

## **DIVINE FLUIDITY AND FRAGMENTATION MODEL OF GOD: A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PROFOUND MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA**

**Ilesanmi Ajibola**

Federal College of Education, Zaria

### **Abstract**

This paper adopts an inductive qualitative research approach to address a theological gridlock between Islam and Christianity, that is, the divinity of Jesus. It argues from the common religious heritage of Christianity and Islam to present an early Judaic fluidity model of God as platform to establish a more profound interreligious dialogue between both religions. The paper hopes that the proposed model would aid a more robust conversation between Islam and Christianity on the vexed issue, and facilitate better understanding of each other's religion for a more peaceful coexistence in the country

**Keywords:** God's Fluidity and Fragmentation, Theophanies, Christian/Muslim interreligious Dialogue

### **Introduction**

This paper takes on one of the vexed issues of Christianity being considered a polytheistic religion on the basis of her teaching on Jesus as Lord. Jesus as Lord is one of the major areas of differences between Islam and Christianity. In places like Nigeria, Christians have been labelled as 'arna' or 'kafiri' (pagan) on that basis and have been persecuted at critical magnitude for the same reason.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, religious dialogue has been one of the means through which resolution of such issues have been attempted. At such instances, exploration of common basis for dialogue from the Qur'an and the Bible, like having the same Creator, common religious ancestry and that both religions have common call to serve humanity, are made. The results of such efforts are often tentative because the major point of Christians as 'arna' or 'kafiri' are not addressed. This paper takes up the issue from the common Scriptural heritage of Christianity and Islam to propose a model for a theological discourse. It argues that the ancient Judaic religion from which came the Old Testament has the idea of fluidity of divine selfhood or of fragmentation and overlapping of identity of God inherent in it. The paper proposes that the idea is not unfounded in the Qur'an and the hadith and that such of fluidity of divine

selfhood remains a reference point to Christians' acceptance and teachings on Jesus as Lord and God. The paper is not an exercise in comparative studies of the two religions, but an attempt to provide a platform from the Old Testament to help dialoguing partners in Christianity and Islam to begin to appreciate each other's spiritual and religious values and promote communion and fellowship among their adherents.

### **Background to the problem**

It must be stated from the outset that this paper does not intend a comparative study of Islam and Christianity nor of such study with Judaism and Christianity. It is an academic attempt at relating the Christian doctrine of Jesus as Lord with the idea of fluidity of *divine selfhood* or of *fragmentation* and *overlapping of identity*<sup>2</sup> as perceived by some scholars in theophanic experiences in the Old Testament. The intention is to establish an argument that the doctrine of *divine fragmentation* is not strange to early Judaism, a religion to which Islam also claim some form of relationship. It is assumed that the effort at establishing a review of Christian doctrine on the basis of the ancient Judaic belief in divine fragmentation is possible on the foundation that the message of God to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad was one, the very same message given to Abraham...<sup>3</sup> and that such idea, as confirming the Christian understanding of Jesus, as God, is not unexplainable in presenting Christianity as a monotheistic religion to Islam.

The task outlined above is processed through an inductive qualitative research approach that interacts with related Old Testament texts which justify the argument for God's fluidity. The paper engages Sommer<sup>4</sup> and Camilla Helena von Heinje<sup>5</sup> in shedding light on the Old Testament's theophanic experiences. In related manner, the perception of the Qur'an on Theophanies, divine fluidity and religious dialogue will be explored while engaging some patristic writings in the service of Christian apology on Jesus as the Son of God, co-substantial with the Father.

It is hoped that such arguments as presented in this paper would go a long way in achieving a better understanding of the Christian adherence to the teaching of Jesus as Lord within theological discourses among Christians and Muslims.

