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**M. A Research on Christianity and Islam – similarities and
differences.**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of comparative Study of religions is not just a mere academic activity but geared towards inter-faith relations. The comparative and historical methods in the study of religions had long been pronounced a scientific study of major religions of the world. Max Muller (1856-1900), founder of comparative Study of religions had declared the approach a formal and independent field of study that does not pass any judgmental sentence on the truth claims of religions¹ with a view to understanding deeply their areas of convergence and divergences. Information so derived

¹ Chris Ukachukwu Manus *etal.* (2016). A Comparative Study of Christianity and Islam in the Contemporary Basotho Society. International journal of Research (IJSR), Vol. 5, Issue 8.

from such study enables any researcher to make relevant recommendations or give useful information that would be helpful to adherents of the religions been studied²

It is in light of the foregoing this paper seeks to compare and contrast the relationships between Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam, bringing out their differences and similarities. In achieving this task, the paper will first begin with the overview of Christian Religion, Islamic and African Traditional Religion.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

A. ISLAM: This religion was founded by Prophet Mohammed from the Arabian Peninsula, precisely Mecca around the 6th century A.D. They believe in the submission and will of Allah. They are associated with this quote “there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet and messenger”.³ The religion has five major beliefs known as the five (5) pillars of Islam, they include

(i) Belief in Allah: here they believe in Allah’s existence, his unity and perfection.

(ii) Belief in Angels: the Quran describes Angels as supernatural and states that such is their real nature that they do not appear in the material world generally, but only by divine command. (iii) Belief in the scriptures: here, Islam calls upon mankind to believe in all the scriptures which have been revealed through God’s messengers e.g. the Quran revealed to Mohammed, the Torah revealed to Moses, the Injil, revealed to Jesus, the Zabur revealed to David and the Scrolls revealed to Abraham.

(iv). Belief in the last day: the last day is described in the Quran as the day of resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and hereafter. It is life after death.

(v) Prayer: In prayer, the Muslim thinks of his Lord five times a day, appearing before his Lord repeatedly and saluting his name within his heart and soul. The Muslim, in prayer, submits himself to God and then looks forward to his favor.

² Ayantayo Jacob K.(2015) Rudiments of Research in Religious studies, Nigeria: Jay Kay-Ayan Pub. 167.

³ Albert I.O 2001 Introduction to Third Party Intervention in Community conflicts, Ibadan: John Archer’s pub. Ltd,1

(vi). Zakat (Religious tax): here, it is a fiscal worship by which Islam requires the well to do care for the needs of the poor and to pay a subsidy to maintain public benefits like hospital, educational institutions and defense force.

(vii) Fasting: it is a means by which the Muslims voluntarily abandon certain legitimate frivolous enjoyment as a means of putting his soul to test and promoting his capacity for perseverance, thus strengthening his will to keep away from sin, both obvious and obscure.

(viii) Pilgrimage: This is where Islam belief that a core adherent of the faith should visit mecca at least once in his life time⁴.

Islam was introduced into Northern Nigeria by North Africa traders (who had already acquired it) in the 14th century and since then; Islam has spread into the middle belt region across Kogi, Nassarawa and into the South Western states. It's no doubt that Islam constitutes one-third of the country's population.

B. CHRISTIANITY: The history of Christianity concerns the Christian religion and the church from the ministry of Jesus and His twelve apostles and the great commission to contemporary times and denominations. The vast majority of Christians believe in a triune God, consisting of three unified and distinct persons; God the father, God the son and the Holy Spirit.⁵

Christianity began in 1st century AD in Jerusalem, from there the religion spread in the Greek/Roman world beyond. It first started by the apostolic church, after the ascension of Christ to heaven where the community led by Jesus apostles and His relatives. According to the great commission, the resurrected Jesus commanded the disciples to spread His teachings all over the world. The first Christians were essentially all ethnically Jewish. The doctrines of the apostles brought the early church into conflict with some Jewish religious authorities. This eventually led to their expulsion from the synagogues, thus Christianity acquired an identity distinct from Rabbinic Judaism.⁶

In Christian teachings, Jesus Christ is believed to have been vindicated and glorified by God through his resurrection from the dead, after three years of entombment. It is strongly believed that his resurrection is the divine proof of his divinity that conferred on him, the power of forgiveness

⁴ Afella Terna, 2010. Introduction to World Religions. Makurdi: Obeta Printing and Pub, co. 58.

⁵ Ajiki Pius. 2014. Understanding World Religions. Makurdi: Obeta Print. and Pub, co, 25.

