



AN OVERVIEW OF GOD, ALLAH, AND CHINEKE IN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND ATR AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY

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Abstract

There have been disputes, quarrels between the three major religions in Nigeria, namely Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. This quarrel has continued and has gone as far as claiming lives. These issues prompted the researcher to go into the area of God, Allah, and ATR., and the use of technology in Educational Delivery. In trying to delve into the area, the researcher did a comparative study of the three major religions in Nigeria, and on what they believe in, it was discovered that all three major religions in Nigeria have what they believe in. For Christianity, it is God, for Islam, it is Allah, and for ATR, it is Chineke. The researcher went further to discover that these three names in the three major religions are functionally the same and regarded as the highest being. The researcher also proposed that the teaching and learning of these beings, be it God, Allah, or Chineke, could be studied using the internet, distance learning, and a digital library instead of mere guessing. This is as a result of the fact that preservation of the knowledge of God, Allah, or chineke in Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion is now technologically driven. The researcher did this using a technological educational approach. It recommends that there is no need for the tension between the three major religions; there is no need for the understanding between God, Allah, and Chineke since functionally they are the same. It equally recommends that technology should be used in this study since the world is now digitally friendly.

Keywords: overview, God, Allah, Chineke, technology, educational delivery.

Introduction

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. This is why Nweke (2020) asserts that "Religion gives answers to a lot of things and problems people face in the world; at the same time, religion has also ruined a lot of people because of the way people understand it"(p.42)

Religion has most times been conceived in terms of a belief in a Supreme reality. In this regard, every religion has a concept of the Supreme Being in its respective religious practices, which vary from one another. For Nweke I (2020), "Belief in God is real and unique"(p.42). This is to say that the belief in the supreme being is a reality, but every religion has its unique way to describe the nature of this supreme being. God is, most time, the basic object of many religions, and as such, religion could also be defined in terms of the worship of God. This concept of God may differ based on the religion in question. It may be the same God, but is talked about in



different ways by different religions. Apart from the concept of God, there are also other characteristics and elements that these religions have and share in common, even though their approaches may differ.

Basically, there are three majorly recognized religions in Nigeria, namely, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. These three religions have flourished in the country for a long time, and their survival could be attributed to many factors. Christianity and Islam are foreign religions and are not originally part of the African community, but they have been allowed to thrive irrespective of the existence of an indigenous religion that is characteristically African. The concept of God is something that cannot be separated from African Traditional Religion, irrespective of the views and opinions of other religions, which may see African Traditional Religion as a fetish religion or the religion of the dark world (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). Supporting the above, Nweke (2020) said, "African Traditional Religion has been seen by many from a negative point of view"(p.44). The African Traditional Religion adherent, in his way, communicates with the Supreme Being just like his counterparts in Christianity and Islam.

While the Christian used the term God to refer to their Supreme Being, Islam regards the Supreme Being as Allah, and the Traditional Religion of the Igbo people in Nigeria would refer to God as Chineke. Against this background, the aim of this work is directed towards an examination of the concept of the Supreme Being as seen in the three religions in Nigeria. An attempt would also be made to look at the characteristics of these religions.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD AS SEEN IN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION GOD: CHRISTIANITY

Admittedly, different religions have different notions and beliefs about God. Our attention here is, however, focused on the Christian's view of God. As one of the monotheistic religions, Christianity believes and teaches the existence of a Supreme Being called God.

God is primarily the Creator; he is responsible for the existence of everything other than himself. More specifically, God, for the Christians, is the one who creates 'from nothing', *ex nihilo*. He makes things to be without there being anything before his creative act, save himself. Existence as a whole is thus possible because of God: the universe began to exist because God made it so. God's creative work is just as present in the continued existence as it was before time began; God is both the initiating and the constantly sustaining cause of the universe and all it contains.