### **The Fluidity model of God**

Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema Yisrael*: שמע ישראל; "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone" [RSV] captures the profoundness and non-compromising disposition of early Judaism to monotheism. It is a defining anthem that underlies the peoples' understanding of the worship of God as distinct from the practices and understanding of their contemporaneous Ancient Near East world. However, details of the people's understanding of God's relationship with them as one God leaves much details to be

understood. This is because, from the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 through the Patriarchal narratives and experiences of various theophanies, there exist religious experiences that raise questions on the nature of relational modality of God with His people. Instances of such questions boarder on ‘God being seen’<sup>6</sup> in spite of claims that no one has seen God and live.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of God been “seen” and “not seen” has captured the attention of theologians and scholars who have attempted a study of such conceptions of the divine in ancient Near East (ANE) and in the Hebrew Bible. Quite revealing is the notion asserted by many of these scholars of a divine corporeality and elusiveness in the Hebrew Bible and ANE religious traditions. Notable among these works is the work of Benjamin Sommer who categorically infers that “the Hebrew God has a body”<sup>8</sup> and that “... God has many bodies located in sundry places in the world that God created.”<sup>9</sup> Sommer’s work explores a model that recognizes the fluid notion of divinity, where a single deity may adopt multiple forms in multiple contexts simultaneously. This idea challenges the common conceptions of divinity in terms of corporeality and fluidity and provides a better platform for the understanding of how God could be Father and Son, one God, two persons as taught in Christianity.

Sommer presents historical and textual analyses of relevant ANE and Old Testament texts to present ‘what the Jewish God is and might be’.<sup>10</sup> He argues that there are evidences of divine fragmentation, in which several divinities with a single name “somehow are and are not the same deity”.<sup>11</sup> Basic to his idea of fluidity of divine selfhood are the concept of fragmentation and overlapping of identity where he proposes fragmentation as a non contradictory paradoxical extremes nor diachronic process, but as gods manifesting in several independent yet parallel beings.<sup>12</sup>

While Sommer’s work must be read within its scholarly exercise, using it as basis for doing practical theology is quite attractive. It is a work of high relevance with high attraction to research proclivity. Its relevance in attempting an explanation of Christianity as a non-polytheistic religion is though academic but clarifies a complex dogma of one God three persons. The basis of his argument is however not new as Justin Matyr had made such claim in the past.<sup>13</sup>

### **Divine fluidity in the Old Testament**

The Bible remains a sacred scripture to the Christians, and a revelation of God, a ‘proto-Scripture of the heavenly type’, to the Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

It is a source book to what Christians know about God and a basis on which Christians conduct their everyday business – personal and public. That the Bible is relevant and primal to the adherents of the triad religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam cannot be overemphasised, yet the contemporary users are not the originally intended recipients. Obviously, given this situation cultural and semantic gap must be bridged in attaining good grasp of its contents. In this respect a comprehensive hermeneutics of the passages cannot be devoid of knowledge of the history, context, language, beliefs and practice of those whose stories and experiences are documented on those pages. This is where works as Sommer's becomes quite handy.

As noted earlier, one of the major claims of the Jews whose religious beliefs and practices are documented in the Bible is that God is One. This monotheistic notion was well guarded against undue interference of their neighbours' polytheistic religious views. To them, God is invisible and lives in heaven and according to the Bible no one has ever seen God.<sup>15</sup> In fact, God declares, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."<sup>16</sup> However, there are scriptural passages that tend to contradict this declaration; for instance in the same book of Exodus Moses was said to have spoken to God "face to face."<sup>17</sup>

The above citation is not a singular or an isolated instance of such divine encounter as will seem to contradict what God has said concerning seeing Him.<sup>18</sup> While experiences of such encounter with God could be explained away as a figurative expressions for some kind of intimate religious experiences, some other theophanic experiences defy such explanations. For instance, the Lord *appearing* to Abraham on his arrival to the land promised to him and his descendants<sup>19</sup> or in a more tangible encounter of Abraham with two angels and God Himself.<sup>20</sup> In the latter narrative, Abraham invited the visitors to a meal which they ate.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, in Genesis 32:22-30, Jacob was recorded to have wrestled with what appeared to be a man, but the man later said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God ....". Outside the burning but not consumed bush experience of Moses in Exodus 3:2 - 4:17, there are other encounters including the appearance of God to Moses with Aaron and his sons and the seventy elders in Exodus 24:9-11. All these point at the question: who was being seen? God? - Who is not seen by anyone and live? An angel? - claiming and acting God? If it was an angel, what sort of angel was he? Was the angel a manifestation of God himself, or an independent angelic being, a messenger distinct from God or a hypostasis of

God ...?<sup>22</sup> These and related questions have not only generated the question of ‘who?’ appeared, but also ‘why?’ He appeared.