⁶ Ojebode P.A and Ajayi B.B, 2012. Introduction to the Study of Religions, Oyo: Omo-oje Publishers, 123.

of sins. After his resurrection, he appeared on many occasions to his disciples in various locations. After forty days on earth, he ascended into heaven and was believed to have been seated at the right hand of God. From his throne, he has continued to support and direct his followers till today. In the great commission (Matt 18:18-20) the risen Jesus gave his disciples direction, to extend his gospels beyond Samaria and Judea to all nations⁷

This is the foundation of Christianity's national enterprise from Jerusalem to Samaria to Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and to most of the Mediterranean coastal region. Christianity arrived much later in Nigeria in 1842, when the first batch of Christians landed in Badagary. Many more religious faiths followed suit, with some denominations evolving from existing ones.

c) AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: When we talk of African traditional religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. Although the African continent is comprised of multitudes of Nations who have complex cultures, innumerable languages and myriads of dialects, there are still basic similarities in their religious systems. Everywhere, there is the concept of God (called by different names). There is also the concept of "divinities and spirits" as well as belief in ancestral cults.⁸

The religion is based mainly on oral transmission. It is not written on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions. It has no founders or reformers like Christ, Mohammed, Gautama the Buddha. It is not the religion of one hero. It has no missionaries or even the desire to propagate the religion or to proselytize. However, the adherents are loyal worshippers.

3.0 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

3.1.1 The Belief in God.

All the three religions belief in the Supreme being. In African Traditional Religion, there is a belief in the concept of God, bur is attributed with different names from their diverse ethnic groups.⁹

⁷ D.T.Nnong, 2012. Christianity in Africa. In E.K. Bongmba (ed), The Willey-Blackwell Companion to African Religions, Oxford, Blackwell, 208-219.

⁸J.S Mbiti, 1969. African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, 1.

⁹ For instance the Tiv people call God *Aondo*, the Yorubas call him *Olorum or Olodumare*. The Ibos calls him *Chukwu or Chukwu* . Though the names differ in pronunciation, they are referring to the same Supreme being called

They believe that God is the all powerful. This reality of the Supreme being is also found in Islam who call God *Allah*, the sustainer and creator of mankind. This means that *Allah* is only one, the singular cause and initiator of all planet and everything, living and non-living that are on them¹⁰ Christianity as well belief in the supremacy of God who is accorded with different names like *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, among others. They believe he has no beginning and will have no end, for he is eternal. He possesses all knowledge and power. And that he created all things, seen and unseen¹¹

3.1.2 Religions of Peace

The three religions emphasizes on peaceful coexistence. African Traditional Religion enjoin people to live at peace with one another especially those of the same family and clan. That's the reason why their worshippers have been able to welcome other foreign religions like Christianity and Islam with open arms. In fact cases of religious violence appeal more to adherents of Islam and Christianity than African Traditional worshippers. Christians on the other hand cannot afford to be unfriendly to their neighbors. It is the matter of fundamental principle in Christianity. For instance the Bible says “ thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself “ The concept of love in Christianity is all embracing, as it transcends members of the Church to cover non-members.. This instance is demonstrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, where Jesus shows the meaning of love of a man who picked up and assisted an unknown dying soul. ¹² So also is the Islamic belief that they are a religion of peace, as such people who go about killing non-believers are not carrying out the true tenets of Islam.

3.1.3 Doctrinal Similarities.

A. Stories of Creation

According to Boafo a common ground can be found in the area of how the Universe came to be (Cosmology). Both Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions have stories of creation and all of them attribute it to the handwork of the almighty God. In Christianity, Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, and an alienation of humans from God resulted. With

God. (see Awolalu J. O, 1995, What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 9, 1. Winter: World Wisdom, Inc <http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com>. Relieved, 1-06-2017).