Consequently, the Catechism of the Catholic Church holds that God is one of three persons; this becomes the fulcrum of the doctrine of the Trinity; he is both transcendent and immanent. The church further teaches that God can be known through the created world and the natural light of human reason. God made all things, and he is their finality and eternity. He is merciful, all-loving and infinitely good (CCC. 36)

Furthermore, everything other than God is totally dependent on God for its existence and for its being. God is everywhere since he is making everything that exists to be what it is for as long as it exists: creatures constantly owe all that they are to God, and any causal activity of theirs is, first and foremost, God's causal activity in them. God is omnipresent, immutable,



unchangeable, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, among many other attributes. He exists necessarily, while other beings have contingent existence, for he exists at no particular time and therefore neither existed at some instant in the past nor will exist at some instant of time in the future; and so is his activity. Since all began in him, all will also return to him—eschatology. For Christians, God is merciful and forgiving rather than vengeful. In collaboration with the above, Nweke (2020) posits "the concept of God as a benevolent and forgiving rather than vengeful is a main tenet of the Christian faith"(p.43). This is to say that God prefers forgiveness when humanity erred and asks for it rather than punishment.

CHINEKE: IGBO

The Igbo tradition holds that one Supreme Being is known as Chineke, which means 'God who creates' or 'God the creator'. This meaning tells that the Igbo tradition attributes all created things to God. This describes how powerful this Chineke (God) is to have created these mighty things that we see, how organized God is to have arranged the world in the manner it is arranged, and how magnificent in beauty He is that He beautified the world in the manner it is beautified. Chineke, who continues to do wonders, is so great that he provides rain and food at their seasons. However, the spelling or pronunciation of these names of God in different dialects of the Igbo tradition might look different, but they have the same meaning. For instance, the Nsukka people of Enugu state call God Ezechitoke, which means the King Spirit that is the creator. Another common and popular name of God in Igbo usage is Olise (God). Other expressions about God may include, Olise-okike (God the creator); Olise-biko (God please); Olise-Emeka (God has done well). Chukwu is another name attributed to God in the Igbo tradition. This means Big God or Great God. Agreeably, to have called God Big or Great means there are other gods referred to as small gods in the Igbo tradition. These gods are those the Igbo people believe are closer to us, even though they operate in the realm of the Supreme, but serve as intermediaries between Chukwu (God) and humans. Examples of these gods are Ancestors, Divinities, Spirits, and what have you. These gods receive their authority from Chukwu (God), the Supreme Being. And they are at the service of humans who invoke them daily. God, the creator, is the controller of heaven and earth, but gives responsibilities to these gods who serve as His messengers.

More so, Nweke (2017) identified some major qualities of the African Supreme God. These are: supremacy, omnipresence, impartiality, swiftness in action, genderless, cultureless, without race, and just. In African God is second to no other creature, God is everywhere and nothing is hidden from his sight; he does not show partiality, he does not delay in judgement, God is neither male nor female and does not have any cultural or racial background (p. 112). The use of the third-person masculine pronouns "he," "him," or "his" here is a result of the limitation of human language in describing God.

Another important name in the Igbo tradition is Chi. Chi refers to individual gods. This Chi is present in the life of every individual. Chi is also the life force energy behind human actions. It is also the life spirit (Mmuo) of a person; the success of individuals is dependent on their Chi, and this Chi also protects them from danger. Chi is the individual angel; they are not seen but always there with individuals they are guiding. This traditional belief is not based on Christian belief because it has been the life of the people before the advent of Christianity in the land.



Before the missionaries arrived in the southern part of Nigeria, the Igbos had their own experience of the Supreme Being (God), the creator of heaven and earth. Our fathers worshipped this same God of heaven. They did communicate with him in their way.

They knew the Chukwu (God) they worshipped, and God in return answered their prayers. *Chiokike, Chineke, or Chukwu*, as Igbo tradition calls God, does not mean three Supreme Beings rather an expression that tells how mighty and powerful God is.

It is interesting to know that in Igbo tradition, meaning is very essential, and the meaning attached to names summarizes everything about that name. But the White man did not know this, if not. he would have adopted the name *Chiokike, Chineke, or Chukwu* as the name of God, or have told the people, if it was difficult for him to pronounce, *Chiokike, Chineke* or *Chukwu*, and whatever name they call God is the same God whom he preaches. The white man made our fathers believe that whatever they knew about God was what they taught them, and they allowed themselves to be deceived. But the challenge was that our people were not educated, and that was why they could not defend what they believed; instead, they saw these missionaries as one of the intermediaries they invoked on a daily basis, which seemed more real to them.

However, *Chukwu* or *Chineke* is the Igbo name of God. And it is not the missionaries who brought the idea of the Supreme Being to us. Our fathers knew God because God also appeared to them and communicated with them. God did not speak English, Latin, or Greek to them; He spoke their language to them. Therefore, the God who lived with them, spoke with them should also have a name to describe His personality. He remains, in the Igbo tradition, *Chineke* (God the creator) or *Chukwu* (The Great God). Nweke (2020) noted that " the belief in the supreme being in Igbo religion as well as African religion is axiomatic"(p.45). One needs to be taught before he knows.

