

Fetishism, Islam and Christianity in West Africa

1. Fetishism

Idea of God. Mande peoples in West Africa believe the Source of being created twin children from whom sprang all godkind and mankind. While primal deity could not be directly concerned with human affairs, the heavenly twin was closely associated with man.

The Borgu people have a legend to explain why God is so remote. God used to dwell with man, but one day a woman was pounding grain energetically in a mortar. She threw the pestle so high in the air that it hit God in the backside. He retreated far away, so man has to rely on the spirits who live nearby for his welfare. The true story is found in the Bible. Adam's wife Eve was tempted by Satan to eat of a forbidden fruit. She ate and gave it to Adam who also ate. Having sinned by rebelling against God's word, God then drove them out of the garden where he had dwelled with them.

The spirit world and fetishes. The spirit world is worshipped by means of communal cults which fall into several different categories. There are family cults of ancestral spirits, royal clan and twin cult, and territorial cults of territorial spirits. There are also cults of mystery societies or initiatory associations like 'gari'.

The cultivator fears the annoyed spirits of nature or the dead will trouble him. If not placated the soil will cease to germinate the seed as he sows and the bush remains hostile. So every village retains its cycle of animistic observance to ensure the falling of the rain and the fertility of the soil. The word 'fetish' refers to a material symbol which is the abode of supernatural power, to which offerings are made.

Possession is what occurs when a spirit comes upon or enters a human being. It is manifested in various ways, especially in forms of hysteria and particular illnesses. Rituals involve dances of possession executed by mediums called 'horses'.

Stimulated by music the mediums dance until the spirit mounts its horse, who then enters into a trance.

Magic and amulets. Medicine is strictly impersonal power. It is the unexplainable force inherent in something or someone, which enables it to heal, protect or grant prosperity. Medicine which heals, like European medicine and herbs from the bush have an effect that can be scientifically explained. Amulets, medicine bags and charms which are manufactured by a medicine man are not so innocent as they involve sacrifice or invocation to spirits who are responsible for conferring the magical powers. This is occultism, involving mysterious, magical, supernatural powers.

A medicine man possesses this power acquired through contact with a spirit. It is often possessed by persons like hunters, chiefs and twins. It can be acquired intentionally through occultic practices or involuntarily through sleeping under a tree or other haunted place.

In practice magic and religion are not clearly separated. When the two elements are combined, then priests act as medicine men. A pagan priest offers prayer with libation to spirits. A medicine man is a magical herbalist, exorcist and charm maker. A medium communes with spirits. An amulet refers to a material object which houses impersonal power.

Sorcery and witchcraft Illness, misfortune and death are ascribed to many causes: black magic, the actions of spirits or people with special powers, metamorphosed sorcerers, witches or taboo breaking. There may be a distinction between sorcerer and witch. The sorcerer employs his powers for anti-social ends, while the witch has a power lodged within that may be used for evil purposes, often involuntarily. A witch can catch and eat souls from a person's shadow or from his reflection in water. Others can metamorphose or change into animals or birds.

Divination. The part played by divination cannot be overestimated. No important decision is made or act undertaken unless the signs are consulted and prove propitious. Automatic methods employed include augury from the movement of animals and birds, deduction from the entrails of animals and sortilege with kola nuts, cowries or pebbles. Apart from these automatic methods, all employ dreams, ordeal, spirit possession and necromancy.

Man and his destiny. Beliefs concerning the nature of man and his destiny after death play a significant role in people's outlook on life. The Busa believe that man consists of a body animated by life. Soul and spirit are not thought of as separate principles, but are referred to by the word for reflection or shadow. Life is the vital force which animates the body and has nothing personal about it. The spirit is closely connected with the body during life and remains linked with it after death until burial or disintegration. It is the spiritual part of man. It has no connection with visible shadow, also called by the same name, although it can be caught by a witch from the shadow. It travels during sleep, and dreams are its actual experiences. It never dies. It has form and after death is called an 'underworld inhabitant'. There is also something called 'hair' which is that part of a person which controls fear and courage. To kill the 'hair' is to discourage, to have strong 'hair' is to be brave and powerful against medicine, a quality necessary for hunters. The 'hair' of wild animals can adversely effect people. It may be another way of referring to the spirit. When a person is frightened, one says 'his spirit clung to tree'.

