



A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE MUSLIMS' AND
CHRISTIANS' UNDERSTANDING ON THE MEANING
OF 'ALLAH' IN NIGERIA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the Christian perspective on the concept of (Allah) in Nigeria, which contradicts the true understanding of the concept of (Allah) in Islam. It begins with a discussion on the concept of Allah according to the Christian scholars in Nigeria followed by the Muslim scholars in Nigeria. The research continues with the explanation on how the concept of (Allah) is presented in the Qur'ān, Ḥadith and the work of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars. The methodology applied in this study is textual analysis, using descriptive and analytical methods on numerous works on the subject. This study identifies that most of the current module used to understand the concept of Allah by Christian scholars is wrong. Finally, the study concludes that it is crucial for both Muslims and Christians to have a comprehensive knowledge about the concept of (Allah). The proper knowledge would guide them to understand the real God of the entire universe.

خلاصة البحث

إنّ الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن وجهة نظر المسيحيين في نيجيريا حول مفهوم "الله"، والذي يتناقض مع الفهم الحقيقي لمفهوم "الله" عند المسلمين. بحيث بدأ النقاش حول مفهوم الله وفقا لعلماء المسيحيين في نيجيريا، ومن ثمّ علماء المسلمين في نيجيريا. علاوة على ذلك استمر البحث في شرح مفهوم "الله" تعالى وفقا لما جاء في القرآن الكريم والحديث النبوي الشريف، ووفقا لمفهوم علماء المسلمين المتقدمين والمعاصرين. إن المنهجية المطبقة في هذه الدراسة هي المنهجية الوصفية والتحليلية وذلك من خلال تحليل النصوص المتعلقة بالموضوع. وأوضحت الدراسة إلى أن معظم المناهج والوسائل المستخدمة لدى أبحار النصارى وعلمائها للتوصل إلى مفهوم "الله" كانت خاطئة ومنحرفة. وأخيرا، لخصت الدراسة إلى أنه من الأهمية بمكان بالنسبة لكل من المسلمين والمسيحيين معرفة مفهوم الله تعالى على وجه شامل دون تحيز، وهذا من شأنه أن يرشدهم إلى معرفة الإله الحقيقي لهذا الكون.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

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Mohd Shuhaimi Ishak
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

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Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed knowledge and Human Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree at IIUM or other institutions.

Zakariyya H. Yakub Ja'e

Signature

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This dissertation is dedicated to:

My beloved Mother

My beloved Father

To my children: Khadija and Muhammad

May Allah bless them and reward them with Al-Jannah

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All praises are due to Allah, Who alone is worthy of our submission and adoration, and may His benevolence continued upon our Prophet, Master of His servant and liberator of mankind from the clutches of darkness, Muhammad (p.b.u.h), his progeny, Companions and his followers. Thank you Allah for giving me the opportunity to complete this thesis.

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic Transliteration Scheme (According to IIUM Thesis Manual)

Consonant

Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration
ء	'	ز	Z	ق	Q
ب	B	س	S	ك	K
ت	T	ش	Sh	ل	L
ث	Th	ص	ṣ	م	M
ج	J	ض	ḍ	ن	N
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	H
خ	Kh	ظ	ẓ	و	W
د	D	ع	'	ي	Y
ذ	Dh	غ	Gh		
ر	R	ف	F		

Vowel

Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic Term	Transliteration
َ	A	ا+َ	Ā
ِ	I	ي+ِ	Ī
ُ	U	و+ُ	Ū
اي	ay	او	Aw

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In general, the concept of Allah is understood as a religious term which means God, and Allah is visible to the world as the Creator and Sustainer of the entire Universe. Allah says “And verily, We have sent among every *Ummāh* (Community, nation) a Messenger (proclaiming): “Worship Allah (alone), and avoid (or keep away from) *Tāghūt* (all false deities i.e. do not worship besides Allah).”¹ And He says “And whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allah’s forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”² Likewise, “Say: “O ‘*Ibādī* (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins). Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”³

The rise of the so called Muslim terrorists has outraged people across the world. Many Christians have directed their anger, not simply towards terrorists, but towards Muslims in general and towards Islam in particular. Much of the anger expressed in the West has taken in the form of demonizing the Islamic religion and accusing Muslims of worshipping a demon. A key element of this attack has been the claim of some that the name Allah refers to a demon or at least a pagan deity, notably the so-called “moon god.”⁴ Such claim has been made by scholars who are knowledgeable in their own fields but who are poorly acquainted with the *Arabic*

¹ Al-Qur’ān, 16:36. (Translated by Muhāmmad Muhsīn Khān and Muhammad Taqīūd-Dīn al-Hilālī, (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 2001).