¹⁰ Shittu ESQ, A. A, 2015, Islam and Christianity: Why Conflict? Ibadan: alfurqa and pub. LTD, 42.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Bidmos M. A, 2016. Inter-Religious Dialogue, the Nigerian Experience. Abuja: Panaf Pub. Inc, 26.

this alienation from an originally given right relationship of humans with God, death both Physical and spiritual entered the world. In most African Traditional Religions the Supreme being dwelt close to humanity until humans offended God. The offended God departed and choose to dwell faraway from the rich of humanity. ¹³

B. Belief in the Spirit Realm.

The three religions belief in the world beyond the natural realm. They claim that the universe is inhabited by spiritual beings. These spirits are both good and bad. In addition to the Supreme God, both religions acknowledge the existence of the head of evil spirits who is a personal opponent and is notorious for rebellion and destruction. In Islam and Christianity, this evil one is known as humanity's accuser, Satan. Also on the side of African Religion, the world is also divided into two realms: the seen and the unseen realms. Existence is lived in wholeness of those two realities. The two realms interact with each other. Some personalities have lived in both realms more than one. People can move in to the unseen realm during dreams, visions or trances and of course at death. There's constant communication between the seen and unseen. Thus a quick look at the foregoing shows similar belief system. ¹⁴

C. Life after Death.

The African Traditional worshippers hold this concept in high esteem, the origin of death is unknown, as such many myths were introduced. Death to them came because the messengers failed to failed to carry out their given tasks. There is no myth on how death will be removed from the world. On the other hand, in the here after, there's no break between life and death. When someone dies his body is destroyed but his spirit lives on. The spirit receives his body which is identical to his earthly body, so that he can move around as spirit. ¹⁵This similar belief is found in Christianity and Islamic religions too. The Bible in Christianity teaches that there are two different places where

¹³ This myth of creation among the Tiv people is illustrated that a woman (*kwase*) was pounding in her mortal and lifted her pestle too high and kept poking God (*Aondo*) in the eye. So God got offended and decided to go up higher. That's why God is up there in the sky. (see Pius Ajiki, 2011, Tiv Creative Expression of the Devine in NAJORB, 4th Ed, 2011, Vol 1, ISSN 1595-9326, 31.

¹⁴ [Http://www.afrikaworld.net/atrcom.html](http://www.afrikaworld.net/atrcom.html). Retrieve 14-07-2017.

¹⁵ Comparative Religion ATR. [Http://www.academia.edu/comparative Religion](http://www.academia.edu/comparative%20Religion), 9.

the spirit of a person goes after death. It goes to hades if the person was an unbeliever or heaven if the person was a Christian, (Lk 16:19-31:41, Rev 20:11-15).¹⁶ The Muslims too that there is a life after death, where in the last day or the day of resurrection, the dead would rise from their grave in obedience to the Lord of host, to face accountability. The ones that their deeds weighs heavier on the balance would be rewarded with paradise. On the other hand, all others of bad deeds would be visited with a most devastating punishment in hell fire.¹⁷

3.1.4 Veneration of Ancestors.

Ancestor veneration is common among the three religions. In African Traditional Religion, ancestors are the spirits of the departed fore fathers and mothers. They believe that they have gone to the other world to intercede for them. Of course not every one who died in Africa is an Ancestor, there are special qualities or standards one must meet to be qualified as one. Some of the these standards include : firstly, the person ought to have had a position of authority, second, he has to have had adult sons or children, depending on the tribe. Third, he must have lived a decent life and be of impact to many while on earth. So these ancestors are highly venerated and adored.¹⁸ Similarly, the religious practices of the Christians and Islam, the Christians refer to ancestors as saints or the faithful departed (especially the Roman Catholic). They are believed to be in heaven with God because of the Godly and exemplary lives. They include Abraham (both Islam and Christians venerate him). Others are Mary, St Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Thancy and the rest. Many Christians especially the Catholic ask these saints on their behalf.¹⁹ Muslims as well accord a special honor for their patriarch Abraham and prophet Muhammed who is believed to be the root of their faith. They also venerate such people as Mariam, Isah and others.

3.1.5 Prayers.

All the three religions adopt the medium of prayers as the major way of appeasing, petitioning or communicating with the Supreme being. That's why you will see a Muslim separate himself or

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Shittu ESQ Abdur-Raheem. A. Islam and Christianity, Why Conflict? Ibadan :alfurqa :An Pub, LTD, 47.

¹⁸ Comparative Religion ATR (African Traditional Religion), online source. www.academia.edu./comparativecomparativereligion,9.