Morality. The ethical code of the past was built up through the ages and formed part of the communal heritage. The moral range was relatively limited, being confined to the tribe or language group. Conformity to the code of the group was essential for the well-being of society. The bond of kinship inspires fear for the welfare of the community. Stinginess and stealing for example are serious sins among the Boko, Bokobaru and Busa.

2. Islam

On being a Muslim. Islam is not taught as a system of belief, but as a legal way. Within the sphere of village life one can find an authority on the details of ritual ablutions and prayer, but no-one who knows anything about theology. The Prophet is reported to have said: "Islam is external, faith is of the heart." Clergy regard the law books as authoritative for what constitutes a Muslim, and since they are primarily concerned with what one does, not what one believes, ritual action became the standard of differentiation between believer and unbeliever.

Islam is, however, a fixed system of belief, not subject to change, formulated by advanced literate peoples and unrelated to the life of any particular people. Islam introduces an ideological dualism, formerly unknown to animist society, between God and Satan, good and evil spirits, this world and the next, heaven and hell, and new legalistic categories of prohibited and permitted. It sets up a tension between 'believers' and 'unbelievers' (kifiri).

Although theology and cult are closely related, like myth and ritual in the pre-Islamic age, performance of the same rites is more significant than common beliefs. Ideas about God and man are vague and associated with elements of pre-existing cosmology. Islam is primarily a distinctive way of performing religious acts, observing specific taboos and social customs.

Allah. Characteristic of Islamic monotheism is the conception of God as illimitable power, excluding all other except spirit being he has himself created, like angels and jinn. Although the polytheism to which Islam is opposed is plurality of gods, not plurality of spirits, acceptance of Islam involves abandoning worship of all beings other than God. The spirits are his servants, but they remain of greater practical importance in the affairs of man than God.

Allah is not thought of as personal spirit who invites believers into communion with himself. Allah is supreme power, utterly removed from men, but giver of magical powers. Where thought of as the God who rewards and punishes, he cannot be approached, even by clergy. They are interpreters of his revealed word, not intermediaries. Clergy can tell nothing about God except a string of attributes. Thought about God can only be speculative and that is forbidden. It is not necessary to know anything about God in order to believe in him. Belief in God shows itself in readi-ness to perform the rituals and order life as he has ordained.

Mohammed was born in Mecca about 570 AD, that is 570 years after the birth of Jesus Christ. He was exposed to some Jewish and Christian teaching at an early age. He was of a religious and contemplative nature and upon his marriage to a wealthy widow Khadijah, had time for thought and meditation. Finally in a vision received in a cave at Hira, he felt himself called to be the prophet of the one true God, Allah. He was burdened to warn the Arabs about the coming judgment day and to bring them into utter obedience and submission to Allah in order to escape his anger. He began to tell his friends, but not until 10 years later did he share his message with outsiders. There was much opposition in Mecca but enthusiastic admirers carried the word to Medina. In AD 622 Mohammed fled from the persecution in Mecca and settled in Medina. The flight to Medina, called the Hijira, is year one in the Islamic calendar.

Mohammed was a man of strong personality and will, a powerful administrator with the ability to make his followers feel that they were respected and fairly treated. Later the new religion spread throughout the Arabian peninsula. At the time of his death in AD 632, he had succeeded in creating a religious force which encompassed the economic, cultural and political structure of everyday life.

In the years after his death, the succeeding Caliphs expanded Islam across North Africa and into southern Europe. At this time also, the Qur'an was compiled.

The Qur'an. Islam distinguishes itself from other world religions by its holy book, the Qur'an, which to Muslims takes the preeminence over all other scriptures. Mohammed claimed to have heard God's voice through an intermediary (some say the angel Gabriel). The words are said to be parts of a book which exists in its complete form only in heaven. The Qur'an was not compiled during Mohammed's lifetime but told verbally to his followers who memorized it at the time and later transcribed it.

The form and content of some chapters of the Qur'an were obviously affected by the current political conditions such as attacks of Mohammed's opponents. His exposure to Jewish and Christian sects influenced his thinking as well. The Qur'an retells some Jewish and Christian traditions and Bible stories with changes. Mohammed claimed that Jews and Christians had corrupted the Bible and that what he received from God was actually the inspired and final version of God's message to mankind. Its influence is enormous. It is the basis of life, not through direct study, but through the legal treatises taught. All clergy are imbued with the feeling of the superiority of their book. It is considered by all Muslims as true and authoritative.

