

## **AN INVESTIGATION OF THE UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCES OF ULTIMATE REALITY IN AFRICAN RELIGION, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM**

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### **Abstract**

The universal experience of the Ultimate Reality is one of the existing and strong revelations found in African Christian and Islamic Religions. The study has examined Universal experiences of Ultimate Reality in African, Christian and Islamic Religions. The paper made use of prescriptive, descriptive, comparative and analytic and methods. Data were collected from Focus Group Discussion (F.G.D.) and books. It has been discovered by the research that; universal experience of the Ultimate Reality is at bay among the adherents of the trio religions. The Ultimate Reality is been placed to have same significance with other finite, mortal (ultimate realities). The notion of the Ultimate Reality is under serious distortion, and is not dully acknowledged as the only source of all creation whom people experienced in daily experiences. The paper recommends that, there is need for people to search for genuine Ultimate Reality, acknowledge his presence, accord him due worship time without limit. The experience of Ultimate Reality is a universal phenomenon being made manifest in existing realities in the cosmos, which should be upheld in high esteem by the trio religions. People should always learn to appreciate the presence of the Ultimate Reality and all his benevolence over their lives as the only source of all creation, and whom other ultimate realities depend on for existence.

**Keywords:** African Religion, Christianity, Islam, Universal and Ultimate Reality

## Introduction

The notion and experience of the Ultimate Reality existed long ago among mankind. Thus, it emphasizes the originality and genuineness of the concept of a universal Supreme Being whose experience is indelible in African Religion, Christianity and Islam. Human persons are the primary and most important beneficiary of God's life force (Oborji 39). It is undeniable also to say that the human person is not at the very centre of existence of what God has created. The created world and all it contains manifest themselves as they are being experienced by the adherents of African Religion, Christianity and Islam. Thus, the object of divine revelation is always something in the sphere of religions. Hence, God reveals to his people the meaning of the events which in his providence they have experienced. These events constitute the visible threat of the divine salvific design men attest of their experience of the ultimate reality (God) (Leon-Dufour 500).

However, the influence of God in human lives is a clear experience of his intervening role at every human situation, rewarding the just and punishing evil doers. Hence, he is being experienced by men in facets of their lives (Okwuosa 23). Universal experiences of the Ultimate Reality are losing their relevance and patronage among the adherents of the three religions, where adoption and recognition of other ultimate realities alongside the Real Ultimate Reality prevails. Also, other ultimate realities are not everlasting but temporal and cannot guarantee all the fulfilment of men but they are given recognition. Equating Ultimate Reality with other ultimate realities also leads to crises of faith among the three monotheistic religions.

Human life is full of experiences of the Holy as Smart asserts, religion is an experience of the sacred (1). Hence, our existence in the cosmic world is a great phenomenal experience that proves the universe is created by an Ultimate Reality, who reveals himself in human daily experiences. Thus, human beings are created in the image and likeness of him; he endowed them with five senses to experience him. Often through these senses human acquisition of knowledge is made through revelationism, rationalism, empiricism and intuitionism. Through rational experiences, humans learn to appreciate what they experience in life and their relationship with the Ultimate Reality as obtainable in African Religion, Christianity and Islam respectively. It is sad to say that, amidst the uncertainties of life, people still look for focus in recognizing and according due worship to the Ultimate Reality, as source of all beings.

It is evident that, the five senses endowed by Ultimate Reality to every living creature are being used today by them to deny his presence in their lives. Hence, serving other mortal gods, idols or cults are considered ultimate reality today by those practicing African, Christian and Islamic religions. Experiencing Ultimate Reality is a doubly and complex phenomenon. Not only has it the complexity x-rayed by this, but which hold together its outer and inner aspect as it has existed and exists in various forms of faiths.

As evidence, the universe encapsulates human and other natural phenomena of all that the Ultimate Reality has created and are experiencing him through the things he created, and which

cannot be denied (Smart 4). Thus, experience of natural phenomenon like rain, sun, wind, snow, moon, skies there is an Ultimate Reality responsible for their coming into beings. Under normal circumstance, the names we bear are reflections of events which are definitely experience by humanity. We can also affirm that Ultimate Reality is been experienced by people, even if they doubt or reject to accord him due recognition and worship, at least by their very own existence in the universe they cannot attribute it to any mortal being but to him.

