

God, Olodumare, Zeus, Odin, Allah, etc.

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Heaven can mean the realm of the spirits or the physical heavens (sky and space). In ancient Yoruba religion, the supreme being is Olodumare. The Yorubas gave their supreme being the title “Olorun” (owner of the heavens).

However, the beliefs and narrations surrounding the chief spirit or supreme being of any culture is what distinguishes that spirit from Elohim (YAH) the God of the Jewish Scripture (Old and New Testament).

In Yoruba religion, **the stories about Olodumare** (the supreme) and the various spirits under it, easily show that the Olodumare/Olorun (owner of the heavens) of ancient Yorubas isn't the same Olorun the Yoruba Christians follow. However, i think the early translators should have used **Elohim** (the Hebrew word for God) when they began translating the Hebrew Scriptures to Yoruba. The same should have been done all over the world where Christian translation was needed. **When translators borrow a name or two from the myths of the natives (recipient of an entirely new religion), this causes some confusion.** However, in general, the teachings of this Jewish Messiah contains entirely unique details and elements.

Elohim is a compound singular, not a single. In Hebrew, “im” indicates plural.

Despite the few instances in which translation's choice (of words or names from the natives' myth) may cause some confusion, if the new Christian diligently gives him/herself to the Scriptures, he/she will not end-up under the power of another spirit. **The teachings are clearly unique.**

In **Arabic**, Allah (a contraction of Al-ilah) means “The God” (i.e., the chief god of the Kaaba). In some translations of the Jewish Scripture (Old and New Testament) around the world, **Allah** is used for the word “God”. For example, John 3:16 “For **Allah** so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son ...” **Son??** Allah has no sons (according to Islam) talk-less of giving his dear son to bear the Punishment for us; but unlike Islam, pre-Islamic Arabia had the following beliefs about their own chief god, “**The God**”, **Al-ilah of the Kaaba** (which always changed when another Arab tribe became care-taker of the Kaaba and its 360 idols):

Allah was not considered the sole divinity [i.e., it was legal to follow other spirits too]; however, Allah was considered the creator of the world and the giver of rain. The notion of the term may have been vague in the Meccan religion. Allah was associated with companions, whom pre-Islamic Arabs considered as subordinate deities. Meccans held that a kind of kinship existed between Allah and the jinn. Allah was thought to have had sons and that the local deities of al-Uzzá, Manāt and al-Lāt were His daughters. The Meccans possibly associated angels with Allah. Allah was invoked in times of distress.

Muhammad's father's name was 'Abdallāh meaning the "servant of Allāh." or "the slave of Allāh" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah#Pre-Islamic_Arabia).

Back to old Yoruba religion and the Christian translator's borrowing of one or two names from Yoruba mythology. I don't think Obatala/Orishanla (the big god) is used at all. However, the following presents some challenge: Although the translators rightfully introduced an entirely new name: Shatan (in Hebrew), Satani (in Yoruba) to the Yoruba people, "Eshu" (from old Yoruba religion) was sometimes used instead of "Satani". In *Thinking About Religion*, vol.3, 2004, Johnson and Oyinade shows how Eshu of the ancient Yorubas wasn't a completely evil spirit. **Ancient Yorubas regularly prayed to Eshu:**

Eshu, the Divine Messenger. ... is the youngest and cleverest of the deities (Bascom, 1969). He is the divine messenger who delivers sacrifices prescribed by the Babalawo to Olorun after they have been placed at his shrine. ... The Yoruba people believe Eshu is a trickster who delights in making trouble; that he serves other deities by making trouble for human beings who offend or neglect them. As an illustration, let's say Sango, a God of Thunder, desires to kill a person with lightning. He must first ask Eshu to clear the road for him. Eshu may use various punishments at his disposal. The Yoruba knows Eshu as the law enforcer because he punishes those who fail to make sacrifices prescribed by the high priests and rewards those who do. When any of the deities desire to reward those on earth, they send Eshu to do it. Western scholars have made concerted efforts to paint Eshu as the equivalent of the Judeo-Christian "Devil". This is not true. Eshu's role is that of a messenger who delivers sacrifices to Olorun and does good for other deities. His remarkable even-handedness in his role as divine enforcer is not consistent with identification as Satan by Christians and Muslims (Bascom 1969). Regardless of what deity one serves, everyone prays to Eshu frequently so that he will not trouble them (http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v03/johnsonoyinade_yoruba.htm).