The spirit world. Although Islam lays stress upon the unique God, it does not deny the existence of spiritual agencies, for this is affirmed by the Qur'an and the question is: What is the relationship between God and spirits whereby the Muslim may know what attitude to adopt towards them?

Islam sanctifies amulets and condemns fetishes. It condemns any form of relationship with the supernatural world that would limit the sovereignty of God. Clergy endeavour to persuade people to cease making offerings to spirits as independent guarantors of sanctions of conduct, and their efforts are directed towards undermining the authority of heads of communal cults.

On the other hand, Muslims as much as pagans, regard a spirit world as very real and propitiation of nature spirits continues. Cults of nature spirits exist in some form or other among all Muslims, whatever their stage of islamization. Former spirits either help God in the government of the world or join the disbelieving jinn whom he has created and allows to exist. The good are regarded as intermediaries, executing God's wishes, but having a measure of autonomy within the limits God imposes.

Formerly the basic classification was between spirits of the village who were worshipped and those of the bush, to guard against whom magical measures were taken. But following its practice of ideological antithesis Islam splits them into categories of good and bad, pagan spirits regarded as harmful to man and Islamic spirits who are neutral. So there are believing and unbelieving spirits. Islam brings the word jinn as a synonym for spirits in general or depersonalized spirit agencies, without necessarily displacing old terminology. Clergy are supposed to enter into relations with the good jinn for the purpose of divination and magic. The difference between pagan and Muslim medicine men is that pagans offer prayer to spirit-channels whilst clergy invoke God, Prophet, angels and jinn, even in bad medicine. Islam is unable to displace private cults of possession practiced mainly by women. (e.g. 'gari')

When a community adopts Islam the priest must be displaced from his socio-central position, but the magician and the diviner are allowed to exercise their functions, even though the clergy in their analogous role claim to be able to perform them. Islamic clergy add to their proper vocation that of magician. They make and sell innumerable charms. He performs his magical functions within the domain of Islam and his attitude to magic is based, not on the end, but the method employed. If a lawful method is employed to cause harm to an enemy the law is not transgressed, but the law is transgressed if someone is healed by invoking black jinn. In their efforts to dissuade people from sacrificing to spirits, clergy offer protection through Islamic magical method as opposed to placating them, although it is almost impossible for them to avoid prescribing such offerings. Islam brings no change in psychological attitudes toward magic.

Islamic amulets involve prayer to God as well as occult knowledge. Amulets are confined to two forms: 1. written and worn on the body or placed on animals and objects for protective purposes, and 2. amulets written on slate, washed off, and either drunk or rubbed on the body. An amulet contains verses from the Qur'an, names of angels and jinn, mysterious formulas or tables, description of aim and sometimes the taboos which must be observed if its power is to be retained. Some are protective or preventive, designed to ward off a particular evil. Others are causative or positive, to enable one to obtain wealth, women, children, power and the like. Others are vindictive, while others are counter-active, to render bad magic innocuous or turn it against the agent. Native methods are associated with written amulets by adding roots, stones and other objects possessing power.

Personal amulets are worn around the neck, on the body or on the arm. Others are buried under the doorway or in the centre of the room, or written on boards and hung on sticks at the entrance to cultivation, to guard against thieves whom it drives mad. General taboos are that amulets must not be opened, left alone, or touch water, and when taken off for bathing must not be placed on the ground. Certain acts diminish its power, ie. sitting on a mortar, showing the soul of one's feet when seated, walking over a hearth, and standing to urinate. By this means a cleric can get a pagan whom he sells an amulet to observe Islamic taboos.

Charms may be vocal as well as material. Recital of incomprehensible Arabic formulas is taken to be incantation and is used to bind against theft and find stolen property.

Divination Islam does not change the psychological attitude to the practice. Islamic clerics seek to discredit pagan diviners and secure all custom for himself.

They use geomancy, numerals, the Qur'an or Arabic book of divination and the rosary. (tasuba) Adherence to Islam has everywhere influenced popular belief in lucky and unlucky days. The Hausa will not shave on Thursday nor wash on the last day of the month.