Thus, other experiences of other human created ultimate realities are finite and mortal. But Ultimate Reality in the real sense of the world is reserved only to the Almighty God, who reveals him to be experienced by humanity universally. Genuine believers are people who experience dealings with Ultimate Reality in their today to day lives (Evans and Manis 99) which remain factual. In this write up, the Ultimate Reality as experienced in the three religions refers only to an eternal and Supreme Being whose experience is going to be examined by this research.

#### **Elucidation of Key words:**

**Universal:** done by or involving all people in the world or a particular group (horn by 8<sup>th</sup> ed. 1631)

**Experience:** attitude, interest, or other qualitative data which are knowledgeable through the sense even though they are not completely or directly measurable by scales or test (Fairchild 111).

**Ultimate:** from which something originally comes (1613).

**Reality:** a thing that is actually experienced, seen in contrast to what people might imagine (1221).

**Ultimate Reality:** is that supreme, infinite, independent creative being responsible for creating the world, and other existing ultimate realities; who also owed their existence from him.

#### **Scholarly views of what Ultimate Reality is**

For clear assimilation of the scholarly views of what Ultimate Reality is, it is good to know what reality is before us. Scholars have argued out on what reality is and reality is one or many? There is a classic representative of monism in the western world. Parmenides an early Greek philosopher argued for the ones of all reality. His basic argument is summarized below:

- i. Reality is either one or many
- ii. If reality is many, then the many things must differ from each other.

- iii. But there are only two ways things can differ; either by being (something) or by nonbeing (nothing).
- iv. However, two (or more) things cannot differ by nothing, for to differ by nothing means not to differ at all.
- v. Neither can things differ by something has in common and things cannot differ in every respect in which they are same.
- vi. Therefore, things cannot differ at all everything is one (Geisler 168).

Zeno further wrote that; famous series of paradox is in which he defended Parmenides argument in a method known as reduction act *absurdum*. In his paradoxical argument Zeno concluded that reality is composed of one thing (as quoted in Palmer 32). Thus, in response to Parmenides argument, Philosophers after him took one of four basic positions. Two groups said reality differ by none being (atomists and Platonist) and two insisted that reality offers “in being” (Aristotelians and Thomists). Hence, pluralism in the strict sense insists that beings is essentially multiple. Also, there are many beings but Christian argues that there is a real unity and a real diversity of being in the uni-vocally identical where it is found. Beings are similar analogies but not identical to one another yet there is unity of being, hence, since God is the one being from whom all other being derive their being, he is referred to as Ultimate Reality (Geisler 176).

Quoting John 1:2, Rev. 4:11 they assert that “in him we live and move, and have our beings. Since creatures are in some sense like their creator, then there is similarity in being between creator and creatures”. However, God is infinite, and his creatures are finite, so there is also a genuine difference and this difference is a part of the essence of the creatures, and it makes it possible for them to be two or more beings that’s are genuinely different. Furthermore, apart from this apparent diversity for being, all would be one monistic whole but the theists insists that such is not the case, because there are many different finite beings, all of whom derive their essence from the one infinite ultimate reality (Palmer 107).

God is real ultimate reality other creatures are contingent (41) from all the scholarly diversion of views on the concept of the ultimate reality, there are many existing realities which people considered as their ultimate realities. However, considering these scholarly arguments, the ultimate reality is the underlying principle responsible for the existence of other beings he is infinite while these other beings remained finite or contingent.

### **African Religion**

African Religion is the religious tradition of the African People’s that is based purely on their culture. The religion was initiated by the ancestors of present generation thousands of years ago and is still being practice today (Gbenda 4-5). Anyacho also buttress thus, African Religion is the term that is used to describe the religion that was founded by the fore bears of

Africans (242). In a nut shell, African Religion is part of African Culture, and His not therefore not a borrowed religion from any of the world Religions; rather it is a distinctive religion with distinct features which evolved gradually through the years from experiences of its forebears (Anyacho 242).