For the ancient Yorubas, "Eshu" wasn't more evil than all the other spirits whom they served. Borrowing that name (in translation) instead of using only the new name Shatan (in Hebrew), Satani (in Yoruba) which was introduced to the Yorubas, may have caused some confusion for the new Christians at one point or another. **The Yoruba version of the Hebrew Scriptures sometimes rightfully used "Satani" instead of "Eshu".**

The Eshu of the ancient Yorubas is different from the Eshu of today's Yoruba people. Same with Olorun (Olodumare), the stories and beliefs have changed, therefore, changing both characters/spirits.

Critics of Nigerian Pentecostalism and Christo-Islamic Spirituality in Nigeria are right when they point out that, much in the Nigerian religions of today is simply the old paganism but in modern clothing. All around the world, Medicine-men/Witch-doctors

(Shamans) are now clothed in modern-day suit and are called Faith-healers, and **Psycho-therapists** (Selfists). They use visualization/imagination, they teach: “believe in yourself”; they believe that whatever they say with their mouth will surely happen. **That’s Occultism.** Truly, when those who claim to be Christian fail to understand and guard the truths of the New Testament, then they are practicing the old pagan stuff but in a different lingua (“Christian” lingua). That’s deadly, it’s like the serpent.

Under the guise of “Science”, Developed nations (non-Christians) continue in **superstition** (e.g., Evolution, and Psychological theories).

The fact that those who claim to be Christian use “GOD” for whatever spirit (**and its beliefs**) they are following, doesn’t change that spirit to the God of the Jewish Scripture (Old and New Testament). The Jesus of the Catholics isn’t the Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses (WatchTower). The Jesus of the Mormons/LDS isn’t the Jesus of the Pentecostals. Islam has a Jesus too, and it is different from the Jesus found in the Jewish Scripture (Old and New Testament). Often times i find it very difficult in talking to people about Jesus because the moment i say “Jesus”, the person i’m talking to has began thinking of another “Jesus” very different from the Jesus i’m trying to communicate to that person. Many times i try in vain to clear people’s mind of the various “Christs” they have in their mind/soul.

Back to the various characters in West-African religions; concerning “Eshu”, Bewaji of *African Studies Quarterly* states:

Finally, the fact that someone believes that some element of evil exists in Esu as in other divinities, does not make those other divinities to be all evil [i.e., completely evil] nor does it make Esu evil. It needs to be emphasized that the Yoruba believe that both good and bad always go hand in hand [in all the gods].

As this essay is primarily concerned with an exposition of Olodumare as believed by the Yoruba people traditionally, the phenomenon of Esu is only of secondary relevance. Because of its link with the problem of evil one may end this section with some cross-reference of materials. Of relevance here is Onuoha’s discussion of Igbo religion in related matters. He says:

They do not think to assign a separate ultimate cause to evil since they realize that evil is an imperfection ... Evil does not require a cause. It is the Christians who have elevated Ekwensu to the rank of anti-God or Satan. Igbo religion has no room for such an “evil incarnate” or devil who does nothing but evil.

Similarly, [Kenyan] Mugo Gatheru suggests:

When the missionaries brought the Bible to the Kikuyu, our people understood the Old Testament right away, for many of the customs of the ancient Jews were very much like ours. Like the Hebrew people of old, the Kikuyu are God-

fearing people . . . They had no idea, of course, about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the devil ... (<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm>).

In *African Studies Quarterly*, Bewaji stated:

Equally, some of the attributes of Olodumare are diametrically at variance with those of the Christian God. Consequently, some theoretical and doctrinal problems that arise within Christianity do not arise for Africans . . . The sources of evil are God-devised and help to maintain high moral standards. The Christian God is ever-merciful, slow to anger [and] quick to forgive (in fact He does not desire the death of the sinner but that he repent and be saved), whereas, the Yoruba Olodumare is a morally upright God who metes out justice here on earth and not necessarily in the hereafter where we are not sure anybody will witness and learn from it. ... Olodumare is more akin to the Old Testament Yahweh in his requirement of honesty and uprightness. This ensured law and order in the societies involved (<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm>).