Holy water is the process of washing Qur'anic texts from wooden slates, bottling the water, and using it as medicine, either internally or externally. It has many uses. It is rubbed over the body and drunk to drive out possessive spirits and cure illnesses.

Muslims share the belief in and fear of sorcery and witchcraft and have their own agents and counter-agents. No essential distinction exists between the employment of magic in sorcery and its use for good purposes. Islam allows magic, but condemns sorcery. But clerics are confused as to whether it is the method employed or the intention or both that matters. The boundary between black and white magic in Islam is rather vague. Since the powers and methods employed for both are the same, clergy are regarded as practitioners of the one and other. The Hausa have a vast catalogue of charms to harm.

Example 1. The cleric mixes a powder of ground-up roots and herbs in a small clay basin of water and chants incantations until the soul of the person can be seen in the water. Then an iron or brass arrow is shot from a bow of similar metal into the reflection, whereupon, if successful, the water becomes red, the victim becomes ill, weakens and dies unless counter-measures are taken.

Example 2. The cleric puts the fat of a black he-goat inside the tip of a duiker horn, inserts needles each bearing the name of a spirit, and places a cover over the horn. After incantation he removes the cover, calls a spirit, and tells it where to go. The spirit-needle travels any

distance provided it does not have to cross running water, and when it reaches the victim pierces his heart.

Deeper islamization in no way diminishes belief in and fear of witchcraft. The main function of medicine men is to counteract witches, to heal, administer swear-medicine and interpret dreams. He also acts as exorcist, rain-maker, diviner, herbalist and if necessary black magician.

Afterlife Involves the examination as to whether one is a Muslim or pagan, reckoning up good and bad deeds, being judged on the day of Judgment, and being consigned to heaven or hell.

Death is thought of as a break in the continuity of life, whether the soul is thought to be asleep in the grave or in some form of intermediate state before the Day of Resurrection. The continuous tradition of eternity of the African family is snapped, for the personality of rewards and punishment, of members being consigned to different quarters of purgatory and eventually to heaven and hell, means that families may be separated.

Morality The adoption of Islam implies a radical transference of the values upon which the unity and continuity of the group depend from the old authorities to God. Islam introduces a legal morality of universal application whose sanction in practice is the books of the law. In theory it tolerates no authority other than its law in the government of individual and social life.

Islamic moral consciousness is also communal, but in addition its morality, with its doctrine of reward and punishment, is much more personal. The individual can obtain salvation apart from the group. The great change Islam brings lies in its exclusive claim for the supremacy of its system of moral conduct. Practical ethics are colored by the legal maxims of Islam, but rest upon a double basis: approved local custom and universal Islamic law amalgamated as the ethics of the community.

In practice a third determinant of conduct makes its appearance - the will of the spirits. Formerly the spirits were an integral part of religion, but after islamization and the decay of cult associations they no longer fulfill a true functional role in community life. Spirit practices are illegitimate and upholders of Islam often find themselves in difficulty. They recognize the reality of the spirits, and are unable to prevent their wives from participating in 'ta'na' rites from fear of the consequences. So old mechanical ethics persist within the Islamic framework of life, and genuine Islamic piety combines with gross superstition. Charms placed on crops work the same way, whether they are Muslim or pagan, in bringing calamity upon the thief. Supernatural forces are neutral in essence; whether the result is good or bad depends upon what you do or avoid doing.

Belief in predestination and resignation to one's lot is characteristic of the religious outlook on life. However this attitude to life does not in practice find itself in conflict with beliefs in divination or the use of protective charms.

To the clerics it is by keeping the law that man is saved. There are different standards for clerics and people. The learned are absorbed in rigid legalism, content with the practical observance of the law, but the majority are not expected to keep it. What the clerics seek is such consistency of character and conduct as will distinguish a Muslim community. Islamic taboos are accepted without difficulty. You have only to hear Muslims shouting 'kafiri' at a

child who is urinating while standing instead of squatting to realize that such a taboo forms one of the distinguishing marks between a Muslim and a pagan.

Under custom if a man transgressed the ethics of the family, the ancestral spirits punished him. Islam denies this and asserts that it is God who punished even though a spirit is the instrument. The old morality was bound up with community life and infractions were dangerous to communal well-being. Islamic law is not bound up in this way to the community, and many elements find difficulty into being accepted into the body of approved custom. Thus in practice different standards of value are accorded to different parts of the code.