ALLAH IN ISLAMIC RELIGION

According to Nweke I (2020), "Islam is one of the world's greatest religions founded in the seventh century AD by Mohammed"(p3).

For Nweke I (2020), "Islamic religion has also its beliefs and doctrines like God, apostles, Koran, angels, last judgment, etc. They equally have five obligations: profession of faith, ritual prayer, almsgiving (Zakat), Ramadan fast, and pilgrimage"(p.43)

Archer (2014) observes that the Islamic religion is a religion that can be found in many countries and among many cultures of the world. In spite of the diversity of culture and nationality, Muslims share a common faith that brings them a sense of peace and stability in their individual and community life. The Islamic Religion ranks among the leading religions of the world in terms of the population of faithful adherents.

The word Islam means submission to, and peaceful worship of the one almighty God. The religion teaches universal values like equality, honesty, and humility. However, as observed by Archer (2014), in today's world, Muslims are often linked with radicalism and intolerance: their beliefs are misunderstood and even despised. Stereotypes and misinformation are spread out of ignorance or deliberately promoted for political or social purposes.



In the Arabic language, Allah is usually conceived as "the god" (al-ilah). However, in Islamic theology, the belief in Allah as the Supreme Being is tenaciously held and defended. Allah for the Muslims is the almighty, transcendent, and all-knowing God. For the Muslims,

Allah is the only God, and besides him there is no other. The word Tawhid is used to describe the oneness of Allah, which is the fundamental belief of Islam. There are ninety-nine names of the Muslim God, and each name gives Him many attributes. Through their recitation and reflection upon these names, the Muslims often try to understand God more.

Islamic adherents believe Allah to be responsible for the creation of the cosmos and that all things which have come to exist are a manifestation of his greatness. Allah is also a sustainer, the merciful one who reaches out compassionately to his people. The greatness of Allah is most times expressed in declarations such as *Allahu akbar* (God is great). For the Islamic adherents, nothing can ever happen unless it is caused or permitted by Allah, and He knows the destiny of all creatures. This is the reason why a Muslim making plans sometimes says, in sha'allah (God willing) or ma Sha' allah (whatever Allah wills). Among the typical Muslims, giving thanks to Allah could also be seen in the expression al-hamdu li-llah (Thanks be to Allah). The various expressions by them portray their belief in Allah and their thought of Allah as the central point of their life.

In the Islamic religion, intermediaries or special devices are not needed to reach out directly to Allah. In addition, the Muslims believe that Allah fashioned man out of dust, but the angels were made out of light. These angels are responsible for administering Allah's kingdom, and they have no freewill of their own but full obedience to Allah. It is typical of the Muslim to also believe in the life after. For them, Allah rewards the just and faithful with heaven, while the unrepentant sinner would be condemned to eternal damnation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE RELIGIONS

Belief in the Supernatural

The three religions believe in the existence of transcendental beings that are beyond the visible. For instance, in African Traditional Religion, Nweke I (2020) asserts that "The principal god of Igbo is called *Chineke*"(p.45). Without the belief in the supernatural, no religion will exist as a religion based on the speculation that religion emerged from the belief in supernatural beings. Buttressing on the above, Edward Taylor described religion as the belief in spiritual beings, "animism" (Corrigan J. et al., 1998, p. 3). The African Traditional Religionists believe that the ancestors, spirits, and divinities, though invisible, still influence certain happenings in the visible realm. Christianity and Islam believe in the afterlife and the existence of saints in paradise.

Monotheism

Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions are monotheistic religions. Each professes belief in One God. However, inasmuch as each professes One God, each also differs in the ways the One God is conceived. Unfortunately, sometimes people misconstrue the unique ways African Traditionalists profess the One-God *Chukwu*. In the African traditional religion, God is one but other beings serve as intermediaries. These intermediaries should not be seen in terms of the existence of many gods.



Assertively, the singular God worshipped by Christians is the same God worshipped by Muslims and African traditionalists (Corrigan, J. et al., p.134). The Muslims believe in the existence of the absolute sovereign God, *Allah*. This belief in the One God is known in Arabic as Tawhid and means “to acknowledge as One, and to make one” (Corrigan, J. et al., p.135). It points to the oneness of God.

