals of worship. They thus remained heedless, for example, to the value of honesty in dealings. Fulfillment of promises, carelessness in dealing with trusts, and honesty in giving due share to the rightful, which are essentials of Islam, have no meanings for them. They feel free in disregarding others’ just claims on them, do not observe religious rules in dealings, and do whatever suits their mundane interests”.*<sup>18</sup>

They are ritualistic and therefore remain at the realm of the physical in their religious lives. In all likelihood it is these very people who will see themselves as possessing meticulous religiosity and who will condemn others as not religious

## Conclusion

From the discussions above, it can be seen that the concept of God as the Creator, Sustainer and Preserver of all creation is not the preserve of the monotheistic traditions especially Islam alone. Belief in God, known variously across the continent, has been a reality from antiquity. However, unlike Islam, God is not directly worshipped the way He is worshipped in African communities. Absence of manifest worship of God is taken by outsiders to imply that Africans neither know God nor hinge their behavior on His fear and love. This is a fallacy borne out of ignorance of the African religious experience. Recognition of God and the respect given to Him by the African comes from his/her behavior or his/her actions and inactions. From all indications, the African takes this very serious.

## Endnotes:

1. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
2. World Book Inc., *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: World Book Inc. 2001).
3. Haji Mizra Mehdi Pooya, *Fundamentals of Islam according to the Quran as Represented by Muhammed and Ale Muhammed (AS)*. (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2000), p. 9. Or look <https://darulquran.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Fundamentals-of-Islam-according-to-Quran.pdf>
4. Sayyid Hassan Ali Nadwi. *Islam: An Introduction* (New Delhi and Qum: Universal Peace Foundation, 2006).
5. Isaac Kwesi Otabil, *Notes on West African Traditional Religions* (Accra: University of Ghana, 1999).
6. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
7. Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Jurong, Singapore: FEP International Private Limited, 1978).
8. Isaac Kwesi Otabi, *Notes on West African Traditional Religions* (Accra: University of Ghana, 1999).
9. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
10. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
11. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Melbourne, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1975).
12. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
13. Isaac Kwesi Otabi, *Notes on West African Traditional Religions* (Accra: University of Ghana, 1999).
14. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
15. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).
16. R. C. Zaehner, *Introduction to Christianity and other Religions* (New York: Hawthorn Books 1964).
17. Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi Lari, *Western Civilization Through Muslim Eyes* (Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World, 2006), p. 47-48. Or look <https://islamicmobility.com/pdf/Western%20Civilization.pdf>
18. Sayyid Hassan Ali Nadwi. *Islam: An Introduction* (New Delhi and Qum: Universal Peace Foundation, 2006).

## Bibliography

- Gyekye, Kwame (1996). *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company.
- Lari, Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi (2006). *Western Civilization Through Muslim Eyes*. Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World.
- Mbiti, John S. (1975). *Introduction to African Religion*. Melbourne, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Nadwi, Sayyid Hassan Ali (2006). *Islam: An Introduction*. New Delhi and Qum: Universal Peace Foundation.
- Opoku, Kofi Asare (1978). *West African Traditional Religion*. Jurong, Singapore: FEP International Private Limited.
- Otabil, Isaac Kwesi (1999). *Notes on West African Traditional Religions*. Accra: University of Ghana.
- Pooya, Mizra Mehdi (2000). *Fundamentals of Islam according to the Quran as Represented by Muhammed and Ale Muhammed (AS)*. Qum: Ansariyan Publications.
- Quarcoopome, T.N.O., (1987). *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: African Universities Press, Pilgrims Books Limited.
- World Book Inc, (2001). *The World Book Encyclopedia*. Chicago: World Book Inc.
- Zaehner, Robert Charles (1964). *Introduction to Christianity and other Religions*. New York: Hawthorn Books.

---

**Hussein I.I. Ibrahim**, *Head of Department Islamic University College, Ghana*; Email: zoggdoo@iug.edu.gh; Phone: 0266258189

**Mustapha Abdullah Kuyateh**, *Lecturer Islamic University College, Ghana*; Email: ahpatsum2003@iug.edu.gh; Phone: 0243153473