Camilla Helena von Heijne did a great work in investigating who has been seen in Genesis.<sup>23</sup> She dealt extensively with such questions in her book, observing that “knowledge of the Hebrew Bible alone is not sufficient for a proper understanding of Judaism”, hence she advocated for an addition of the “oral Torah” which was also revealed by God. Consequently, she attempted a profound midrashic excursus of the issues in her book, especially, in chapter three where she examined a wide range of texts from Genesis with explicit references to *angel of the Lord/God*. Generally, her work offers insights into the Angel’s identity. Beginning with the Gen. 16:7-14 pericope on Hagar and the Angel, Heijne notes that the Angel speaks in the first person as if he were God. While the Angel never says that God sent him, the Angel talks about Yahweh as someone distinct from himself (v. 11), and as far as Hagar is concerned her encounter was with God. Similarly, in the Gen 18-19:29 pericope on the three heavenly visitors of Abraham and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, “the term ‘the Angel of the Lord’ is not mentioned, but the narrative is reminiscent of ‘the angel of the Lord text’ which describes the appearance of a divine messenger in the form of a man”.<sup>24</sup> There are other periscopes like the *Aqedah* in Genesis 22:1-19, the wooing of Rebekah (Gen 24:1-4) and Jacob’s various encounters with the Angel of the Lord.

What is clear in all the citations above is that “he who is said to have appeared to Abraham, Jacob and Moses, and is called God, is distinct from God, the Creator ... in number, but not in mind”.<sup>25</sup> Coupled with that, though not precisely clear, in most of the theophanic periscopes where the idea of presence [of the Messenger of the Lord/God] is highlighted, the motif of redemption is often linked with it. The appearances of the angel of the Lord/God at certain points of need for deliverance is significant to the overall Christian salvation story and offers a better understanding of a genuine ‘biblical’ theology which respects historical complexity when considered in the light of God’s presence in Jesus and the Church.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, we may ask, how does these serve to promote a better understanding of Christian idea of Trinity as Monotheistic to Muslims in a pluralistic society. Before this is done it is appropriate to cast a quick look at what the Qur’an makes of the Old Testament theophanies and what are its vies on the fluidity model of God.

### Qur'anic perception of Old Testament Theophanies

Keeping in mind, as stated at the outset that this paper is not a comparative study of two religions on God's fluidity, it is apt to point out that in spite of the conservative pose of Islam on the non-visibility of God,<sup>27</sup> one still find instances that betrays that motif in the Qur'an. A section has been dedicated to considering such presence below. However, a quick look is made here of what the Qur'an makes of the Old Testament's theophanies.

In most parallel theophanic narratives found in the Old Testament and in the Qur'an, the motif for the manifestations are in most instances different; accordingly, the presentations seem to differ in response to what they illustrate. Beginning with the *aqedah*, the narrative of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, the Qur'an only said that Abraham had a dream to sacrifice his son, he told his son about the dream and the latter succumbed to the demand that he be sacrificed but at the point of the sacrifice, further variation from the Biblical narrative is noticed: "We called out to him: O Abraham! You have fulfilled the dream! ... And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (i.e. a ram)..."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, while God's appearance in Gen 15:5-6 was part of the pericope in proving His being truthful to His promise, the episode in Sura 2:260/262 omits the appearance but proceeded with the inclusion of a ritual reminiscent of the puzzling form of the covenant mentioned in Genesis 15 pericope of the divided heifer.

The pericope of Abraham under the oak of Mamre and his encounter with the three visitors has a parallel in the Quran also, but the narrative is without certain details as recorded in the Bible. The visit was narrated in direct connection with Lot and the judgment on Sodom.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, the Qur'an mentioned that though Abraham offered the 'visitors' food, "... their hands went not towards it..."<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the eating of food has continually been one of the supplanting argument for the non-divine status of Jesus according to the Qur'an,<sup>31</sup> hence any inference that the three visitors of Abraham as recorded in the Bible are divine would be nullify on that ground. Be that as it may, when a similar argument was filed by Trypho to Justin, the latter reiterate that angels do eat, though not the same kind of food human beings eat.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the eating by Abraham's visitors should not be taken literally but should be "understood in the same way as when we say that fire devours everything"<sup>33</sup>

In general term, sources of theophanic narratives from which the fluidity model of God is made clear for the Christians are presented in the Qur'an in a somewhat different scenario from their Biblical parallels. As

earlier observed, there exist roles for intermediaries as angels in the Qur'an, they feature in similar pericopes where the Christian Bible also feature them but what seem to differ is the role they play in the reported context of both books; hence a variation in doctrinal use of such pericopes.

