

## DIVINE–HUMAN RELATIONS AND THEODICY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ABRAHAMIC AND ORIENTAL RELIGIONS

By

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### **Abstract**

The problem of evil, or theodicy, remains central to religious philosophy. This paper proposes CCBDS Creation, Covenant, Betrayal, Destruction, and Salvation as a fivefold historical pattern by which the Divine relates to humanity. While CCBDS is most explicitly articulated in the Abrahamic scriptures, this study argues that analogous structures exist in major Oriental traditions, though with different metaphysical assumptions. Using comparative philosophical analysis, the paper examines CCBDS in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and contrasts it with patterns in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. In the Abrahamic view, suffering is largely moral and covenantal: a consequence of human betrayal against a personal God, followed by judgment and redemptive salvation. In Oriental traditions, suffering is more often cosmic and karmic: a result of imbalance, ignorance, or departure from the Tao/Dharma, followed by restoration through enlightenment or balance. Drawing on scholars from the UK and Nigeria, including the works of Prof. Charles. Nnaji on socionomy and psychonomy, John Hick on soul-making theodicy, Alvin Plantinga on free will defense, J.B. Danjuma on African theology, and K.C. Anyanwu on African metaphysics, this paper argues that CCBDS offers a cross-cultural framework for understanding how religions rationalize suffering and divine justice. The study concludes that while the structural pattern is similar, the theological meaning of “betrayal” and “salvation” diverges significantly. This has implications for interfaith dialogue, mission, and pastoral care in pluralistic societies like Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Theodicy, CCBDS, Abrahamic Religions, Oriental Religions, Comparative Philosophy, Suffering, Covenant, Salvation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The question “Why does God allow suffering?” has troubled philosophers and theologians for millennia. In Western philosophy this is called theodicy. In African thought, suffering is often interpreted communally and spiritually. In Eastern thought, it is interpreted cosmically. This paper introduces CCBDS as a heuristic model. CCBDS = Creation → Covenant → Betrayal → Destruction → Salvation. In the Bible, we see it with Adam, Noah, Israel, and Christ. In the Qur’an, with Adam, the prophets, and the Ummah. In the Torah, with Sinai and Exile. The pattern suggests that divine-human relationship is not static. It is cyclical and moral. But is this pattern unique to Abrahamic faiths? This paper argues no. Oriental religions present parallel cycles, though without a personal covenanting God. For example, Hindu Yugas move from Satya to Kali, followed by divine avatars. Buddhism moves from ignorance to karma to nirvana. Taoism moves from harmony with Tao to disharmony and return.

The significance for theodicy is this: how a religion explains the movement from Betrayal to Destruction to Salvation determines how it answers the problem of evil.

This study will:

1. Explicate CCBDS biblically and theologically
2. Map parallel patterns in Oriental religions
3. Compare the philosophical assumptions behind suffering in both
4. Offer recommendations for theology and mission in Africa

The method is comparative philosophy, with textual analysis and engagement with both UK and Nigerian scholarship.

## **DEFINING CCBDS**

**Creation:** In Abrahamic thought, creation is *ex nihilo* by a personal God. In Oriental thought, creation is often emanation or cyclical. Prof. Nnaji's work on "Theistic and Socioeconomic-Origin of Philosophy" helps us see creation as both ontological and social.

**Covenant:** Covenant is central to Abrahamic faiths a binding moral relationship. In Oriental religions, the parallel is Dharma, Tao, or the Mandate of Heaven. Not personal, but ordered.

Betrayal: Here is the pivot. In Abrahamic: sin, idolatry, breaking law. In Oriental: Adharma, ignorance, loss of harmony.

**Destruction:** Judgment in Abrahamic. Karma, Pralaya, dynastic collapse in Oriental.

**Salvation:** Remnant and Messiah vs Avatar and Enlightenment. Prof. Nnaji's "Education Personification Theory" suggests that names and patterns carry meaning. CCBDS is such a pattern.

## **CCBDS IN ABRAHAMIC TRADITIONS**

The Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam present the clearest articulation of the CCBDS pattern. Here, the relationship between the Divine and humanity is personal, moral, and historical. Suffering is not random; it is covenantal.

### ***Creation: The Good Beginning.***

In Genesis 1-2, God creates humanity in His image and declares it "very good." This is not deistic. God enters relationship. Similarly, in the Qur'an, Allah creates Adam and breathes His spirit into him [Qur'an 15:29]. In Jewish thought, creation is the foundation of Berit, covenant. As Prof. Charles Ogundu Nnaji argues in Theistic and Socioeconomic-Origin of Philosophy, creation is both

ontological and social. God creates not just matter, but a community ordered by purpose. This aligns with Nigerian scholar J.B. Danjuma who notes that in African theology, creation establishes kinship between God and people.

### ***Covenant: The Binding Relationship***

The covenant is the center of Abrahamic theodicy. God initiates: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant. Covenant means promise and responsibility. John Hick, the UK philosopher, calls this the “vale of soul-making.” God gives humans freedom within relationship so they can become moral agents. Without covenant, there is no basis to call anything “betrayal.” In Islam, the covenant is mithaq humanity’s primordial testimony to Allah’s Lordship [Qur'an 7:172]. Thus, to break covenant is to break a sworn oath.

### ***Betrayal: The Moral Rupture***

Betrayal in Abrahamic faiths is sin a willful turning from God. Adam and Eve, Israel’s idolatry, and humanity’s rejection of prophets. Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense, developed in the UK and US, helps here. God created humans with libertarian freedom. The possibility of evil is the price of genuine love and obedience. Thus, suffering after betrayal is not cruelty, but consequence.

Nigerian theologian K.C. Anyanwu adds that in African thought, betrayal is also communal. One man’s sin affects the village. This makes CCBDS even more relevant in Africa where suffering is rarely seen as individual only.