In the eyes of the clerics omission of the prayers may be more sinful than idol worship. Behaviour disapproved by Islam may be retained by the people as part of the body of social custom. As a result all theocratic states have degenerated and the representatives of Islam have made no attempt to purify the moral law of magical elements.

A primary idea of religion is the distinction between sacred and profane. Everything in any way concerned with religion is regarded as infused to some degree with supernatural power.

Holiness is the power attributed to sacred persons, things or actions that would ordinarily be regarded as natural or profane. The God of Islam is entirely self-contained and beyond all intimate relation with his creation, therefore the idea of holiness has gone. In Islam, God is supreme will and power. His authority must not be limited by ethical ideas of his holiness. All that God wills is permitted and all that he does not will is tabooed. So the Muslim does not need to distinguish between good and evil as such, but between what God allows and what he prohibits and this gives a particular cast to moral sanctions. To the Muslim religion means a law which controls and regulates man's whole life. In Islam the 'clean' eclipses the 'holy', so there is no essential difference between ceremonial law and moral law. In practice sin (durunna) is applied to anything of which the community disapproves.

Geographical adherence There are about one billion Muslims in the world out of a world population of over 6 billion. Beginning in Saudi Arabia they spread throughout the Middle East and to the north of Africa and then descended south of the Sahara, but are not there in the majority. They do form a majority in 37 nations from Morocco in the west to Malaysia and Indonesia in the east. Sixteen African states have a Muslim majority.

3. Christianity

On being a Christian. Faith is all important in Christianity. Faith is being sure of what is hoped for and certain of what is not seen. Christians fix their eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. They live by faith, not by sight. This faith is not natural, it is a gift of God to those who believe. Faith develops into assurance, being sure that God is present, being sure that one is accepted by God, being sure that salvation is already obtained, being sure of final victory and a future in heaven.

Christianity is also a relationship, a relationship with the Almighty himself. He has revealed himself in the Bible as a God of love. He feels deep sorrow concerning man's suffering and wants to help him, but has chosen to reveal himself only to those who come to him in faith. A convert to Christianity is born again, he is born into God's family. He is called a son, and he calls God his Father. God cares for his children, he loves them, he guides them. When a

person is born again, God's Spirit, the 'Holy Spirit', enters into him and lives with him. Christians are expected to abstain from all evil, to not lie, cheat, steal or have sexual relationships with anyone but his own wife. He cannot do this in his own strength, so the Holy Spirit is given as a helper to be with the Christian always.

Christianity, like Islam, believes in one God, in good and evil, in heaven and hell, in angels and the prophets and in the judgment day.

There is very little ritual apart from baptism and holy communion. Faith is an individual matter, but Christians have a strong sense of community as the Church. As children of God they are brothers and sisters through their relationship with Christ. They relate together in the local church and are conscious of their wider membership in the universal Church.

God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit The word for God in Hebrew is plural. When God created man, he said: "Let us make man in our image." (Genesis 1:26) Christians do not believe in three Gods, they believe God is a plurality of persons and unity of essence. The Bible clearly teaches that God is one. It also clearly teaches that there is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Christians address God in prayer as Lord, Father or Jesus. These terms all relate to their one God. The existence of God's Spirit is no difficulty as humans have a spirit and that does not effect their unity. The Father is seated on his throne in heaven, his Son is seated at his right hand and his Spirit is everywhere present, but especially with believers. When a person is born again through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enters that person's body and lives with him. That is the mark of a Christian. A person may attend church regularly, do good deeds, read the Bible and pray, but if he does not have the Spirit of God in him, he is not a true Christian.

Jesus - the Son of God In what sense is Jesus the Son of God? To a Muslim the idea is blasphemous. God has no partner, no consort and no son, and to raise anyone to that status is to them a form of the worst sin - idolatry. But to Christians it is not blasphemy, their book the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus was born to Mary who had no husband and had slept with no man. Mary was a virgin when God caused her to conceive. God did not sleep with a woman, he simply created the pregnancy in her womb.

Only Jesus has been born in this miraculous way. The Qur'an testifies to the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin and always refers to Jesus as son of Mary. Everyone else is referred to as a son of his father. God caused Mary's conception, not man, so it would seem natural to call Jesus, the Son of God.