² Ibid., 4:110.

³ Ibid., 39:53.

⁴ Rick Brown, *Who is Allah? International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23:2, Summer 2006, 79.

language. The *Arabic* (Allah) is equalized with the name of God in English whereas this translation does not convey the total meaning of Allah. Allah is understood as the name of God in *Arabic*, the language of the Qur'ān and is expressed as the Only Creator of the world. Allah says, "Say: He is God, the One and Only: God, the eternal, absolute, He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto him."⁵ It is a known fact that every language has more than one term that is used to refer to God and sometimes to lesser deities at the same time. This is not the case with Allah. Allah is the personal name of the One true God. Nothing else can be called Allah. The term has no plural or gender. This shows its uniqueness when compared with the word "god," which can be made plural, as in "gods," or made feminine, as in "goddess."⁶ Thus, there is an urgent need to really comprehend the term (Allah).

Therefore, for this reason, the research will try to analyze the conception of Allah according to what has been revealed in the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The research also looks into the classical and contemporary scholarships on the concept of Allah. This is because in the mind of any atheist, the concept of God rests on core beliefs, tenets and practices. This in turn influences the way of life in the world and in the Hereafter. Thus, the concept of the term is of great significance with numerous implications.

The study intends to clarify the vagueness of the term and to analyze the correct view of contemporary Muslim scholars in Nigeria on the concept of Allah as the majority of them share the same view with that of classical Muslim scholars. The Holy Qur'ān highlights the importance truthfulness as in the verse, "Allah commands that you should render back the trust to those to whom they are due and that when you

⁵ Al-Qur'ān, 112:1-4.

⁶ Ahmad Deedat. *A Collection of Comparative Religion Booklets*, (Unknown Publisher, 1989), 9-12.

judge between men, judge with justice, verily how excellent is the teaching which He gives you. Truly, Allah is ever All Hearer and All Seer.”⁷

The research aims to highlight the Qur’ānic exposition towards the concept of Allah. To ensure the proper translation of the Qur’an, the research uses the Noble Qur’an, translation by Muhammad Ṭaqī-ud-Dīn al-Ḥilālī and Muhammad Muhsīn Khān, published by Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, and supported by authentic *Ahādith* by *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *al-Ṣaḥīḥ Muṣlīm*.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Today, in Nigeria there is great concern about the abuse of the concept of Allah, especially when a Christian Pastor GJO Moshay writes a book “Who is this Allah?” that distorts the meaning of the concept of Allah. Moreover, the concept is not correctly understood as it is presented in the Qur’an, *Ḥaḍīth* and by Muslim scholars. The issue of the term “Allah” has recently gained much controversy as Christians in Malaysia have also claimed the right to use it in their religious worship.

The research thus attempts to provide the exact and true meaning of the concept of Allah in order to overcome the various issues arising from distorting, misleading or deceiving the meaning of the concept.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the views of Christian scholars in Nigeria on the concept of (Allah)?

⁷ Al-Qur’an, 4:58.

2. What are the views of Muslim scholars in Nigeria on the concept of (Allah)?
3. How do the Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth* and the Muslim scholars discuss the concept of (Allah)?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the views of Christian scholars in Nigeria on the concept of Allah.
2. To examine the views of Muslim scholars in Nigeria on the concept of Allah.
3. To highlight the concept of Allah according to Al-Qur'ān, *Ḥadīth* and Muslims scholars.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In Africa, especially in Nigeria, many Christian missionaries from different countries come with the mission of converting Muslims to Christianity. They distribute pamphlets that contain a few verses of the Holy Qur'ān with orientalist perspective to deceive the Muslims. This research would be of benefit to both Muslims and non-Muslims as it primarily attempts to explain Allah from the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* point of view and the opinions of learned scholars from Nigeria as well as other parts of the world.