¹⁹ BOISI Center for Religion and American Public life, An Introduction to Christian Theology. <http://www.bc.edu/boisi/pdf/bc/papers>. Retrieved 01-06-2017.

herself from secular activities and go to a sacred place to pray, at least five times daily to Allah (God). Prayer is one of the fundamental principles of Islam. The Muslim in prayer submits himself to God and looks forward to his favor. Therefore he perseveres in obeying his commands.²⁰ Christians as well believe in a personal God who listens to individuals prayer take place in many forms, including the ritualized prayers of worship services, personal prayer, group prayers and even Bible Study. Prayers may be silent or even spoken aloud: contemplative, non verbal forms of prayer are also practiced. Intercessory prayers, asking others to prayer one's behalf are also common²¹

Prayer is also one of the most common act of worship in African Traditional Religion. Through prayers, the worshippers are able to directly or indirectly with God. Here, Africans perform prayers of Thanksgiving in which people give gratitude to God, supplications in which people ask for material blessings, prayers of protection against sickness and death, victory over enemies and long life and prayers of dedication in which belongings and children are dedicated to God.²²

4 Sacrifice.

Sacrifice plays an essential role in African Traditional Religion as it is in Christianity and in Islam. Sacrifice is the act of offering the life of animals or human beings to divine power or powers.²³ It entails the attempt of the mortals to invite the attention of the divinity to their problems. Christians believe in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. That he died once and for all, thereby for the redemption of mankind. As such Christ sacrifice is the seal of all sacrifice. African Traditional Religion on the other hand offer animals and food items for sacrifice. During the sacrifice, the animals offered are being shared by both the receiver and the worshippers. This is done by placing part belonging to the receiver in the Shrine while the rest is eaten by the worshippers. This sacrifice could be in form of thanks offering, the votive offering, the propitiation

²⁰ Ojebode P. A and Ajayi B.B, 2012, Introduction to the Study of Religions, Oyo: Omo-Oje Pub, 97.

²¹ BOISI Center for Religion and American Public life, An Introduction to Christian Theology. <http://www.bc.edu/boisi/pdf/bc/papers>. Retrieved 01-06-2017.

²² Fola Lateju *etal* 2012 Introduction to African Traditional Religion. Lagos: National Open University, 87-88.

²³ Hornby A.S, 2000, Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, 6th Ed. New York : Oxford University Press.

and expiation sacrifice, the foundation sacrifice, the substitution sacrifice, and the meal and drink sacrifice.²⁴

In Islam, sacrifice is carried out during Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. On the 10th of Dhul-Hijja and after the morning prayer, the pilgrims move to the sacred monument (al-Mash aril-Harram) remain there till the bright light in the sky. After which they throw stones at the Devil. Then the pilgrims perform their sacrificial offering. Thousands of sheep, goats and camels are kept ready in Mina for sacrifice. Then Muslims all over the world offer their sacrifice and celebrate the Id of al-adha (the Great Bairan) A rock at the west end of the valley is prepared for the sacrifice.

25

3.1.6 Divine Messengers.

All the three religions belief that the Supreme being has Messengers that carry his intentions and messages to man and vice versa. In Christianity and Islam, they have a belief in angels. The Quaran and the Bible describes angels as supernatural and states that such is their real nature. That they do not appear in the material world generally, but only by divine command. Their functions are concerned with spirits and souls. They are believed to carry God's revelation, his orders, his messages to hid people for the people²⁶ They have this strong belief that at various times, God sends his angels to deliver his messages to man. One of such popular angels is Gabriel, who is also recognized as the one who delivered the Quaran to prophet Muhammed in Islam. African Traditional Religion on the other hand also belief that God delivers his messages to man through his divine messengers, such as the gods, spirits and ancestors.²⁷

3.1.7 Codes Of Conducts (Moral Teachings).

All the three religions has set of ethics guiding their worship and also on how to behave in the society. Islam and Christianity have rules and regulations that are codified and contained in their revealed books or oral circulations. Codification of rules and regulations means making categorical statements on and description of what constitutes an offense or a sin, in addition to the prescription

²⁴ Fola Lateju etal, 2012 Introduction to African Traditional Religion, National Open University, Nigeria: Corporate Trust Consultants Ltd, 88-89.

²⁵ Ojebode P And Ajayi B.B, 2012 Introduction to the Study of Religions, Oyo Omo-Oje Pub, 118.

²⁶ Ojebode P. A and Ajayi B.B, 2012, Introduction to the Study of Religions, Oyo: Omo-Oje Pub, 90.