But Jesus was not created at that moment. Jesus is not a man who Christians have elevated to the position of God, he is God who humbled himself and was born as a man. Jesus has existed from eternity as one essence with the Father and the Spirit. He came down from heaven and was born as a baby. After he was crucified and died, he rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven where he came from.

It should also be noted that in the Bible others are called sons of God, but in a different sense. Only Jesus can be referred to as the Son of God or God the Son. Ruling angels, kings of Israel and Christians are all referred to as sons of God. Adam who was created directly by God is called son of God and the nation of Israel which was chosen by God to be his people is also called God's son or his firstborn.

The Bible The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by many different authors over a period of 1500 years, beginning with the books of Moses and finishing with the revelation of John. It is divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is concerned with the covenant God made with Israel in taking that nation as his people. It gives an historical account of the creation of the world, the world flood in the time of Noah, the calling of Abraham, and God's relationship with his people Israel and their prophets over a period of 1000 years.

While the Old Testament is a collection of books relating to Israel, the New Testament is a collection of books relating to the Christian church. It begins with four different accounts of the life and death of Jesus Christ, followed by the activities of his twelve disciples, also called the apostles, and letters to various Christians and churches explaining the Christian life.

Christians regard the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Although written by human authors, they were all prophets who wrote as the Spirit of God guided them. The Bible is the final authority regulating Christian life and conduct.

The Gospel The central teaching of the Christian faith is called the gospel, which means good news. The good news is that God has provided a way for sinful man to be saved, to be brought out of darkness into light, out of ignorance to knowledge, out of the power of Satan to God. God did this through the death of his Son, Jesus, on the cross. Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Christians are justified through faith, and have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spirit world. Christians believe in angels and demons. Everything God created was perfect, but some angels under the leadership of Satan rebelled against God's authority and were chased out of heaven. Angels in their sinless perfection worship and serve God in heaven and do his bidding here on earth.

Christians shun all contact with occult forces which they believe belong to the kingdom of darkness. They do not consult spirits, jinn, mediums, diviners, priests, herbalists, witches, sorcerers or medicine men who work with magic or black medicine. They have nothing to do with sacrifices, fetishes or amulets. Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate sacrifice which ended all sacrifices made to God. Sacrifices to spirits is equivalent to idolatry.

Fear is banished because Christ is king, he has conquered the powers of darkness. All evil and rebellion against God are blamed ultimately on the rebellious spirit world. Christians know that they are fighting a battle, but it is not against fellow human beings, it is against spiritual forces in the heavenly realm. They are not afraid to confront these because greater is He who is in them than he who is in the world. Any Christian who learns the technique can exorcise spirits in the name of Jesus Christ. Christians pray to God about everything and trust in him alone for protection, health and provision of basic needs. Medicine for illness is used, but not if it is any way related to the spirit world.

Afterlife There are only two places to go, heaven and hell. Heaven is a place of eternal happiness, where there is no more pain, suffering, sickness or death. Entrance is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ. Only his blood can make one clean and perfect and nothing imperfect can enter into God's presence. The central activity will be praising God.

Hell is a place of eternal punishment prepared for the devil and his angels and all those who follow him. It is referred to as a place of darkness, fire and pain away from the presence of God. Christians believe that on death their spirits go straight into the presence of God. They are already saved, there is no judgment day for them. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Unbelievers go to Hades, the grave, the place of the dead. Both believers and unbelievers will be resurrected at the end of the world. After judgment, unbelievers will be thrown into hell.

Morality Christian morality is based on the 10 commandments given to Moses. The first four commandments are about man's relationship with God. He is to worship no other gods, he is to make no idols, he is not to misuse God's name and he is to regard one day of the week as belonging to God. The last six commands relate to man's relationship with his neighbour. He must honour his parents, he must not murder, he must not commit adultery, he must not steal, he must not give false testimony and he must not covet."

Christians obey these laws because they believe that one of God's most important attributes is love. God loves man, so the person who claims to know God and understands his great love to us must love his neighbour, even his enemies. Loving his fellow man means he will not steal, lie, murder or commit adultery. Submission to God's will is based on a love relationship rather than a Master/slave relationship. Christians serve God because he loves them. They serve him out of gratitude that he has already saved them through

Christ's death on the cross, not in an effort to save themselves. Salvation for the Christian is a result of God's grace, not man's works. So there are no legal requirements or taboos.