### **Origin of African Religion**

On the origin of the aboriginal religion, it has been asserts that, "it was initiated by the ancestors of the present generation thousands of years ago and is still being practiced today" (Gbenda 4). Going further, Anyacho also enthused similarly that "African Religion was not borrowed from any world religions. Rather, it is a distinct religion with distinct features which evolved gradually through the years from the practices and experiences of the fore bears as handed to succeeding generations of African till day (242).

### **Sources of African Religion**

African Religion emanated basically from two sources as shall be examined here.

#### **i. Physical Sources**

These are materials of worship that can be felt physically. They are mostly emblems of worship found in places such as temples, shrines, groves, mountains, staff, stool and effigies, masks, caves and host of others (Sarwuan 5).

#### **ii. Non-Physical Sources**

In the absent of writing, arts become necessary to employ the use oral traditional as means of preserving and transmitting cherished traditional religious reliefs and practices Hence, these non-physical sources include music, proverbs, riddles, names, wise sayings amongst other non-physical sources (8-9).

### **Ways of Experiencing Ultimate Reality in African Religion**

African Religion is entirely encapsulated in the African worldview. However, it cannot be said to exist in plurality as been written by some authors. It is an indigenious thought system that is practiced in sects just as Christianity and Islam have various sects professing the faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Concept and experience of the Ultimate Reality in African Religion is deeply and religiously tied to the Africans' belief in the inter-relationship in the two worlds, physical and spiritual. Hence, Religion denotes man's experience, awareness, attitude, recognition, conception and understanding of the existences of the supernatural or the multiplicity of spiritual beings and his relationship or interaction with them.

In view of the above, it has been reiterated that, it is true ultimate Reality is experienced through enactment of religious objects of worship, shrines, alters sacred arena or grooves. Hence, the ultimate Reality is been referred in various African Languages like (*Kpanti-Laa, Aondo, Allah, Chuckwu* (in Mumuye, Tiv, Hausa, Igbo). Such view was supported by Anyacho when he reiterated that, Ultimate Reality is the only reality that possessed attributes

like good, merciful, just, Holy and benevolence, and is experienced. In the two would: physical and non physical which pertained to the African religious experiences in vision, intuition, rationalism, emprise and revelations in Spiritual Beings and the living whom people believed to influence men (247).

As part of the religious culture of Africans, it is has been asserts that during ritual ceremonies like birth funerals, call to become medicine man, protection and mystical relationship, people, also experience the ultimate Reality in festivals of thanksgiving (Sarwuan 4). No human can also be said not to experience the living Ultimate Reality in facets of life endeavours. Thus, by virtue of God participating in human history, he intervenes in the affairs of men. He is provident, and humanity experiences Him as Ultimate Reality, who gives rain, food, health, prosperity and children (Gbenda 27).

Ultimate Reality, natural phenomenon and sacred objects create link with the profane and sacred as tied in a relationship. Hence, the experience of the Ultimate Reality is interwoven in the two worlds, spiritual and physical. The sun, moon, rain, lightening, thunder sound of Giriri is physical experienced phenomenon. Since their origin has a link to the quelled original source, which is the only force responsible for the creation of the Universe.

Since religion is the essence and the motivating force in the Africa's life and is the element which unites all different areas of that life which originates from the supreme. Being (Ultimate Reality) which links the two nature of man, spiritual and physical to be one (Afagbegbee 279). Mbiti was not also wrong to have asserts also that, African knowledge of God is easy to remember and pass to other people' since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies. Hence, the experiences of God in Africa' life is no longer a strange phenomenon for there are no atheists. Everybody experienced God' existence almost by instinct, rationality, intuition, experience and even children know Him (29).

Hence, from experiences of the creation, it makes the Ultimate Reality real as one who sustains all things (30). Africans further experience the Ultimate Reality in their culture, which has a very strong communitarian virtue of awareness of the providence and orderliness of the ontological universe. Thus, this recognition is exercised mutually by the members as set up by code of conduct that God can reward as well as punished men who do good or evil. However, destabilization of the basis of communalism where there is set ups of participation in the institutions, customs, economics and political wellbeing's (Afagbegbe 279).