²⁷ Awolalu, J O, 1975, What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol 9, No 1, Winter: World Wisdom Inc.

of the appropriate penalties for sins committed. The three religions have set of rules and regulations that guides the adherents activities like trade, education, marriage, divorce, politics, banking, food, drinks, mode of dressing, child custody and interpersonal relationships. ²⁸

African Traditional Religion on the other hand also has sets of codes and conducts guiding their worshippers in all ramifications. These set of rules is what is known as taboos.²⁹ Others are enshrined in proverbial sayings, customs, folklore, legends, myths, tales, song and lyrics. All these projects the tremendous richness of African Religious moral values or ethics. ³⁰

3.1.8 Custodians.

The three religions have Custodians who stand as a guide to the worshippers on the rules, regulations, divine commands, beliefs and practices of their religions. In other words, they are known as the religious leaders. For instance, the Christians priest , Bishops, Arch Bishops, Patriarchs, the Pope, pastors, ministers, deacons and evangelists. These people are faced with responsibilities of ensuring that Christians serve God in the way that is appropriate. In Islam, you have such examples as the Imams and the Ulamas, who are the Custodians of the Hadith, the Quaran and the activities in the Mosque as well as Islamic tenets of faith.³¹In African Traditional Religion these Custodians include : the Priest, rain makers, ritual elders, diviners, medicine men, kings and rulers. ³²

3.1.9 Symbols.

The three religions have special symbols that throw more light on the whole complexity of the beliefs and practices connected with their use. They provide a wealth of information about the past and present religious beliefs of the people. In African Traditional Religion, they are made of wood and sculptures and are usually placed in Shrines and family alters. ³³ Among the Tiv Traditional

²⁸ Badmos M.A, 2006, Inter Religious Dialogue, the Nigerian Experience, Abuja: Panaf Pub, Inc, 26.

²⁹ Taboos are prohibitions imposed by social customs, isolation of something as sacred or accursed, words or speech, items or clothes, conduct, food and places (See Hornby A.S, 2000, Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, New York: Oxford University Press)

³⁰ Abe G. O, 1993, Ethics and African Societies: The Perspectives of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam in Abe G.O (ed) African Journal of Biblical Studies, Vol 8, No 1. Ilorin: NAIS

³¹ Chris Ukachukwu Manus etal, 2016, A Comparative Study of Christianity and Islam in the Contemporary Basotho Society. International journal of Research and Science (IJSR) ISSN, Vol 5, 144.

³² Comparative Religions. ATR, <https://www.bc.edu/comparative-religions>, Retrieve 02-07-2017.

³³ Fola Lateju *etal*, 2012 Introduction to African Traditional Religion, National Open University, 16.

worshippers, one would find symbols such as *adzov spirits*, the *Swem Symbol* (symbol of justice) and the rest. In Christianity, these symbols include the water, the cross, (signifying the death of Jesus Christ on the cross) the dove symbol representing the Holy Spirit and purity, anchor, fish, alpha and omega and the Chi Rho. In Islam, they include the Mawhid, Ashura crescent, minarets and the name of Allah in Arabic. The moon and the star (signifying dignity) as well as the black stone in Mecca. ³⁴

3.1.10 Rites and Rituals.

Rites and Rituals are inseparable concepts, once you are discussing one, the other one is invariably discussed. All the three religions seem to exhibit certain sacred rites and rituals. The Christians carries out two basic rites to include baptism of water on a new convert to confirm his state of repentance from past sins. Another is the Holy Communion known as the eucharist. The Holy communion is in other words referred to as the Lord's supper. Christ commanded them to observe it in remembrance of him ³⁵ Islam on the other hand have these three basic rites they observe. Especially during prayers: one would see a Muslim wash his hands and feet, his face and every major part of the body. They belief is not correct without the purification from the major impurities. ³⁶

African Traditional Religion has also basic rites and rituals which they observe. This includes rites of passage : They are further subdivided into birth rites, puberty rites and marriage rites as well as death or funeral rites. These foregoing rites involve the crossing from one stage of rites to the other, although the rites vary from one traditional religion to the other, yet they express the same kind of commitments among their traditions. ³⁷

³⁴ Chris Ukachukwu Manus etal, 2016, A Comparative Study of Christianity and Islam in the Contemporary Basotho Society. International journal of Research and Science (IJSR) ISSN Vol 5,

³⁵ William M. Miller, beliefs and practices of Christians. Pakistan: Masihi/ Shaat Khana, 67.

³⁶ Ojebode P and Ajayi B.B, 2012, Introduction to the Study of Religions, Oyo: Omo-Oje Pub, 99.

