



COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY: EXAMINING GOD, ALLAH, AND CHINEKE IN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

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Abstract

This study delves into the comparative theology of three significant theological constructs: God in Christianity, Allah in Islam, and Chineke in African Traditional Religions. By analyzing the attributes, roles, and interpretations of these divine figures across their respective religious frameworks, this research aims to highlight both distinct and overlapping perceptions of the divine. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the paper examines sacred texts, historical contexts, and theological commentaries to uncover how each faith articulates the nature of God, including the implications of these beliefs on moral principles and communal practices. The investigation further considers the impact of cultural context on the understanding of the divine, exploring how the characteristics ascribed to God, Allah, and Chineke inform ethical behavior and social cohesion within their adherents. Ultimately, this study contributes to interfaith dialogue and promotes a deeper understanding of how diverse religious traditions conceive of the divine, fostering respect and appreciation for the rich tapestry of global spirituality.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Allah, Examining, Christianity, Comparative, Islam, Theology

Introduction

According to Oguechuo, Nweke (2025), "Religion is a vital aspect of human existence. Many people understand religion from different perspectives. Religion might be seen as a double-edged sword, which can either have a positive or a negative effect on a society" (p.34). Religion significantly influences human perceptions of the Supreme Being, providing the frameworks through which followers understand their existence and purpose. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) each articulate a belief in a supreme divine power, albeit through distinct theological narratives and relational dynamics. Migilore (2004) states, "In Christianity, God is viewed as both the Creator and Redeemer of humanity, embodying a loving figure who interacts with believers through grace and covenant. This relationship highlights themes of salvation and moral guidance, profoundly impacting the ethical behaviors and community structures within Christian circles" (p. 12).

In contrast, Islam presents Allah as the one true God, described as both transcendent and immanent, deserving complete submission and worship. Esposito (2011) asserts, "The Qur'an and Hadith underscore Allah's uniqueness and sovereignty, inviting followers into a relationship defined by



reverence, obedience, and a strong sense of communal identity" (p. 57). This emphasis on monotheism creates a worldview in which every aspect of life is understood through the lens of divine will and moral guidance.

Within African Traditional Religions, particularly among the Igbo, the concept of Chineke as the Supreme Creator stands central to their spiritual worldview. Chineke is acknowledged not only as the source of all existence but also as a vital force that nurtures life and fosters community. According to Ekwunife(1989), "The dynamic between the sacred and the secular in ATR highlights the significance of ancestral veneration, communal rituals, and a deep connection to the natural world, reflecting a holistic approach to spirituality" (p. 83).

A comparative study of these varying interpretations serves to illuminate both the theological distinctions and similarities among these faiths, ultimately promoting religious understanding and peaceful coexistence in a diverse society. By exploring how each tradition conceptualizes the divine and its implications for ethical conduct and social relationships, we are able to gain insights into the rich tapestry of human spirituality. This research emphasizes the urgent need for dialogue and collaboration among various religious communities, fostering mutual respect and appreciation for the myriad ways humanity seeks to connect with the ultimate reality.

Methodology

For the study of "Comparative Theology: Examining God, Allah, and Chineke in Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions," both primary and secondary methods of data collection were employed by the researcher. The data collected was analysed using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) combined with textual analysis and interfaith dialogue.

This combined methodology is suitable as it balances theoretical inquiry with practical engagement. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of the theological constructs while fostering the interreligious dialogue essential for a study focused on comparative theology. By utilizing both qualitative and textual analysis, the methodology ensures a thorough understanding of how each tradition perceives the divine, thus promoting a richer understanding of shared values and distinct beliefs.

The Concept of God in Christianity

In Christianity, God is conceptualized as the Supreme Being, the Creator of both heaven and earth, and the ultimate source of life. Christians adhere to a monotheistic belief in one God who exists in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit, a theological construct known as the Trinity. In this framework, God is characterized by attributes such as love, mercy, holiness, and justice. Central to Christian belief is the notion that God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, who incarnated in the world to offer salvation to humanity, thereby reconciling individuals with God and addressing the problem of sin (McGrath, 2013, p. 102).