Sacred and Profane

In each of these religions, there is a marked distinction between things that are sacred and those that are profane. Sacred refers to something that is dedicated to the service of God, worthy of religious veneration, or entitled to reverence and respect. Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things; things set apart. So, each of these religions has things set apart and considered sacred. Also, in each of these religions, there are places that are sacred, such as shrines, churches, and mosques. There are also months or certain specified days that are considered sacred, for example, among the Igbo traditional religion, *Aro*- the eighth day- *Afo Uku* is dedicated to *Obasi bi n'elu* (Ekwunife: 1990, p. 42). In the African Traditional Religion, for instance, the *Ikenga* and *Ofo* are objects considered sacred. There are times as well that are considered sacred, especially times for worship and sacrifices. Christians dedicate Sunday as a holiday, while Muslims hold Friday as a day set aside for the *Juma'at* prayers.

Profane can mean to treat something sacred with abuse, irreverence, or contempt. In the African Traditional Religion, whenever there is a profanation of what is sacred, it calls for cleansing and atonement. In other words, profane may mean things not concerned with religion; things apart from religion. Deviating from that which is sacred is yielding to the profane.

Religious symbols and symbolism

The essence of symbolism lies in the recognition of one thing as standing for (representing) another; the relation between them is normally that of concrete to abstract, particular to general (Lehrmann and Myers, 2001, p. 64). The relation is such that the symbol by itself appears capable of generating and receiving effects, and such effects are often of high emotional change (Lehmann and Myers 2001, p. 65). Certain symbolic actions in these religions clarify the understanding of phenomena of religious change. There are some forms of symbolic acts, language, and behaviour that convey meaning to the believers of these religions.

Generally, symbols are things that express and communicate to a group which owns its deeper realities other than the signifier, as well as their multiple meanings. Among the Igbo of Southern Nigeria, trees like the cotton plant, *ogilisi*, and *Iroko* are often dedicated as symbols to Chukwu. (Ekwunife, 1990, p. 42). As the cross is a symbol of great significance to the Christian, so is the moon and star of equal significance to the Muslims.

Moral code/ethics

Another common characteristic of these religions is the moral code. Without a moral code, there will be disharmony and chaos in these religions. From the onset, religion and morality have been closely intertwined in that both exert influences on each other. Sometimes it becomes even difficult to distinguish between what constitutes moral instruction and religious instruction.



Each of these religions, African Traditional, Christianity, and Islam, possesses their moral code. These are rules and directives on how adherents ought to behave. The adherents are expected to abide by these rules so as to maintain decorum in the place and order of worship. In the African Traditional Religion, while certain acts are considered good and rewarding, there are also illicit acts that are forbidden and regarded as taboos. In the Islamic religion, it is a taboo for a woman to slaughter the sacrificial lamb. In the Christian religion, a believer is forbidden to eat meat on Good Friday.

Essentially, rules and taboos are meant to guide and restrict adherents against certain acts of touching or speaking, seeing, eating, etc. Keeping the rules will amount to beneficial rewards, while breaching them will unleash dangers, punishment, and calamities. The Christians have the Decalogue, which guides their behavior towards doing good and avoiding evil. In the Islamic religion, the Sharia stipulates the law and distinguishes acts that are *haram* (forbidden) from acts that are rewarding *halal*.

World views

The three religions have their respective world views. Broadly speaking, a worldview can be described as the way a person perceives, interprets, and relates to the universe and everything in it (Ekwunife, 1990, p. 53). The African Traditional religionists perceive their world sometimes as a two-tier or three-tier structure of two interacting realities- spiritual and material (Ekwunife, 1990, p. 53). Similarly, Christianity and Islamic worldviews are related to the two visible and invisible structures of reality. These religions believe that the transcendent God is mighty and surpasses the visible-materialistic world. Consequently, what the material world cannot offer, they believe in the providence of an omnipotent God.