³⁷ Among the Yoruba's for instance: their birth rites starts from the point of conception until a child is finally delivered. Great is taken to ensure safe delivery. Medicine men are consulted to provide charms to ward off evil spirits and also, all the needed needed medical care to ensure safe delivery. For the puberty rites, It is carried out when the child reach the age of twenty or is about to take a wife. However, modernization has taken it back to when the child is born at birth. The female too as a sign of maturity are expected to go through circumcision before they get married. Tatooing of the shoulders, back, trunk and thighs are also done at this time. (see Fola Lateju etal,2012 Introduction to African Traditional Religion, National Open University,)

3.1.11 Observation of Festivals.

The three religions have similar but unique special celebration of Festivals peculiar to them. In Christianity these festivals include Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Sundays, and Easter Mondays (Galilee).³⁸ Islam on the other hand celebrate such festivals like Eid-el-Fitr, Eid-el-Adaha, Eid-el-Matud and the Holy month of Ramadan³⁹ In African Traditional Religion too, festivals have a place in their beliefs and practices. One of such is the new yam festival practiced among the Ibo traditional worshippers and other African countries. The Ibo's call this festival *iwaji* There is another festival among the Yorubas known as *osu-osogbo* festival. They celebrate it to honor the Osun River goddess and the people of Osogbo, who represent all of humanity.⁴⁰

3.1.12 The Sacred and Profane.

The three religions have both reserved special days, objects and places of worship as sacred. As Christians reserve Sundays for Church services and Fridays for Jumia prayers respectively as the days of worship, so also is the African Traditional Religion. Most Africans also meet on Fridays in shrines for worship. Nsimbi M. B (Qtd in K. M Ahmed) notes that the Bangada revere Wednesdays which they attribute to god Mukasa as a resting day for gods and most Shrines are

³⁸ Christmas is the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ. Most Christians observe Christmas in Dec. 25th, but some observe it on Jan 6th. However, the exact date of Christ birth is not known. Easter on the other hand talks about the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The date of Easter being at full moon varies from year to year, but it always comes in March or April. Others are the feast of Pentecost, when Christians remember the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christ disciples, several weeks after his resurrection. (see William M. Miller. Beliefs and Practices of Christians. Pakistan: Masin Isha at Khana, 67).

³⁹ Eid-el-Fitr is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of Ramadan , the Islamic holy month of fasting (sawm). The religious Eid (Muslim religious festival) is the first and only day in the month of Shawwal during which Muslims are not permitted to fast. The holiday celebrates the conclusion of the 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting during the entire month of Ramadan . The day of Eid, therefore, falls on the first day of the month of Shawwal. The date for the start of any lunar Hijri month varies based on the observation of new moon by local religious authorities, so the exact day of celebration varies by locality
ED-el-adaha on the other hand 'Feast of the Sacrifice also called the "Sacrifice Feast", is the second of two Muslim holidays celebrated worldwide each year, and considered the holier of the two. It honors the willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son, as an act of submission to God 's command. Before he sacrificed his son God intervened by sending his angel Jibra'il (Gabriel) , who then put a sheep in his son's place. The meat from the sacrificed animal is divided into three parts: the family retains one third of the share; another third is given to relatives, friends and neighbors; and the remaining third is given to the poor and needy.
Finally (http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed-el_adaha).

⁴⁰ George T. O and Amusa Tolulope A. Religion and Acts of Worship Amongst the Nigerian People: Implications for Development and National Unity in A.S Jegede *etal.* Ed. Peoples and Cultures of Nigeria, 312.

closed on that day. ⁴¹ Moreover just like Christians and Muslims have rosaries, African Traditional Religion worshippers also have cowries, shells, coffee, beans, coconut and beads. ⁴²

3.1.13 Pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is accorded a special feature in Islam and Christianity, as they embark on this journey to the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well as Jerusalem respectively to visit famous *kabba* stone and the empty tomb where Jesus was buried among other things to offer prayers and celebrations. So also is African Traditional Religion. African Traditionalist also have their holy places for Pilgrimage. Basonja visits Bujagali falls near the source of river Nile, Baganda, Banyoro and Banyam Kore visit Nakayima in mubede. Abandawula culture makes periodical Pilgrimage at Buwaali. ⁴³ Many tribes and clans have their own ancestral and spiritual places they visit at specific periods, just like the Tiv people of Benue State Nigeria also visit the *swem* (a Religious symbol of justice and the origin of the Tiv man) from time to time to perform both social and religious practices. The next section seeks to discuss some of the differences observed in these religions.

3.2 THEIR DIFFERENCES.

In this section some of the beliefs and practices of the three religions differs. While some are different, others agree together against another. A cursory look at them would better explain this point.

3.1.1 **Doctrinal issues.** There are certain Doctrinal beliefs and practices that are found in these three religions which are quite peculiar to themselves. These differences ranges from the idea of heaven and hell, the concept of salvation, the concept of God and the concept of marriage and procreation.