The Concept of Allah in Islam

In Islam, "Allah" serves as the Arabic term for God and is perceived as the singular and ultimate Supreme Being. The foundational principle of Islamic belief is Tawhid, which denotes the oneness and uniqueness of Allah. Muslims maintain that Allah is devoid of partners, progeny, or any equals. Attributes ascribed to Allah include omnipotence, omniscience, mercy, and compassion. The exhibition of Allah's will and guidance is encapsulated in the Holy Qur'an, regarded by Muslims as the final and unaltered revelation of God, transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad (Esposito,



2017, p. 88). Worship practices in Islam are direct and encompass prayer, fasting, and adherence to divine commandments, reflecting a personal relationship with Allah.

The Concept of Chineke in African Traditional Religions (ATR)

According to Oguechuo, Nweke (2025) "This African Traditional Religion (ATR) has long served as the cornerstone of African spirituality, culture, and identity. Its intricate tapestry of beliefs, rituals, and practices is deeply embedded in the worldview of many African societies" (p.28). Within African Traditional Religions, particularly among the Igbo people, Chineke is acknowledged as the Supreme God and Creator of the cosmos. Chineke is considered all-powerful, all-knowing, and the ultimate giver of life. Although Chineke holds the highest rank in the spiritual hierarchy, worship is frequently conducted through intermediaries such as ancestors, spirits, and lesser deities, who serve as conduits between humans and the Supreme Being. ATR places a significant emphasis on living in harmony with nature, honoring ancestors, and fostering communal unity, all regarded as critical expressions of reverence toward Chineke (Eliade, 1987, p. 378).

Theoretical Framework

Comparative Theory

Comparative Theory in religious studies, specifically as it relates to comparative theology, was notably developed by scholar Francis Clooney in the early 1990s, particularly through his influential work in the field. His ideas were formalized in publications such as *The Future of the Catholic Theology of Religions*, published in 1997. Although comparative religious studies have roots in earlier scholarly traditions, Clooney's work helped to establish Comparative Theology as a distinct academic discipline. Comparative Theory entails a methodical approach to studying and comparing various religious traditions, focusing on their beliefs, practices, and theological concepts. Comparative Theory is an analytical framework designed to explore and understand the complexities of multiple religious traditions through a reflective, engaged, and respectful lens, promoting both academic inquiry and interreligious harmony. This theoretical approach is appropriate because it allows for a systematic analysis of diverse theological perspectives on the nature of the divine, facilitating a nuanced understanding of similarities and differences among these faith traditions while promoting interfaith dialogue and respect.

Similarities Among God, Allah, and Chineke

Certainly! Here's an expanded explanation of each point regarding the similarities among the concepts of God, Allah, and Chineke in their respective religious traditions:

Supremacy and Creator Status:

All three entities—God in Christianity, Allah in Islam, and Chineke in African Traditional Religions—are acknowledged as the Supreme Being and the ultimate Creator of the universe. This belief underscores a foundational understanding that each deity has absolute sovereignty over all creation. In Christianity, God is traditionally viewed as the omnipotent architect of the universe, responsible for both the physical and spiritual realms. In Islam, the belief in Allah's supremacy emphasizes His role as the singular deity who created everything from nothing, reinforcing the doctrine of Tawhid, or the oneness of God. In the context of African Traditional Religions, Chineke is seen as the initiator of all life and existence, embodying the creative force that brings harmony to the universe. Each faith positions its understanding of the divine as central to the origins and ongoing sustenance of life, highlighting the interconnectedness of creation and the divine essence.



Supreme Attributes:

God, Allah, and Chineke are all ascribed attributes that reflect their unparalleled power, wisdom, and authority. These attributes affirm the notion that they are not merely powerful beings but possess an ultimate level of sovereignty that shapes the cosmos and governs the moral order. In Christianity, God is described as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, emphasizing His ability to control and understand all things. Allah is similarly depicted in Islamic theology as all-powerful and all-knowing, with the Qur'an illustrating His eternal wisdom and mercy. In African Traditional Religions, Chineke embodies immense power and wisdom, acting as a guiding force for the world and its inhabitants. The acknowledgment of these supreme attributes establishes a sense of reverence and awe among followers, encouraging them to aspire to divine qualities in their own lives.