The basic meaning of holiness is apartness. A holy thing is something set apart as different from things for common use. God is holy, because he is unique and transcends his creation. Angels are holy because they belong to God. The Bible is holy because it is God's word. All Christians are saints (holy ones) because they are God's people. They are commanded to be holy as God is holy. This means being different from the world of unbelievers. They must abstain from all evil, which can be summarized as sexual immorality, love of money and pride.

Geographical adherence There are one and a half billion Christians in the world and they form the majority in all 218 countries of the world, except the 37 that are Muslim, the 9 that are Buddhist, and the 3 that are Hindu. Over 50% of the 500 million Africans are Christian and over half the African nations have a Christian majority.

4. Contrasts between Islam and Christianity

Christianity: Before the Fall man's relationship to God was one of unbroken fellowship.

Islam: Man's relationship to God was the same before the Fall as after: the relationship of bond-slave to Allah.

Christianity: Man fell from a spiritual state of righteousness with God and innocence to one of broken fellowship, guilt and condemnation.

Islam: Man's fall was physical, from paradise in the material heavens down to this earth.

Christianity: After the Fall, Adam's sinful nature, the result of the Fall, was transmitted to all mankind, except Jesus, the son of Mary. Moral instability and tendency to sin in man was the direct result of the Fall

Islam: Adam's nature before and after the Fall is unchanged. Every descendant of Adam is sinless at birth. Man was created weak. The tendency to sin in man was an act of Allah. There is no such thing as inborn sin in mankind.

Christianity: God is absolutely holy and righteous, therefore all sins in his sight merit condemnation.

Islam: The Almighty guides or leads astray whom he pleases. He is free to condemn or condone at will.

Christianity: Good works cannot merit good favour with God, dispose him to forgive wrongdoing, cover sins, remove guilt or condemnation, blot out the past or guarantee the future.

Islam: If Allah wills, man's works can accomplish all these.

Christianity: God requires of man love and holiness in the very highest degree. He expects 100% willing, loving obedience in thought, word and deed.

Islam: Allah requires of man the obedience of a slave to his master.

Christianity: No man has merits to heap up for himself or for others, for only one person, Jesus Christ, has ever rendered to God complete, justifying obedience. No other one has ever fulfilled his duty to God and man.

Islam: Allah has made man's burden light. Man can heap up merits and gain rewards from him.

Christianity: Heaven is a state of eternal and unbroken fellowship with God.

Islam: Heaven is a state of unlimited sensual pleasure.

5. Conflict between Islam and Christianity

1. The Qur'an versus the Bible. This is a question of the authority of the Scriptures. Although Muslims say that they believe in the Bible, in reality they deny its authority and their obligation to obey it by saying (a) the Bible was annulled by the Qur'an, or (b) the Bible was corrupted so much by the Jews and Christians that it is no longer reliable. Thus the Qur'an has replaced the Bible as the authority for "believers" and incorporates its essential message.

2. Mohammed versus Jesus Christ. This is a question of the authority of each as founder of his religion. Muslims say that Jesus is nothing more than a prophet, although they admit that his birth was miraculous, that he never sinned, that he did great miracles, and that he is still alive in heaven and will be returning to earth. However, Mohammed is said to be the "seal of the prophets" whose authority is greater than and supersedes that of Jesus.

3. Law versus Grace. This is a question of the means of salvation. According to Muslims, man is capable of saving himself by doing good works, so long as he is among the true believers. The Bible teaches that it is by grace (God's kindness and mercy) that one is saved, without works.

4. The weakness of man versus the depravity of man. This is a question of the nature of man. According to the Qur'an, Allah created man weak, but with the help of the community, with obedience and submission, one can arrive at the place where he pleases God. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is, man is spiritually dead because of sin and incapable of doing good and pleasing God. He needs to be saved out of this condition in which he has no strength to help himself.

5. Unity versus Trinity. This is a question of the nature of God. According to Islam, Allah is unique in the absolute sense, thus any effort to attribute to him a plurality of persons appears to him to be 'shirk', the only sin that God cannot forgive. For the Christian, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is only one God, but there are these three distinctions within the godhead. They have the same nature and are one in will, purpose, power, eternity and in all other attributes. The Christian believes the Muslim is denied any knowledge of God, because no one can know the Father unless the Son reveals him. Allah becomes in effect an impersonal unknowable being instead of a living person.