People also experienced Ultimate Reality as he peaks through indigenous inventions of men in the society (Ugwu 17). By invention, it denotes creative geniuses endowed in men, and made visible or invisible, innate, empirical and in vision or dreams. Humans experienced the ultimate reality in the two worlds because, there is inter-flow of vitality continues to accord that due reverence, honour adoration and worship in facets of their lives. During deliverance from danger, sickness and evil attacks, peoples also experienced the ultimate. Reality in

number of related phenomena. Hence, experience of the ultimate Reality is universally undeniable.

By experiences of the mystery in the universe pinpoint to the fact that, Ultimate Reality is the only supreme force responsible and can control their existence and impacts. Religious experiences of the philosophy of African names leave us not to doubt that, ultimate Reality is that sacred and focal object of worship, which is experienced by people in multiple ways as they pertain their relationship with the ontological order sharing in profane and sacred relationship. Experience of the ultimate Reality is a religious experience which manifests itself in various forms of human encounters. Since the human person has vast religious experience of the ultimate realities as they are the created creatures living in the centre of the world. Hence, there is undeniable real existences and experiences of one who is in-charge of human life (Oborji 37).

Furthermore, Universal experience of Ultimate Reality is undeniable but a proclamation of one' deep faith in God built with utmost affirmation in molding men's moral character towards supreme – human relationship. However, the Ultimate Reality is conceptualized by Africans as the omnipotent, omniscience, just, provident, and defined as the creator of the world, and ultimate source of the human life (Green 122). This affirmation is attestable in His experiences by men in their daily lives as one who is experienced in the two worlds shared by men and considered the prime place in their religious traditional (Green 63).

### **History and Origin of Christianity**

Christianity is the religion that's based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he was the son of God Encyclopedia of Britannica asserts also that, Christianity is a major religion stemming from the life, teaching and death of Jesus of Nazareth (280) adherents of Christ are called Christians because, they belonged to Christ's party, or the household of Christ (Northcott 19).

Christianity as earlier stated stemmed from the teachings of Jesus Christ. The ultimate reality is referred to as God is experienced to exist through vision, dream, revelations, induction and faith. Thus, the essence of religious experience rest on man, desire even needs to transcend. There are many directions to transcend but all men (even confessed atheists) seem to experience this inclination toward transcendence. People experienced the ultimate reality as he speaks to them in human language. Rahner also summed such experience thus ‘‘ O infinite God, you have actually willed to speak such a word to me. You have come to me inhuman word; you are the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ‘’ (16) people experienced God in their brain (27).

## **Ways of Experiencing the Ultimate Reality in Christianity (God)**

Experienced may be viewed into; General and specifically. General experience includes a wide range of consciousness such as the awareness of being alive while specific experience focuses on a given aspect of moment within the whole of one's consciousness (Geisler338). Hence, if men want to know God, by experiences and their quest to find out, actually points to the point that the ultimate reality exist (348). Just as God was experienced by Moses in the burning bush, Christian knows God through experience of possessing information and understanding about his presence (Palmer 101.) American Heritage Dictionary of English Language recap also that "through personal experiences we gain the knowledge of God. Thus, another way of experiencing the Ultimate Reality might be through God's revelation to a Christian" (250). Hence, God revealed himself as the ultimate Reality to Joshua after the death of Moses as the leader of the Israelites who will lead to them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. In another related revelation of the presence of the ultimate Reality, the Israelites experience God on their way to Canaan when he parted the river Jordan for the Israelites and they crossed on dry ground (Joshua 1:1ff).

Revelation and experience of the Ultimate Reality is through visions, trance, dreams and prophetism. It is interesting to reiterate also that, God appeared to Prophet Nathan and told him about the sin of David (2 Samuel 12). Also, when Solomon became king, God revealed Himself at Gibon and asked him to mark a request. Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding of mind to govern the people of Israel (I Kings 9:1-9). However, experiencing the existence of the ultimate reality in Christianity is also through the study of the Bible, where God, close relationship with man is based on love, kindness, mercy and forgiveness (Breiseh 145). Our knowledge of the ultimate Reality is through participation in Church activities and through worship of Him. In Church, we pray, sing songs, dance and listen to His Holy word as explained by the priest. Thus, our knowledge and understanding of God continue in families as we sing and pray together (Quarcoopome 23).