Source of Life and Morality:

Each of these divine figures is revered as the ultimate source of life and moral guidance for their adherents. In Christianity, God is seen as the giver of life, with narratives in the Bible emphasizing His role in creating humanity and imbuing individuals with inherent dignity and purpose. Within Islam, Allah is viewed as the sustainer of life, who not only creates but also guides human behavior through divine commandments that shape ethical living. In African Traditional Religions, Chineke is recognized as the life-giver, whose influence extends to the ancestral spirits that guide moral conduct. Each belief system portrays the divine as a moral compass, instilling values and behaviors that foster communal well-being and direct individuals towards righteous living.

Eternal Nature:

The concepts of God, Allah, and Chineke share a common understanding of their eternal and transcendent nature. Each is perceived as existing beyond the confines of time and space, embodying an essence that is imperishable and unchangeable. In Christianity, God's nature is described as eternal, having no beginning or end, which underscores His ultimate authority over history and existence. Similarly, Allah is understood to be eternal, whose existence is independent of the creation He governs. In African Traditional Religions, Chineke is viewed as a timeless entity whose presence transcends the material world, providing an ongoing connection between the divine and the human realm. This understanding of eternity enhances the reverence with which followers approach their respective faiths, instilling a sense of hope and continuity in their spiritual journeys.

Ethical Encouragement:

The worship of God, Allah, and Chineke catalyzes ethical behavior and fosters a strong sense of communal respect among believers. Each religious tradition encourages its adherents to embody moral principles that align with the teachings and characteristics of the divine. In Christianity, followers are urged to love their neighbors, practice forgiveness, and exhibit compassion, reflecting God's love and mercy. In Islam, believers are called to uphold justice, charity, and honesty, aligning their actions with Allah's guidance as articulated in the Qur'an. In African Traditional Religions, reverence for Chineke translates into ethical living that honors ancestors and emphasizes communal harmony, where individual actions have communal ramifications. This ethical framework not only enhances interpersonal relationships among followers but also strengthens the sense of community, creating a supportive environment that values moral integrity and collective well-being.

Overall, these similarities highlight the shared foundations across different religious traditions regarding the nature of the divine and the implications for ethical living, promoting a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of human spirituality across cultural boundaries.

Differences Among God, Allah, and Chineke



In these three religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions—distinct worldviews regarding the nature and personality of God are articulated. According to Madukasi, Oguechuo (2024), "By worldview, we mean a rational explanation of the order which undergirds human lives and the environment" (p. 414). Each of these religions offers a unique perspective on the concept of the divine.

In terms of the Nature of God, Christianity is characterized by a belief in the Trinity, which encompasses the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, reflecting a complex understanding of God's multifaceted nature. In contrast, Islam is marked by a strict belief in the oneness of Allah, emphasizing His singularity and indivisible essence. Meanwhile, within African Traditional Religions, there is an acknowledgment of a Supreme Creator, often approached through intermediaries such as ancestors, spirits, and lesser deities who mediate the relationship between humanity and the divine.

Regarding the View of Jesus Christ, Christians regard Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of humanity, whose life and teachings are central to their faith. In Islamic belief, Jesus is revered as a prophet, possessing a significant but non-divine status, and is not considered part of the divine essence. Conversely, in African Traditional Religions, Jesus is recognized as a prophet; however, He does not hold a central role in worship practices, which are predominantly focused on ancestral and spiritual figures.

On the subject of Sacred Texts, Christianity's foundational scripture is the Bible, which encompasses both the Old and New Testaments as sacred documents inspired by God. In Islam, the Qur'an is regarded as the final and ultimate revelation from Allah, transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad, serving as the comprehensive guide for ethical and spiritual living. In contrast, African Traditional Religions primarily rely on oral traditions and cultural practices, which are passed down through generations and encompass the wisdom of ancestors rather than a singular written doctrine.