Prayer and communication

Prayer is an act of communication by humans with the Sacred or Holy God, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers. It expresses a human desire to enter into contact with the Sacred or Holy (Ekwunife, 1990, p. 56). African Traditional Religions, Christianity, and Islam have regard for prayer. Prayer occupies a central position in these religions. Since these religious beliefs in the existence of supernatural beings beyond the physical grasp of humans, they implore channels through which the supernatural is invoked. The African Traditional religionist prays constantly. Sometimes they pray in groups or individually. Sometimes they express the forms of prayers in words. For example, in the Igbo traditional worship, these words include “*Ikpe ekpele*”, “*Igo ofo*”, “*Ikpulu Chukwu isi ala*”, “*Ibeku Chukwu*”, “*ma obu Chineke ma obu ndi muo*”, “*Iyo ayiyo*”. (Ekwunife, 1990, p. 56).

Sacramental

The New Dictionary of Theology defines sacramental as “sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments in so far as they signify the effects, especially of a spiritual kind, which are obtained through the church” (Komonchak et al., 2019, p. 992). The sacramental is not only peculiar to the According to Nweke I(2020),” some practices of Islamic religion were just a continuation from African cultures”(p.44). The Muslims and Traditional Religion adherents also have sacraments which are most time regarded as powerful articles that confer special benefit or grace upon their users. The Catholics have rosaries, scapulars, Sacred medal, and so on. Just like Catholics have the rosary and pray it, the Muslims also have their beads of prayer, which they call *tasbeih*. Using these beads, the Muslims recite and praise the names of



Allah. In the African Traditional Religion, sacramental also exist. Among the Igbo people, items like kola nuts, alligator pepper, and white chalks are considered as sacramental as they confer some spiritual benefits upon their users. The kolanut as a sacrament is a symbol of communion, welcome, and used to initiate a peace talk with a bid to make reconciliation between warring parties. What the kolanut is to the African Traditionalist is what the Eucharist is to the Catholics. Alligator pepper and white chalk are also sacramental to the Igbo people, both respectively signifying cleansing and welcome.

EVALUATION/CONCLUSION

From our examination of these different religious traditions, we have realized that without God or the idea of the holy, there would be no religion. God is the center of all these religious life, beliefs, and practices. God in the three religions revealed himself in the creation, prophecy, and historical events. The idea of God is part and parcel of the three religions and constitutes the major object of these religions. Apart from this, we can also see many characteristics that show that many things unite these religions than separate them.

In the three religions examined in this work, God has different names which adherents cherish. All these names depict God's attributes or characteristics as seen by the adherents. He is seen to be the creator, infinite, pure, eternal, holy, unmoved mover, immanent, sovereign, and transcendent. His moral attributes include essential goodness, kindness, pity, rightness, justice, Love, and so on. It is out of his goodness that he created everything perfect. Also, the three religious traditions have certain human terms or qualities that are used to describe God. God is seen as father, mother, having large eyes, etc. In the different religious traditions as discussed above, we can also notice that this God is worshipped directly or indirectly through sacrifices, prayers, songs, music, proverbs, festivals, and feasts.

Some dissimilarities can also be found in these three religions. One major dissimilarities between Islam and the other two religions is that it does not believe in the existence of intermediaries that help in getting to God or worshipping Allah. African Traditional Religion recognizes the existence of intermediaries like deities, ancestors, and oracles in reaching the Supreme Being, and the Christians, especially the Catholics, often implore the intercession of saints and Martyrs in praying to God. Notwithstanding, between African Traditional religion and Christianity, the dissimilarities readily identifiable are that while African Traditional Religion believes in offering sacrifices to appease the Supreme Being, Christianity holds that Christ, in the history of salvation, has paid the ultimate price, and as such, there is no need for further sacrifice. Islam too does not believe in offering sacrifices even though, like Christianity and African Traditional Religion, almsgiving, fasting, and abstinence and preached.

This discussion has also shown that these religions are unique in their beliefs, and it is not always the case that one religion copied from another. For instance, as observed from above, African Traditional Religion has the concept and notion of God even before the advent of the Europeans into the continent. Although the Religion of the Africans was greatly influenced by the colonial masters, there still exist rich elements and cultures that were not blotted out of the religion. Appropriately, the African Traditional Religion is independent of any other Religion as it is unique in the same way as Christianity and Islam. For this, Nweke (202) advises that "no religion should be seen as superior to the other"(p.47). This fact can also be a major point for interreligious dialogue and discussion. Every religion should be respected and cherished,



as no religion is superior to another. This should be the basis for religious tolerance in any country. The above was supported when Nweke I (202) said "... by doing this ATR, Christianity, and Islam can co-habit and have peace, love, unity and understanding between them"(p.47).

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