With proper understanding of the concept, it is hoped that all sorts of distortion, misleading and deceitful meaning of the concept can be overcome. This

research will particularly help Muslims in Nigeria to advocate for the correct meaning of Allah.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used is qualitative library approach that requires due investigation and analysis of the concept of Allah in the Qur'an and *Ṣūnnāh* as primary sources. The approach also includes the historical and comparative study of literature on the concept of Allah from classical and contemporary sources in order to analyze the materials and arrive at a more accurate and complete understanding of the concept.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is an analytical study of Muslims' and Christians' understanding of the concept of Allah in Nigeria, with special reference to the Holy Qur'ān, authentic *Ḥādīth* from the book of Bukhārī and Muslīm, and the views of Muslim and Christian scholars in Nigeria and the world in general.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several studies and articles that discuss the issue of Allah. This research seeks the views of both Christian and Muslim scholars.

The Concept of God in Christianity

To begin the discussion on God in Christianity, the research starts with the classical writings of St Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theology* and of Augustine *The Christian*

*Theology Reader*⁸ which discuss the attributes of God. They say that God is not like a creature made up of parts. God is a spirit, without bodily dimension. Nevertheless, God's perfection is all-embracing. God is not limited in any way, so God is present everywhere in everything, not indeed as part of their substance, but in causal contact with what they act. They also say "There is Only One God" whatever exists is *ipso facto*⁹ individual, to be one "it needs no extra property and calling it one denies that it is divided."¹⁰

The Concept of God among Contemporary Christians

From contemporary scholarship the study considers the work of Olga Dunlop, *The Living God: A Catechism for the Christian Faith*. He mentions the mystery of Christ's words on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"¹¹ He says we must reflect on these last words of the Saviour and there are three ways of approaching this mystery. He argues that "He who is upon the cross is the Messiah, come to accomplish the prophecies. He who is upon the cross is God. Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung on the tree. He who is upon the cross is fully man. The Son of God, true God like his Father, He is freely abased by Himself so as to share our human feelings because of his love for us and has annihilated Himself so as to share our human condition to the very end."¹²

⁸ *The Christian Theology Reader*, edited by Alister E. McGrath, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Second Edition 1993), 99-106.

⁹ *Ipsa facto* is a Latin phrase, directly translated as "by the fact itself," which means that a certain phenomenon is a direct consequence, a resultant effect, of the action in question, instead of being brought about by a previous action, or "in and of itself".

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologie A Concise Translation*, Edited by Timothy McDermott. (First published in Great Britain by Eyre and Spotswood publishers, 1989), 14-24.

¹¹ Holy Bible, Matthew 27:46, and Mark 15:34, (*The Revised English Bible: With the Apocrypha*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹² *The Living God, A Catechism for the Christian Faith*. (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), Vol 1: 186-187.

Miller (1989), in his article entitled *Missionary Christianity*, describes God as unchanging and that Jesus passed through the state of death and is regarded as immortal.¹³ In another article entitled *A Concise Reply to Christianity*, Miller tries to shed light on the issue of son ship of Jesus, in the Holy Bible and he shows the use of the different terms such as son of man, Son of God, Messiah and Saviour. He explains the quotation of the Bible that says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that everyone who has faith in Him may not perish but have eternal life.”¹⁴

John Hick, the author of *The Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, also demonstrates the transformation of the concept of divinity from the medieval to contemporary time to show the love, caring, merciful relationship. He says God in the second century was not the same as the God in the New Testament, as narrated in the following statement:

In the second century Marcion says that: the God of the Old Testament was not the same God as that of the New Testament, because the former was responsible for the whole suffering of the world, while the latter God brought love and kindness, but early Christianity rejected that, and held that god and the Father of Jesus was the God of the Old Testament, but some changes had transpired.¹⁵

Monotheism in Christianity went through a historical development. Gregory J. Riley (2001), in *The River of God: A New Christian Origins*, describes the historical process of monotheism in Christianity and the Concept of Trinity. He elaborates that in Christian monotheism there are two categories. The inclusive monotheism and the exclusive monotheism.¹⁶

¹³ Miller, “*Missionary Christianity*” A Collective of Comparative Religion. 33-42.

¹⁴ Ibid., 15-28.

¹⁵ John Hick, Edmund S, edited by Meltzer, *The Three Faiths-One God. A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, (London: Published by: the Macmillan Press, 1989), 41-42.