The guarding against close association of theophanies with God's direct presence in the Qur'an calls to mind the struggle of Conservative Judaism with such extensions of divine presence at the face of possible influence of their polytheistic neighbors of the Ancient Near East. It is the opinion of this paper that such variations and motif for retelling should nevertheless deter a reasonable attentiveness to the meaning derivable in the context of the documents' composition.

### **Perception of the Qur'an on God's fluidity and the ensuing Trinitarian doctrine**

#### *On God's fluidity*

In the above section, it was stated that theophanic narratives of the Old Testament are rendered differently in the Qur'an, probably to guard against inferences that could lead to polytheistic interpretations of such theophanies; however, there are significant references in the Qur'an to establish traits of the divine fluidity tradition in Islamic heritage.

It was demonstrated through the work of Sommer above that hermeneutical analyses of relevant passages from the Bible establish the claim of God having a body. This claim is made in spite of claimed non-visibility of God and despite the fact that no one sees God and lives. If the religion of Mohammad and the Scripture of Islam share basic religious stories with the Old Testament –a product of a people's culture, is it not likely that certain motif underscoring the understanding of God and His relationship with the human from that background be evident in the Qur'an too? Thus, it of interest to this paper to ask if *Allah* could be said to also have a body and be seen.

#### *God's fluidity in Islam*

As with the Old Testament instances, there are references in the Qur'an and the *hadith* that suggest bodily appearance of Allah to Mohammad. One must however observe that in many translations of the Qur'an, the angel Jibril [Gabriel] is often fingered as the subject of such instances. Nevertheless, apart from passages that specifically make affirmative claims of God's appearances,<sup>34</sup> some of those attributed to the angel Jibril, in some cases, do

not make meaningful conclusions when read as such. An example of the latter case is found in the following passage from the Holy Qur'an:

By the Star when it goes down, - Your Companion is neither astray nor being misled. Nor does he say (ought) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him: He was taught by one Mighty in Power, Endued with Wisdom: for he appeared (in stately form); While he was in the highest part of the horizon: Then he approached and came closer, And was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer; So did ((Allah)) convey the inspiration to is Servant- (conveyed) what He (meant) to convey.<sup>35</sup>

Questions that comes to mind here include, who *approached* Muhammad in visible form... *Mighty in Power and endued with Wisdom... convey inspiration to His servant? Who conveyed inspiration to His servant?* Going by claims that it was angel Jibril that is referred to in Qur'anictheophanies, the reference will only make *sense* if its meaning is taken to mean Mohammad is the servant of Jibril. If the passage is taken as referring to angel Jibril, how should one understand the *Hadith* that specifically state that Mohammad said:

I saw my Lord, the Exalted and Glorious in the most beautiful form. He said: What do the Angels in the presence of Allah contend about? I said: Thou art the most aware of it. He then placed HIS PALM between my shoulders and I felt its coldness in my chest and I came to know what was in the Heavens and the Earth. He recited: 'Thus did we show Ibrahim the kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth and it was so that he might have certainty.'<sup>36</sup>

A quick note that should be taken while the debates continue concerning who appeared in recorded theophanies in Islam, *Allah? or Jibril?* is the claim by many Islamic Scholars who have warned, that 'Allah literally descends and ascends, and that he actually does have hands, shin, etc.,' and that such expressions should not be considered a metaphoric or figurative expression.<sup>37</sup> According to Shamoun, it is a position held by the majority of scholars ... and it is not advisable to interpret such traditions figuratively<sup>38</sup>