A. The Concept of God.

⁴¹ K.M Ahmed, 2013, Compare and Contrast African Traditional Religion to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. <https://ekitibwakyabuganda.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/compareand-contrast-African-Traditional-Religion-to-Judaism-Islam>. Retrieved 14/06/2017.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

Although the three religions believe in the Supreme being called God, yet their concept of God varies. The Christians believe that there is one God, but this God consists of three persons in one (the trinity). That is God the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is placed at one point of this triangular belief, so he is being deified as an equal power and partner with God.⁴⁴ The Muslims on the other hand believe in the unity of the trinity as acclaimed by the Christians. To them, God cannot be three in one, neither does he have a child. That God is one, (undivided Monotheism) He is independent and besought of all. He begets none, nor was begotten (Surah 112). And there is none like unto him.⁴⁵ For African Traditional Religion the whole concept of God found in the above religions are totally odd to them.

B. Heaven and Hell

Unlike Christianity and Islam that believe in heaven and hell, where the good ones inherit the paradise while the bad ones are punished by being thrown in hell. African Traditional Religion on the other hand has no teaching on heaven and hell. They instead comfort themselves anytime someone dies by saying that they are going to their ancestors. They believe the spirit departs the body and lives on. Some say that they go to places like caves, forest, valleys, rivers, graves or indwell people or animals. That before the spirits get a permanent place, they just wander around the earth⁴⁶

C. The Concept of Sin/Salvation.

Christianity teaches that the first man Adam and his wife fell in Sin in Gen, 3. As such all of humanity have been inherent in sin. So there is total depravity and total corruption in man. But for this reason Jesus Christ was sent to redeem man from that bondage of sin (1John 3:8,3:16,Roman 10:8) and offered the gift of salvation on the ground of choice. However on the final day of judgment, the unbelievers (those who refused to accept Jesus Christ) would be cast into the lake of hell fire, (Matt 25:41, Rev 20:11-15) while Christians

⁴⁴ A. J Omoyajowo, 1981, Monotheism in Christianity and Islam, In ORITA, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies X111/11,39.

⁴⁵ J. Stephen Lang, 1999. Biblical view on Marriage. <https://www.cbn.com/biblical> view-on-marriage. Retrieved 16th-06-2017.

⁴⁶ Comparative Religion ATR (African Traditional Religion) www.academia.edu/comparativecomparativereligion. Retrieved 15th-06-2017,10.

on the other hand (those who belief in Jesus Christ) would not be judged but would enter into eternity with Christ the sovereign savior and Lord (John 5:24, Rev 21-22).⁴⁷

In Islam this concept of Sin and Salvation is quite different. They do not belief in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, that on the last day the basic law for judging right and wrong shall be according to the provisions of the Holy Quaran and the Hadith. That the people whose good deeds weigh heavier on the balance would be rewarded with paradise. While the wrong doers would be visited with a most devastating punishment in hell fire. ⁴⁸

African Traditional Religion on the other hand has a different view on salvation and sin. To them, there's no teaching or belief in inherent sin. (sin nature, total depravity, total corruption and human inability). There are however expressions and proverbs used to describe a depraved heart, wicked or evil heart. The doctrine of sin and the fall as taught in Gen, 3 is unknown in African Traditional Religion. People in Africa do not sin against God, but rather they sin against the ancestors, against the members of the family or clan. Sin is evil acts to those whom one is related to. The concept of heaven and hell is completely foreign to them. They belief that salvation is rather seen through the physical health, calm situation or prosperity enjoyed by the family through a member who gets a well paying job or accumulate a lump of money ⁴⁹

D. Concept of Marriage and Procreation.

All the three religions acknowledge the divine injunction of marriage and procreation in order to replenish the earth. However, Christians emphasize on a man taking only one woman for a wife, ⁵⁰ whereas the Muslims believe in four wives⁵¹ African Traditional Religion on the other hand believe also in many wives and concubines as possible. Part of the reasons the later gave is to avoid adultery and fornication, especially in case where the man is not satisfied with only one wife and so has to go outside to commit adultery and another reason is due to the labour force of the family.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ J Stephen Lang,1999, Biblical view on Marriage <http://www.cbn.com/biblical> view-on-marriage. Retrieved 16-06-2017.

⁵¹ Marriage in Islam en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/ marriage-view-in-Islam. Retrieved 16-06-2017.

⁵² O.O Familusi, 2011, Human Sexuality in African Thought and The HIV Scourge. IN LUMINA, Vol 22, No 2, ISSN:1188,223.