¹⁶ Gregory J. Riley. (2001). *The River of God: A New Christian Origins*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers 2001

The expression of monotheism in Christianity differs with Islam. John Hick, (1988) *God and the Universe of Faith: Essay in Philosophy of Religion*, expresses monotheism as unchangeable form of divinity though often used in three different substances.¹⁷

The Concept of Allah in Christian Writings in Nigeria and the World

One of the prominent pastors in Nigeria, G.J.O Moshay in his book “*Who is this Allah?*” deliberately misinterprets the concept of Allah. He says that Allah is not a true God, that “some believe that there are two Allahs. They say the Allah of the Malay, Indonesian and Hausa Christians is different from the Allah of the Muslims in these same areas. According to them, while the Allah of the Christian is God, the Allah of the Muslim is not.”¹⁸

Another orientalist who writes falsehood about Allah is Colin Chapman. In his book *Cross and Crescent, Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, he attempts to show the difference between Islam and Christianity. He says that although the Qur’ān did actually explain Allah Himself, Allah is unknown and is different from His creations. In Christianity, God can be known through human conscience as (Jesus) and when God says, “I am Holy”¹⁹, where God defines the meaning to the word “Holy” and He does not leave to humans to decide what it may mean.²⁰

¹⁷ John Hick. *God and the Universe of Faith: Essay in Philosophy of Religion*. (London Macmillan Press 1988), 36-50.

¹⁸ *Who is this Allāh?* G.J.O Moshay, (Chick publication, California 2010), 13.

¹⁹ Holy Bible, Peter, 1:16.

²⁰ Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent, Responding to the Challenge of Islām*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press 2003). 244-251.

Chapman also describes Allah as lesser loving, caring and merciful God, unlike in Christianity where the three perspectives of divinity encompass the essential aspect of loving, caring and merciful.²¹

William C. Chittick, another prolific writer shares similar views with Chapman on the term “Allah”. He talks about divine rights, and human rights, how God has many rights over human beings and argues that God has to show love, care and mercy to humans.²²

Abd al-Masīh in his book, *Who is Allah in Islām?* Says that “The Sonship of Christ is another writing that hurt Muslims. They cannot accept another God besides Allah. Because there will be clash within the Godhead. The Son could disobey His Father at any minute.” As an example he argues that Allah is Arrogant and the most Crafty of the deception as in the Qur’an, 59:23²³ and 3:54.²⁴ While in Christianity, Christ’s humility and gentleness are shown in the following narration, “For I am gentle and humble-hearted.”²⁵ or “The Son can do nothing of Himself.”²⁶ or “The Father is greater than I.”²⁷ The above narrations reflect the love, care and mercy of the Christian God.²⁸

Similarly in another vein, another contemporary Christian theologian also made the same expression about Allah. Jerald F. Dirks in his book *The Abrahamic Faith, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Similarities and Contrasts*, claims Allah in

²¹ Ibid., 244-251.

²² William C. Chittick. *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islāmic Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Edited by Tim Winter. 2001), 218-221.

²³ “He is *Allah* beside whom *La ilaha illa Huwa* (none has the right to be worshipped but He), the King, the *Holy*, the One Free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures, the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the Supreme. Glorified is *Allah*. (High is He) above all that they associate as partners with Him.”

²⁴ “And they (disbelievers) plotted [to kill ‘Isa (Jesus)], and Allāh plotted too. And Allāh is the Best of those who plot.”

²⁵ Holy Bible, Matthew, 11:29.

²⁶ Holy Bible, John, 5:19.

²⁷ Ibid., 14:28.

²⁸ Abd al-Masīh, *Who is Allāh in Islām?* 11.

Arabic often sounds very strange and foreign to the non-Muslims' ears. He simply concludes that there is exclusive variance to be made between Allah and God, even though the fact is that the English word "God" is merely a translation of the *Arabic* word "Allah."²⁹

The Concept of Allah in Islam

The concept of *Ilāh* in Islam refers to the possession of infinite power, conveying the sense that others are dependent upon it. On the other hand, the word "Allah" which we tend to render in English as God is the essential personal name of God. *Lā Ilāhā illāha* literally means there is no *Ilāh* other than the great being known by the name Allah. *Islam* rejects characterizing God in any human form, or claiming that Allah as favouring certain people or nations based on their race or power. In reality, Allah created all human beings as equal, there is no difference between white and black, and they may differ among them and obtain His favour only through their piety and virtue.³⁰

In the Holy Qur'ān, Allah has made it clear who is He in various places and that He has different names and attributes. The Qur'ān says, "Say, call upon Allah, or call upon *Rāhmān*, by whatever name you call upon him (it is well): for to him belong the most beautiful names."³¹ Allah denies having a son and calls people upon *Tāwḥeed* by forbidding any partners to Allah. The Holy Qur'ān affirms this in the verse, "Surely, disbelievers are those said: "Allah is the third of the three (in a Trinity). But there is no *Ilāh* (god) (none who has the right to be worshipped) but One

²⁹ Jerald F. Dirks, (2004) *The Abrahamic Faith, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Similarities And Contrasts*. (Beltsville: International Graphics) 33-34.