### *On the Trinity*

Although, Mohammad did say that Jesus was neither God nor an angel, but a man,<sup>39</sup> he did acknowledge that he has no earthly father and was raised up to heaven by God.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, apart from saying that Jesus was raised from the dead to heaven,<sup>41</sup> he asserted that Jesus will come down from heaven to earth as a sign for the coming of the hour of the day of resurrection.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Mohammad affirms that Jesus' mother is in heaven<sup>43</sup>. Thus, either by coincidence or by design, Muhammad's Christology and Mariology apparently agree to some extent with similar Christian opinion but widely differ in Jesus' relationship and place in the Godhead. He does not subscribe to the notion of the Trinity. Mohammad's non-acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity could be presumed on three arguments:

1. God cannot be seen<sup>44</sup>
2. God cannot indulge in act of procreation by which He could get a son
3. God is the Third of Three.<sup>45</sup>

The first is reminiscent of defence in cases where monotheistic idea of God need be defended against to persons, one God. The defense is perhaps to guard against relativizing strict monotheistic character where the doctrine of sonship would be struggled against.<sup>46</sup>

On the second argument, Surah 2:116 said: They say: "(Allah) hath begotten a son" and in Surah 39:4, it says, "Had Allah wished to take to Himself a son; He could have chosen whom He pleased out of those whom He doth create: but Glory be to Him! (He is above such things.) He is Allah, the One, the Irresistible." Note here a careful use of the word 'chosen'; divine paternity is out of the discussion, because it was conceived in the sense of procreation through sexual engagement. According to Dayton,<sup>47</sup> Muhammad perceived this language to mean that Christians believe that God literally engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary, the mother of Jesus. In light of the historical and religious context into which Muhammad was born, it is no surprise that he would object to a doctrine he believed mirrored the pagan "trinities" existing in Arabia. In summary, the Qur'an proposes that Christians believe the following. First, Mary is literally the wife of God. Second, Allah physically engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary and Jesus of Nazareth is the physical offspring resulting from this carnal encounter. Third, the

Christian concept of the Trinity resembles paganism, teaching that a high god (Yahweh) took for Himself a wife (Mary) and sired a half-man-half-God son.

Interestingly, neither the New Testament nor the Qur'an makes such obnoxious claim of sexually procreative activity by God. Both scriptures attest to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> Hence, Jesus is better understood, for the sake of lingual clearness, as *ibnu'llah* and not *waladu'llah* in which most passage that denies the sonship of Jesus is often expressed.<sup>49</sup> The former expresses sonship in metaphorical sense, while the latter describe offspring resulting from the sexual union of a male and female.<sup>50</sup>

On the third point, evidence of a misunderstanding of the Christian idea of the Trinity is noticeable in the very key text often used in rejecting the teaching: "And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?'"<sup>51</sup> It is claimed by reference to this question that Christians ascribes a human wife to God in the person of Mary. In fact scholar as IbnTaymiyya has consistently made this claim<sup>52</sup> in spite of abundant resources available to make such teaching clearer.

The possibility of a probable misconception arising from some Christians that include Mary the mother of Jesus as part of the Trinity may not be ruled out here.<sup>53</sup> Such misconception is derivable from a logic that would conclude that since Mary was assumed into heaven as taught by Modestus,<sup>54</sup> she lives in heaven with her son and God – hence, the Trinity as Father, Son and Mother. To Mohammad, this is polytheism. Obviously, if the Trinitarian formula is conceived as such, it is polytheistic.

Conclusively, since neither the Islamic concept of Mary as member of the Trinity, nor the understanding of Jesus as *waladu'llah* is what the Christian meant by the doctrine of the trinity, what is needed is a clarification from the Christians of their doctrine on the Trinity and an educative openness from the Muslims for a theological discourse.