3.1.2 The Use of Charms, and Magic

Amongst the three religions, only African Traditional Religion is identified with charms and magic. Magic according to Robert, S Ellwood is the art of attaining objectives, acquiring knowledge and performing works of wonder through supernatural or non-rational means⁵³ This magic could be black or white magic. The black magic is for harming others while the white is good purposes. ⁵⁴ More so, the use of charms made from different substances like animals, birds and reptiles and selected trees for the purposes of protection, defense and productivity is not ruled in African Traditional Religion whereas in Christianity and, these practices are alien to them.

3.1.3 Nature Religion.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, African Traditional Religion may be called nature Religion because they are generally directed towards the maintenance of vitality in the life and society of the natural man. Christianity for instance emphasize on a spiritual kingdom centered on a unique individual, Jesus Christ who is both God and man. He is believed by Christians to have mercy on a sinner and to present God's new creation. In this regard, Christianity sees the divine being in terms of a unique person revealed in history, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. ⁵⁵

3.1.4 Abrahamic Religions.

Islam and Christianity are seen as Abrahamic Religions because they trace their strong backgrounds to the traditions of the first Patriarch Abraham. Their sacred history is derived from the life of Abraham. The initial belief in one God, the God of Abraham remains the foundation of their teachings on Monotheism. But on the other hand African Traditional Religion religion is not traceable to the Abrahamic root ⁵⁶

3.1.5 Sacred Books.

⁵³ Robert, S, Ellwood, "Magic" in Microsoft Encarta premium Dictionary.

⁵⁴ The techniques used in magic usually include chants and spells gestures or actions that often have a symbolic relation to the desired result and the use of substances believed to have a special relationship with the powers needed to accomplish the intended purpose. Magic itself appears to be independent from religion could adopt it part of its worship or belief system of which African Traditional Religion is not exempted.(C. F Fola Lateju etal Introduction to African Traditional Religion,2012,National Open University, Nigeria: Coperate Trust Consultants LTD, 105.

⁵⁵ Amponsal Samuel Samuel E, 2009, Christianity and African Traditional Religion in Kumasi: A. Comparative Study. Masters Thesis, Faculty of Arts, College of Health Arts and Social Sciences, 34.

⁵⁶ BOISI Center for Religion and American Public life, An Introduction to Christian Theology .
<http://www.bc.edu/boisi/pdf/bc/papers>. Retrieved 01-06-2017.

Just like Christians who have the Bible and Muslims having the Quaran, African Traditional Religion has no written document believed to be inspired by God or the gods. Their belief, ethics and practices are rather preserved in form of proverbs, songs and dance, folklore and tales. This is unwritten holy books inform of oral traditions are being passed from one generation to another. However, Scholars like Bolaji Idowu,⁵⁷ Awolalu⁵⁸ and others could be considered in their efforts to codify African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices. But such writings represent personal opinions and conclusions resulting from academic exercises. As such we cannot establish them as authentic for worship in African Traditional Religion.⁵⁹

3.1.6 Catholicity

To begin with, African Traditional Religion fall short of universality. That is the religion does not have a universal appeal. It is not a missionary Religion like the Christians and Muslims who uses mission or Da'wah respectively as a means of winning more souls to their fold. They rather operate within a specific locality limited by tribe, ethnicity, family and community boundaries.⁶⁰

4.0 CONCLUSION.

This paper has attempted in carrying out a Comparative Study of the three dominant religions in Africa in generally Nigeria in particular. From the critical discourse drawn from the foregoing so far, cognizance could be taken from the fact that their similarities far outweighs their differences. Some of the differences cited in the three religions even stem from the concepts that are common to them, just that their perspective differs. It is also important to notice that their areas of divergences are not enough grounds to bring about violence or separation. As such, adherents of the three religions should live with the understanding and tolerance, having it in mind that all of them come from one source and creator God.

⁵⁷ E.B Idowu,1973,African Traditional Religion: A Definition. London:SCM Press, Ltd

⁵⁸ Awolalu J.O, Yoruba Belief and Sacrificial Rites,London:Longman, 1979.

⁵⁹ Badmos M.A, 2006, Inter Religious Dialogue, the Nigerian Experience, AbujaAbuja: Panaf Pub, Inc, 7

⁶⁰ A.J, Omoyajowo,1981, Monotheism in Christianity and Islam in ORITA, Ibadan, Journal of Religious Studies X111/11, 9.