Also, experiencing the Ultimate Reality is also through having faith and accepting God as true and real that is religious faith (Hunter 222). By faith, we understand that the universe was formed by the Ultimate Reality. Command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Heb. 11:1-3) so, faith in God is not base on evidence but on the authority of God Himself through His revelation. However, the believer finds reasonable support for his faith in experiential and historical evidence and miracles (Heb. 11:6). Hence, Human acknowledged the creative genius of Ultimate Reality in their lives as Rahner asserts thus, "you are the eternal mystery of my life. Lord, what a frightful puzzle man is!" (7). The Love of God is being experienced by mankind every now and then because, the ultimate Reality is love, power, Goodness, life, and strength (11).

However, the experience of Ultimate Reality is transmitted also through visions and through hearing of the divine word (Num. 23, 3f. 15f). The biblical definition of God (Ex. 34, 6f) is



not the consequence of philosophical speculation but the result of a lived experience (Leon – Dufour 501). Thus, in another vein, revelation of God in thundering storm (Ex 3, 2, Gen. 15, 17, allows the people to contemplate and experience the creator by analogy with the grandeur and beauty of His creatures (Wisdom. 13, 3ff). By revealing Himself in various manners of human experiences, men are able to meet Him with their various worship, petitions request and supplications (501).

### **Islam: Etymology and History**

Islam is a religion founded by Prophet Mohammed's son of Abdullah and Amina of the country of Arabia in the year 610 (Omeregbe 53). It is a monotheistic religion which all Muslim believers have total submission to the will of Allah. Etymologically, the root 'SIM' in Arabia means to be in peace; to be an integral whole. From this root comes Islam, meaning to surrender to God. Law and this to be an integral whole (Ogwuche et al 28). Hence, the religion began in Arabic at the beginning of the the century of the Christian era in a pagan Jahiliya Arab environment (Jormier 5).

### **The Basic Tenets of Islam**

The Qur'an States five basic constitutes or Articles of faith (Iman), namely:

- ✓ Belief in God (Allah)
- ✓ Belief in Angels (Malaika)
- ✓ Belief in Prophet Mohammed
- ✓ Belief in Revealed Books
- ✓ Belief in the last day (Life after death)

Thus, corresponding to these five items of belief, Islam is built on five foundations, which constitute the basic obligation binding on all Muslims (Pillar of Islam). These "five Pillars include:

- (i) The Shahada: (Belief in God and in Mohammed as his Prophet)
- (ii) Salat: (Five times daily Prayer)
- (iii) Zakat (alms giving) that is paying Zakat
- (iv) Ramadan (Fast)
- (v) Pilgrimage to Mecca (The Holy Land)

### **Ways of Experiencing Ultimate Reality in Islam**

To the Muslims, their ultimate Reality is known as Allah. Thus. This is evident and characterized in their religious statements and documents. To become a Muslim is relatively simple. One simply acknowledged that "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet (Breisch 95). Who experienced Allah instructions to receive the Holy Qur'an.

Muslims possessed the knowledge of Allah through deep religious reflection. Hence, an event took place which marked the beginning of Islam. Mohammed was deeply convinced that he must become a prophet of Allah and he made known to men the revelations and deep religious thoughts he had. When revelation came to Mohammed he was seized by a prophetic spirit. What he said in the moment of prophetic seizure were things he heard and reflected on. Hence, he believed his utterances were divine revelation of the ultimate Reality (Guillaume 35).