### **The fluidity model of God as Theological basis for inter-religious dialogue**

Initially Mohammad did not operate any clear segregating principles between Christians and Muslims in Mecca, however it is characteristic of any multi-religious society to have differences in doctrines and practices which often breed dichotomy in relationships. Nevertheless, it is instructive and relevant to this paper to note that according to al-Bukhari in the work of Murad Wilfried Hofmann, "the Prophet of Islam once said: One who hurts a *dhimmi* hurts me, and one who hurts me, hurts Allah".<sup>55</sup> By *dhimmi*s meant non-Muslims in an Islamic State. The principles on which the on-going is

operational is the Qur'anic interfaith principles which Roger Boase highlight as including non-compulsion in matters of faith, avoidance of ridicule of others' beliefs, non-association with "those who ridicule our faith", speaking with courtesy, invitation to reasoning together, "avoidance of idle speculation about the nature of God" and competing in good works.<sup>56</sup>

Since in principle, Islam encourages non-compulsion in matters of faith,<sup>57</sup> and categorically recognises divergence in race and religious creeds as God's doing,<sup>58</sup> what is required is not necessarily dialogue aimed at conversion of one to the other's religion but an educative dialogue to know what the other is doing and accept him/her in that context. After all, the same Qur'an advocates and encourages the use of reasoning in the understanding of doctrines.<sup>59</sup>

Given the above background, it must be stated here clearly that the Christian doctrine of and believe in the Trinity is neither an arbitrary doctrine nor polytheistic. We have stated that the basis for this teaching and belief is well rooted in the parent religion of Christianity and Islam, namely Judaism. On similar premise of what Sommer later referred to as fluidity model of God<sup>60</sup> in which evident overlapping and fragmentation motif of God is experienced and expressed in the Old Testament, the Christians sees these instances as visits from "the angel of the Lord".<sup>61</sup> Since God cannot be seen, a fact to which both ancient Judaism and Islam squarely agreed, the answer to the question of who appears and fully operates as God in theophanies as recorded in both traditions is, while being enigmatic, considered by Christians as Christ.<sup>62</sup> To the Christians each of those instances were Christophanies which culminated in the incarnation; the conception of Jesus by Mary under the influence of the Holy Spirit, a fact that is not denied by Islam.

It is not disputed that Muhammad rejected divine paternity of Jesus in the biological sense but we must also note that he did not place a conclusive blanket on what the Christian understanding of Jesus Sonship could be. Accordingly, the Qur'an said, "Say: If the All-merciful [God] had a son, I would be the very first to worship [him]."<sup>63</sup> Of course, such statement as this could be interpreted from different stand points. In fact to ChawkatMoucarry "some Islamic commentators believe that in this passage Muhammad was stating that, if it could be proven that Allah had a son, he would be the very first to submit unto and worship him".<sup>64</sup>

This task of proving the Sonship of Jesus was a task taken up in the early Christian church where the Christians also had to deal with similar questions of concern to issues on Jesus' Sonship. Trypho, for instance, had told Justin Martyr: "let you who are of Gentile origin, who are all named Christians after Christ, profess him to be the *Lord* and *Christ* and *God*, as the Scripture signify" but Trypho, like his fellow Jews was not going to take that.<sup>65</sup> Arguing from the background of Moses, the Servant of God, who 'speak to God face to face, plainly and not in riddles and sees God's form',<sup>66</sup>

Justin argued that, that same Moses “tells us that he who appeared under the oak tree of Mamre was God.”<sup>67</sup>

In the line of Justin’s position, Tertullian also argued that since no one has seen God and lived, what was seen and experienced were rehearsals of the incarnation by the Son,<sup>68</sup> and a proof that the Son is God who has often been seen at various points of theophanic experiences. According to Tertullian, in a way analogous to the Sun and its rays, a Tree and its root, a Fountain and its river – the □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ [emanation]<sup>69</sup> is the Father related to the Son.

Hippolytus also perceived the same of the Father and the Son as being of the same substance but different individuals. The Father [One God] was alone in Himself ... in this solitary, by exercise of reflection He brought forth the Logos first as a ratiocination of the universe, conceived and residing *in the divine mind*. ... the Logos alone of this God is from God Himself ... being the substance of God. He spoke by the Prophets but became manifest to us at incarnation and thus became Son.<sup>70</sup>

Arguments for the third person of the Trinity is consequent on such antecedents as have been discussed in this paper, that is, of a ‘more-than-singular God’ concept where a second God as a viceroy to God the Father is one of the oldest of theological ideas in Israel.<sup>71</sup> Hence, If this idea is fully expressed in the Old Testament and in spite of the differences in details as recorded by the Qur’an of these theophanic narratives, the Qur’an still have records of God having a body and was seen by Muhammad, conclusions reached on the bases of the theophanies shouldn’t be a reason for aspersions as differences in perceptions among Muslims and Christians only tend to have issued from variation in interest.