When examining Worship Practices, Christians emphasize a direct relationship with God through Christ, viewing personal faith in Jesus as the pathway to divine connection and salvation. In Islam, worship is characterized by direct submission and devotion to Allah, manifested through the Five Pillars of Islam, which guide the spiritual and communal life of Muslims. Conversely, in African Traditional Religions, worship often involves engaging with ancestors and spiritual beings, as highlighted by Chukwudebelu, Ajakor, and Oguechuo (2025), who state, "Ancestorship, as understood among the Igbo, represents a lineage of departed elders from the same ancestral abode, forming a spiritual community that oversees the lives of the living" (p. 3).

This intricate interplay of worldviews, beliefs, texts, and practices underscores the rich tapestry of diverging and converging beliefs about the divine across these three profound religious traditions.

Findings

This comparative study highlights that Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) each articulate a profound understanding of the divine, characterized by distinct frameworks that influence followers' worldviews, ethical behaviors, and communal practices. Key findings reveal that while all three traditions emphasize the existence of a Supreme Being—referred to as God, Allah, and Chineke, respectively—they diverge significantly in their theological narratives, views on intermediaries, and forms of worship.



The Nature of God: Christianity conceptualizes God as a tripartite being (the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which fosters a relational understanding of the divine. In contrast, Islam emphasizes strict monotheism embodied in Tawhid, where Allah is the singular, incomparable God. ATR recognizes a Supreme Creator, Chineke, approached through intermediaries, reflecting a communal relational dynamic.

View of Jesus Christ: The figure of Jesus holds differing significance in each tradition. For Christians, Jesus is the divine Son and Savior, central to their faith; Muslims revere him as a respected prophet but reject his divinity; in ATR, Jesus is acknowledged as a prophet without a central role in worship, further demonstrating the diversity in Christological perspectives.

Sacred Texts: Comparative analysis of sacred texts reveals the Bible as the authoritative scripture for Christians, the Qur'an as the final revelation for Muslims, and a reliance on oral traditions within ATR. This difference underscores varied sources of spiritual authority that shape belief systems.

Worship Practices: Worship in Christianity emphasizes a direct relationship with God through Christ, while Islam encourages direct submission to Allah, manifesting through structured practices. ATR incorporates ancestor veneration and communal rituals, highlighting the interconnectedness of the spiritual and natural worlds.

The findings underscore that while Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions present unique theological frameworks, they share an overarching commitment to the reverence of a Supreme Being and moral guidance. Such insights invite a deeper dialogue about the nature of divinity and ethical conduct across these faiths, allowing for a richer appreciation of their similarities and differences. The study emphasizes the importance of engaging with these distinct perspectives to foster mutual respect and coexistence among diverse religious communities.

Conclusion

Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions each recognize a Supreme Being, referred to respectively as God, Allah, and Chineke. Despite the significant differences in their doctrines, beliefs, and methods of worship, these faiths converge on the understanding of a singular divine power that has created and continues to sustain the universe. Engaging in the study of these distinct yet overlapping perspectives promotes not only mutual respect and religious tolerance but also fosters a deeper appreciation of humanity's enduring quest for the divine (Hessel, 1998, p. 212).

Recommendations

Interfaith Dialogue: Continued interfaith dialogues should be encouraged to promote a greater understanding and respect among followers of Christianity, Islam, and ATR, focusing on shared ethical values and communal goals.

Educational Initiatives: Educational institutions should incorporate comparative theology into their curricula, enhancing awareness of various religious practices and fostering a respect for diversity in beliefs.

Collaborative Community Projects: Religious communities in multicultural settings should collaborate on community projects to address social issues, showcasing the common moral imperatives across faiths.



Further Research: Additional studies examining the interplay between religion and societal dynamics in these faith traditions could yield insights into their roles in shaping ethical behavior and community cohesion.

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