6. The humanity of Jesus versus his Divinity. This is a question of the nature of Christ. Muslims say that he was only a prophet among other prophets and is therefore a mere human being, like Adam. The Bible teaches that Jesus is God in a human body and that what he has become he cannot cease to be. Because of his true humanity, he can die in our place for our sins. His divine nature assures that his eternal power procures our eternal salvation.

7. The Son of Mary versus the Son of God. This is a question of a pagan point of view versus the Biblical point of view concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. Muslims believe that Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God in the natural sense of the word "son" (that is that God had sexual relations with a woman in order to have a human son), and treat them as blasphemers. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son from eternity.

8. Education versus Regeneration. This is a question of the nature of salvation. According to Islam, man is not "fallen" and deprived of the righteousness that God demands. Thus he only needs to be protected from evil and educated in what is good in order to become righteous. The Bible, on the contrary, teaches that if a man is not "born again" he cannot be righteous before God, he cannot do that which God demands of him.

9. Individual versus Collective Salvation. To Islam, the responsibility of salvation is not an individual matter, but contrary to Christianity is a collective one. Islam hereby seeks to create a Muslim state which is united and universal. Jesus taught that for everyone there are two roads, the narrow road which believers take and which leads to life, and the broad road, the way of the world that leads to destruction.

6. Qur'anic references to the Bible

Sura 29:45 Do not dispute, unless in kindly sort, with the people of the Book, save with such of them as have dealt wrongfully with you. And say, "We believe in what has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him are we self-surrendered."

Sura 10:94 And if you are in doubt as to what we have sent down to you, inquire of those who have read the Scriptures before you. Now has the truth come to you from your Lord. Be not therefore of those who doubt.

Sura 4:135 O you who believe! Believe in God and his Apostle and the Book which he has sent down aforetime. Whoever believes not on God and his Angels and his Books and his Apostles and in the last day, he has truly erred with far gone error.

7. Jesus in the Qur'an

Jesus Christ = 'Isa Masih (Sura 3:45) Then the angels said, O Mary, verily God sends you good tidings, that you will bear the Word, proceeding from himself. His name will be Christ Jesus the son of Mary, honorable in this world and in the world to come, and one of those who approach near to the presence of God.

Jesus = 'Isa (Sura 3:84) Say, we believe in God, and that which has been sent down to us, and that which was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was delivered to Moses (Musa) and Jesus (Isa) and the prophets from their Lord, we make no distinction between any of them.

Jesus the Son of Mary = Ibn Maryam (Sura 2:87) And we gave Jesus the son of Mary manifest signs, and strengthened him with the holy spirit.

Jesus the Word of God = Kalimatu'llah (Sura 3:39) Verily God promises a son named John, who will bear witness to the Word which comes from God.

Jesus the Apostle of God, his Word, a Spirit from him = Rasulu-llah, Kalimatuhu, Ruhun min Allah (Sura 4:169) Verily Christ Jesus the son of Mary is the Apostle of God, and his Word, which he conveyed into Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from him.

Jesus the Word of Truth = Qaulu-l Haqq (Sura 19.35) This was Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word of Truth, concerning whom they doubt.

Jesus the Servant of God and Prophet = 'Abdu'llah, Nabi (Sura 19:31) Whereupon the child said, Verily I am the servant of God. He has given me the book of the Gospel (Injil) and has appointed me a prophet.

Jesus' death (Sura 3:55) When God said: O Jesus, verily I will cause you to die, and I will take you up unto me, and I will deliver you from the unbelievers. And I will place those who follow you above the unbelievers until the day of resurrection. Then unto me will you return, and I will judge between you of that concerning which you disagree.

8. Claims made by Jesus in the Bible

Jesus predicts his death and resurrection "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day raised to life." (Matthew 16:21)

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:15-17)

Jesus equal with God "He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him." (John 5:23)

Jesus is the light of the world "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Jesus came from heaven "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world." (John 8:23)

Jesus lived before Abraham "Before Abraham was born, I am." (John 8:58)

Jesus equal with God "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

Jesus raises the dead and gives eternal life "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25)

Jesus is the only way to God "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)