³⁰ Ahmad Deedad, and Others. (1989). *A Collection of Comparative Religion Booklets*. (Unknown Publisher, 1989), 5-13.

³¹ Al-Qur'ān, 17:10.

Ilā (God-Allah). And if they cease not from what they say, Verily, a painful torment will befall on the disbelievers among them.”³² And He says, “Verily! I am Allah! *Lā ilāhā illā Ana* (none has the right to be worshipped but I), so worship Me, and perform *As-Ṣalāt (Iqāmāt-ās-Sālāt)* for My Remembrance”³³ and “Your Lord is not at all unjust to His slaves.”³⁴

In the Hadīth, the Prophet (saw) says, "Whoever believes in Allah and His Apostle, offers prayers perfectly and fast in the month of Ramadan, then it is incumbent upon Allah to admit him into Paradise, whether he emigrates for Allah's cause or stays in the land where he was born". The Companions of the Prophet said: "O Allah's Apostle! Should not we inform the people of that?" He said: "There are one hundreds degrees in Paradise which Allah has prepared for those who carry on *Jihad* in His cause. The distance between every two degrees is like the distance between the sky and the Earth, so if you ask Allah for anything, asked Him for the *Firdaus*, for it is the last part of Paradise and the highest part of Paradise, and at its top there is the Throne of Beneficent, and from it gushes forth the rivers of Paradise.”³⁵

Similarly, in another tradition, narrated By Ibn Abbas, “The Prophet used to say at the time of difficulty, “*Lā ilāha illāhālu Al-Alīm-Ḥalīm. Lā illālāhu Rabul-Arsh-al-azīm, la ilaha illāhah Rabus-Samawāti wa Rab-ul-Ard wa Rab-ul-Arsh Al-Karīm*” (None has the right to be worshipped but Allah. The Knower, the Most Forbearing. None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Lord of Tremendous

³² Ibid., 5:73.

³³ Ibid., 20:14.

³⁴ Ibid., 41: 46.

³⁵ Bukhāri, Ṣahīh al-Bukhāri,(New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2006), vol:9 Hadith no: 7423, p 403-404.

Throne. None has the right to be worshipped but Allah the Lord of the Heaven and the Lord of the Earth and the Lord of the Honorable Throne).”³⁶

The Concept of Allah among Classical Muslim Scholars

Al-Ghazālī (450-505AH) in his *Arrād-dūl Jāmīl lī Ilāhīyyāt Isāā bī šārīhīl-Injīl*, criticizes the Concept of Trinity. He cites some verses from the Bible which purport the union between Jesus and God such as, “Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, we ask no more, Jesus answered, have I been all the time with you, Philip, and still you do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father in me.”³⁷ Al-Ghazālī also refers to the humanity of Jesus, when Jesus told the Jews that “The Father and I are One.”³⁸ Once again the Jews chose to stone him because he blasphemed. You are a man claiming to be God? At this Jesus said to them, “It is written in your law, “I said: you are gods”? It is those to whom God’s word came who are called gods and scriptures cannot be set aside.”³⁹ Al-Ghazālī explains that this is indeed a metaphor. It is clear that is not a reality but a metaphor, and it became clear that he (Jesus) is a messenger of *Allāh*. In fact, according to Al-Ghazālī, Jesus was trying to escape because he feared for his life and thus was not worthy of those who called him the God of the world.⁴⁰

Al-Qārāfī (626-784AH), in his *Al-ajwibatūl-fākhīrāh anīl-as’īlātīl fājīrāh fī raddī alal-Yahūd wan Nasārā*, highlights a major theological error in the Bible which

³⁶ Bukhāri, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri,(New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2006), vol:9 Hadith no: 7426, p 405-406.

³⁷ Holy Bible, John, 14:8-12.

³⁸ Ibid., 10:30.

³⁹ Ibid., John 10:30-35.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Jawab al-saḥīḥ liman badala dīnālmassīh*, (Riyadh: Dar-Umayyah Printing, 1983) (Tahqeeq by Abdallah Al-Sharqawi), 117-121.