They think that the Old Testament God is different from New Testament Messiah. Many (such as Bewaji) don't realize they just quoted from the "wrathful" Old Testament when they say: "the Christian God is ever-merciful, slow to anger [and] quick to forgive (in fact He does not desire the death of the sinner but that he repent and be saved)". **What he just attributed to New Testament Messiah is actually from Ezekiel ch.33 and ch.18, and the Torah (Exodus 34:4-8).** Ezekiel 33:11 "... As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die ...".

Bewaji continued:

When the Christian God is introduced, it become easy to sin all morning and afternoon and repent in the evening and have all your sins forgiven through a special dispensation of grace. This introduction created room for a permissiveness that has never been witnessed in Yoruba society before. ... Hence people swear on the Holy Bible and Holy Q'uran without [fear], while they [hesitate] when called upon to do the same for Ogun, Sango, or some other [African] divinity. They find a convenient but dubious excuse in the denigrating [and] culturally enslaving explanation that swearing by Sango or Ogun is idol worshiping. Making a similar point about Igbo religion Onuoha says that:

The traditional religion makes no apology for exposing the law of retribution. Every act of immorality disrupts the balance of the ontological order and God has ordained that the law of reciprocal effect should restore this order automatically. This law operates blindly like a reflex or a boomerang. The suffering incurred by every sin must be undergone. God's justice cannot be

compromised. This system of justice prevents crime and criminal tendencies in society (<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm>).

You want Justice? Open the New Testament and read the **Book of Revelation**. It is coming and no one will be able to stand. The New Testament isn't against the Old Testament morality and law and order.

Concerning Odin (the chief god in Nordic/Scandinavian religion, an internet encyclopedia states:

Other creatures include ... the two ravens who keep Odin, the chief god, apprised of what is happening on earth, since he gave an eye to the Well of Mimir in his quest for wisdom ...

In the Poetic Edda poem Völuspá ... Odin, the chief god of the Norse pantheon, has conjured up the spirit of a dead völva and commanded this spirit to reveal the past and the future. She is reluctant: "What do you ask of me? Why tempt me?"; but since she is already dead, she shows no fear of Odin, and continually taunts him: "Well, would you know more?" But Odin insists: if he is to fulfill his function as king of the gods, he must possess all knowledge. Once the völva has revealed the secrets of past and future, she falls back into oblivion: "I sink now" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norse_mythology#Supernatural_beings).

Odin (the chief god) contacted the spiritual realm (through necromancy) for divination/guidance; the Yoruba stories (in Nigeria) say their own supreme being (Olodumare) sometimes seek Orunmila for divination (Ifa). In *African Studies Quarterly*, Bewaji states:

... this fact is neither anathemic to the Yoruba, nor does it present any incongruity in their perception of Olodumare. Also, it does not in any way detract the least bit from the "all-wiseness" of Olodumare. ... since Olodumare created Orunmila and his wisdom in the first place, so, tapping from the resources of a created being cannot amount to a reduction in the attribute of the creator. Supporting this point Wande Abimbola suggests:

According to the myths, there were occasions when there being no physical barrier between heaven and earth, Ifa was summoned by Olodumare to use his great wisdom to solve problems for Him.

The faithfulness of Abimbola results from the fact that he was concerned with the corpus of Ifa as the embodiment of the wisdom of Olodumare as bequeathed to Orunmila. He was not concerned with a definition of the attributes of Olodumare (<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm>).

In Greek religion, Zeus was considered the highest who had oversight over the universe. Some of the titles they gave him were: King of the Gods, Father of Gods and

men, **God of sky** and thunder. All those titles are similar to the titles other natives in different parts of the world give to whatever spirit they consider as the Supreme, and he, or it or her allows the natives to worship lesser spirits along with him/it/her. Only Elohim (YAH) of the Jewish Scripture (Old and New Testament) commands His people to reject every idol (physical or mental). Islam tried to copy the Hebrew God but **Muhammad approved the worship of that Black Stone still in the Kaaba till today.** That black stone had been in the Kaaba as part of pre-Islamic pagan worship, decades before Muhammad improved the religion of pre-Islamic Arabia by forcing Arabia from a pluralistic religion (many gods) to a monotheistic one, as he destroyed the 360 idols of the Kaaba and preserved his own choice-god: the Black Stone idol. “Allah” means “the god” (of the Kaaba), a contraction of “Al-ilah” of the Kaaba.

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