According to Islamic teaching, Allah sent revelations of His will to Muhammed through His spirit. The Holy Qur'an identifies this spirit with angel Gabriel. Muhammed further proclaimed these revelations to people and were later put together in Koran – a word in Arabic meaning: to read" or to recite (Pickthall 415). Thus, experience of the ultimate Reality is divinely revealed in the Holy Qur'an as an inspired Holy Book. Furthermore, Muslims have religious experiences of the ultimate Reality by intuition, revelation, experiences, inspirations. However, understanding the Qur'an is a huge understanding of Allah will. By profession of their faith, Muslim experience Allah in practical duties like confession of faith in Allah, prayers, aims giving, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca (Holy Land).

(Alqur'an Surah 29:46) of the Holy Qur'an also attests that, Ultimate Reality (Allah) is experienced in His revelation. It also asserts "we believe in the revelation which have come down to us and in that which has come down to you, our God and your God is one, and it is so to Him we bow in Islam" (Surah 3:64) further to buttress that, if then they turn back, say yes, bear witness that we are bowing to God, will. Hence, these statements are vivid portray of the experience of the ultimate Reality Allah as revealed in the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, reason through created things (Sacramentum Mundi 391) Hence, Allah reflection is one of the undisputable experiences that are universally encountered in intuition, profession of faith, revealed revelation of Allah to mankind. Since the Holy Qur'an is an experience revelation of Allah, it is lucid to claim experiences of Allah from it.

## **Conclusion**

Man is undoubtedly a product of God's creation with a purpose, to worship, honour and love Him. However, in man's continuous search for God, he comes to the knowledge of Ultimate Reality as one who is responsible for creating the entire universe, who is been experienced in various facets of religious experiences. Experiences of Ultimate Reality are Universal phenomena which manifest in various facets of human encounter with God in the trio religions.

Thus, Ultimate Reality has endowed in men a deep reflective and understanding of His existence which they experience in facets of their lives. Hence, by experiencing Ultimate Reality by the adherents of these three viral religions, it is a clear an undoubted fact that, He exist, and humanity cannot doubt is ultimate existence nor equate Him with any mortal ultimate realities which they met or created. Thus, as strong believers in the experience of the Ultimate Reality, His manifestation and experiences in human situations cannot be over down claimed. No matter other counter claims on the non existence and acknowledgement of the

presence of Ultimate Reality, He reality exist and people experienced Him every now and then, and His experience has no segregation of colour race, tribe, region, status but is a universal phenomenon of all religious experiences, where adherents of the trio religion profess, He is one and only Ultimate Reality whose existence manifest in many human experiences.

### **Recommendations**

Ultimate Reality is indeed reserved to the Animator -creator whom people experience in the trio religions. Hence, here are some recommendations:

- i. People must guard against compounding complexities by according due respect, worship and recognition to other ultimate realities, which is a total migration from acknowledging the real source of all creation. Hence, all apparent diversity and multiplicity would in the final analysis be illusory but moving away from God, intended desire for creation is idolatry and must be discarded (Seow 35).
- ii. Amidst the illusory controversies that adherents of the three faiths are likely to fall victims, people should try to sift between human made ultimate realities which are fallible. By our rational, empirical, instructional experiences, we should come to the general conclusion and acceptance there are many human ultimate realities who can never equate themselves with the real Ultimate Reality, who governs the whole of creation.
- iii. Adherents of Christianity, Islam and African Religions should continue to hold from their faiths and beliefs that there is only one Ultimate Reality, whom humanity must continue to worship in various places of worship without belittling Him or even comparing Him with other fallible and finite creatures at all times
- iv. Ultimate Reality revealed Himself in Various forms to the adherents of Christianity, Islam and African Religion. Hence, the need for faith against being brain washed by contemporary delusion doctrine of many Ultimate realities.
- v. Atheism, immorality are rising artful velocity across the globe, religious leaders should stem up measures to safeguard. Hence, the need for proper exhortations against the odd view of denying the Ultimate Reality as maker of all things.
- vi. People should not create their own ultimate realities, instead they should turn in sincerity of faith by acknowledging the true worship of one God, who is Holy, infinite and defender of all in moments favourable or unfavourable conditions. Thus, experience of the Ultimate Reality has no boundary, but is a universal phenomenon that men of whatever, colour, status, religion can experience with genuine faith in their daily lives.

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