## Conclusion

The bottom-line in this paper is that Christians are not polytheists but see Jesus Christ as that whom “God has begotten of himself”<sup>72</sup> as “...when one fire kindles another”, or in a way akin to Justin’s analogy that “when we utter a word, it can be said that we beget the word, but not by cutting it off, in the sense that our power of uttering words would thereby be diminished”.<sup>73</sup> Going by the common experiences of Islam and Christianity variously documented in their various Scriptures, it is established that while both religions perceive their religions as monotheistic, they both associate invisibility to God as an attribute, yet recorded instances of human beings seeing God. Such narratives invariably give rise to ambiguity and questions as to who was seen. While such appearances were occasionally ascribed to a particular angel in the Qur’an, instances where such inferences could not be derived without implying idolatry abound and are cited in this work. However,

in Christianity such ambiguity was explained as instances of God's fragmentation in a fluid expression, they were Christophanies – considered as a rehearsal of the eventual incarnation of Jesus, God became man, and dwell among us; *ipso facto* the belief in one God – expressed as Father, Son... may not be seen as polytheism.

## Notes

1. This is discussed in the work of John N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008. 21-23.
2. Benjamin Sommer. *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 16
3. See Paul Heck L. *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity and Religious Pluralism*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009. P.45 and Busse Heribert. *Islam, Judaism and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations*. Translated by Allison Brown. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1988. p.29.
4. Benjamin Sommer. *The Bodies of God*.
5. Camilla Helena von Heijne. *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis*. Germany: De Gruyter, 2010.
6. Genesis 18:1, Jacob: Genesis 32:30; Moses: Exodus 33:11; Manoah and his wife: Judges 13:22-24. For other instances when the Bible reported the sighting of God by human beings see "God can be seen?" in <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/contra/seen.html> accessed 26th November 2015.
7. Exodus 33:20, John 1:18, 4:12
8. Sommer, *Bodies of God*, p.1
9. Sommer, *Bodies of God*, p.1. He further define a body as "something located in a particular place at a particular time, whatever its shape or substance" p.2
10. Adam Kirsch, *Tablet*. Review of *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*. Heavenly Bodies : Tablet Magazine - A New Read on... <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/books/18771/heavenly-bodies...>
11. Sommer, p.13
12. *Ibid*. p.16

13. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*. Tr. Thomas B. Falls, rev. Thomas Halton, ed. Michael Slusser. Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2003
14. Busse, *Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, p.29
15. Exodus 33:20 and John 1:18
16. Exodus 33:20
17. For instance in the same book of Exodus and in the same chapter 33:19-23 , Moses was said to have spoken to God “face to face.”
18. See footnote #6 above
19. Genesis 12:7-9
20. Genesis 18:1-33
21. Ibid, v8 note that in the Qur’anic version, the visitor did not eat the meal offered by Abraham. Mohammad had used this argument against the divinity of Jesus saying that Jesus was neither God nor an angel, but a man, a clear indication of which was the fact that he ate food. See Sura 11:69 – 70 and Sura 5:75/79
22. Camilla Helena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis. Germany: De Gruyter, 2010. p.2*
23. Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis*
24. Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord*, p.61
25. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*. Tr. Thomas B. Falls, rev. Thomas Halton, ed. Michael Slusser. Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2003. 56,11
26. Samuel Terrien. *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978. Preface.
27. See Quran 6:103: “Vision cannot grasp Him....”. The narrative in Quran 7:143 on the request of Moses to see God and God’s reaction to the request is also instructive on human inability to see God (‘My Lord, show me (Yourself) that I may look at You.’ (God) said, ‘You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me.’ But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Moses fell unconscious”).
28. Sura 37:104-107
29. Sura 11:69/72-73/76; 15:51-56; 51:24-30
30. ibid
31. See Sura 11:69 – 70 and Sura 5:75/79
32. See Psalm 78:25. To Justin, angels are fed in heaven, for in speaking of the food with which the Israelites were fed in the desert, it was described as the food of angels.
33. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*. 57,2

34. As having a face, S. 89:21-23; eyes, 96:14;52:48; 20:39; 54:14; Hand, 39:67; 48:10 a throne, 81:19-25; 57:4, Adam as icon of God, in *SahihBukhari, Volume 8, Book 74, Number 246:Narrated by Abu Huraira and reported on-line by Abdul-Quddus: Allah: Evidence Of An Anthropomorphic Deity.* <http://khalas.wordpress.com/2007/03/02/allah-evidence-of-an-anthropomorphic-deity/> Retrieve 5<sup>th</sup> Dec.2012.
35. *S. 53:1-10 (Yusuf Ali's translation)*
36. This passage was quoted by Sam Shamoun in *allah - an immaterial entity or an invisible man? Referring to (6:75)*. According to him Darimi reported it in a mursal form and Tirmidhi also reported. (*see, Tirmidhi Hadith, Number 237- ALIM CD-ROM Version*)
37. This is an extract by Sam Shamoun [<http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun.html> ] from series of Islamic Scholars whose opinions reflect the view that Allah has a body but not in the manner of a human being; however, that should not mean that because we can't comprehend such as human, we should infer a figurative use of that expression. Sam provided his sources as include: 'Awn al-Ma'bud, I, 506-507) (Sunan Abu Dawud, English Translation with Explanatory Notes by Prof. Ahmad Hasan [Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, Booksellers & Exporters; Lahore, Pakistan, 1984], Volume I, II. Kitab Al-Salat (Book of Prayer), Chapter 462: Which Part of Night is Better (For Prayer)?, p. 346
38. Sam Shamoun *ibid*
39. *Sura 5:75/79*
40. *Sura 3:55/48*
41. *Sura 3:55/48*
42. *Sura 43:61*
43. *Sura5:17/19*
44. *Sura 6:103*
45. *Sura 5:73*
46. *See SommerBodies on the Elitist's fluidity model by the Deuteronomy and Deuteronomist school.*
47. Dayton Hartman 'Did Muhammad Deny the Trinity or Paganism?' <http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/hartman/sonship.html>
48. *Luke 1:34-35 and Sura 19:18-22*
49. *Dayton, Did Muhammad Deny the Trinity, ibid*
50. *Dayton, ibid*
51. *Surah 5:116*
52. *IbnTaymiyya, A Muslim Theologians Response to Christianity.* (Delmar, NY.:Caravan Books, 1984), 260.

53. BusseIslam, *Judaism and Christianity*, reported a Christian sect that worshipped the Virgin in part of the Arabia, the Collyridian/Philomarianites and noted that Mohammad might have had some form of contact with such group. Thus in Sura 5:116, he included Mary as part of the Trinity.
54. The Patriarchy of Jerusalem who was said to be a contemporary of Mohammad. A prominent theologian who had taught Mary's assumption into heaven and Mohammad perhaps heard of the doctrine.
55. MuradWilfried Hofmann. "Religious pluralism and Islam in a Polarized World." In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Peace Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*. Edited by Roger Boase.Foreword by HRH Prince Hassan Bin Talal. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. (2005) 242.
56. Roger Boase. "Ecumenical Islam: A Muslim Response to Religious Pluralism." In *Islam and Global Dialogue: Peace Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*. Edited by Roger Boase.Foreword by HRH Prince Hassan Bin Talal. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. (2005) 252-3
57. Sura 2:256
58. Sura 42:8, 2:148, 22:67, 11:118, 42:8
59. Sura 3:65
60. This concept has been discussed in details on pages 4-8 above
61. Genesis 16:7-14; Genesis 22:11-18; Judges 5:23; 2 Kings 19:35
62. Detail study of this could be found inJohn McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. (Harper and Brothers: Baker Book House, 1981).
63. Surah 43:81
64. ChawkatMoucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 187 quoted by Dayton Hartman, *Did Muhammad Deny the Trinity or Paganism?*
65. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*. 64,1
66. Numbers 12:7-8
67. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*. 56,1
68. *Against Praxeas*, chp 8,14
69. *Ibid*, 8,13
70. Hippolytus, *against Noetius*29
71. Boyarin, 43
72. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 61,1