### ***Destruction: Divine Judgment***

Because God is just, betrayal leads to destruction. Flood, Exile, the Fall of Jerusalem, and ultimately eschatological judgment. But note: destruction is never final in Abrahamic thought. It is corrective. The prophets always call to teshuvah, metanoia, tawbah repentance. Here we see the philosophical answer to theodicy: Evil is permitted because God respects human freedom, but God will not leave evil unjudged.

### ***Salvation: The Remnant and the Redeemer***

Salvation is God’s initiative to restore. Noah and family, the remnant in exile, and ultimately Christ in Christianity and the Mahdi expectation in some Islamic thought. Thus, CCBDS in Abrahamic faiths answers the problem of evil with: personal responsibility, divine justice, and redemptive hope.

### ***Parallel Patterns In Oriental Traditions***

Oriental religions do not speak of a personal covenanting God in the same way. Yet a CCBDS-like pattern appears. The difference is metaphysical: suffering is less about moral guilt and more about cosmic imbalance.

### ***Creation: Emanation and Cycles***

In Hinduism, creation is cyclical. Brahma creates, Vishnu preserves, Shiva destroys. The universe moves through four Yugas: Satya, Treta, Dvapara, Kali. We are in Kali Yuga, an age of decline. In Taoism, the Tao creates spontaneously. In Buddhism, there is no first cause. Samsara is beginningless. Ninian Smart, the UK scholar of comparative religion, calls this “cosmic process” rather than “personal act.” This matters for theodicy. If there is no personal creator, who is to blame?

### ***Covenant: Dharma, Tao, and the Mandate of Heaven***

The parallel to covenant is Dharma in Hinduism and Buddhism cosmic and moral law. In Confucianism, it is the Mandate of Heaven. In Taoism, it is living in harmony with the Tao. This is not a contract with a person, but alignment with order. Prof. Nnaji’s concept of “socioeconomy” is useful here. Society functions when it aligns with transcendent order, whether personal or impersonal.

### ***Betrayal: Ignorance and Adharma***

Betrayal in Oriental thought is avidya ignorance. It is forgetting one’s true nature. It is acting against Dharma. In Confucianism, it is loss of ren and li benevolence and ritual. Thus, evil is not a crime against a person, but a deviation from the Way. This is why K.C. Anyanwu contrasts African and Oriental views: Africans see evil as relational rupture, Orientals see it as metaphysical error.

### ***Destruction: Karma and Cosmic Collapse***

Consequence comes as karma you reap what you sow. It can take lifetimes. On a macro level, we have pralaya dissolution of the world. In Chinese history, dynastic collapse when the Mandate is lost. There is no final judgment day by a judge. There is natural consequence. UK philosopher John Hick tried to bridge this with his “pluralistic hypothesis” all religions are responses to the Ultimate. But CCBDS shows the structure is similar while the cause differs.

### ***Salvation: Avatar, Enlightenment, and Return***

Salvation is restoration of balance. In Hinduism, Vishnu avatars like Krishna come in times of adharma. In Buddhism, it is Nirvana cessation of craving. In Taoism, it is wu wei returning to the Tao. In Confucianism, it is the rise of the sage king. Thus, Oriental CCBDS answers theodicy with: impersonal law, karmic consequence, and liberation through wisdom.

### ***Comparative Theodicy: Moral Vs Cosmic Suffering***

If CCBDS is a universal pattern, why do religions interpret “Betrayal → Destruction → Salvation” so differently? The answer lies in their underlying theodicy. Theodicy is not just about explaining evil. It is about explaining who is responsible, why it happens, and how it ends.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, suffering is primarily moral. It arises from a broken relationship with a personal God.

1. Source of Evil: Human free will. As Alvin Plantinga argues, God created beings capable of love, and love requires the possibility of rejection. John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy adds that suffering is pedagogical. God uses it to build character.
2. Nature of Destruction: It is judgment, but also discipline. Hebrews 12:6 "The Lord disciplines the one He loves." In Islam, *balaa* purifies the believer.
3. Hope of Salvation: It is relational restoration. The Messiah, the Cross, or *tawbah* and divine mercy. History has direction. It moves toward a final judgment and new creation. Nigerian Contribution: J.B. Danjuma and Emefie Ikenga-Metuh both argue that African Christianity understands this deeply because African cosmology is already relational. When a covenant is broken, the ancestors, the community, and God are all affected. CCBDS fits African intuition. Prof. Nnaji's *Insight: In Comparative Introduction to Socionomy and Psychonomy*, Prof. Nnaji shows that philosophy begins when humans ask about order. The Abrahamic answer is: order is personal. When the Person is betrayed, the order breaks.

In Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, suffering is primarily cosmic. It arises from ignorance and imbalance.

1. Source of Evil: Not sin against a person, but *avidya* ignorance of reality. There is no one to blame, only a law to understand. Karma is automatic, like gravity.
2. Nature of Destruction: It is not punishment but consequence. If you plant mango, you reap mango. If a dynasty loses the Mandate of Heaven, it falls. The universe self-corrects.
3. Hope of Salvation: It is liberation from the cycle. *Moksha*, *Nirvana*, or harmony with *Tao*. There is no final end to history, only escape from it.

UK Scholar Perspective: Ninian Smart in *The World's Religions* calls this the difference between "prophetic" and "mystical" religions. Prophetic religions like Abrahamic faiths see time as linear. Mystical religions see time as cyclical.

### ***The Philosophical Tension: Justice vs. Balance***

This is the core debate. Abrahamic CCBDS vs. Oriental CCBDS, who is offended? A Personal God vs. Cosmic Order/Dharma/Tao, why suffering? Moral Betrayal vs. Ignorance/Imbalance/Karma. Who solves it? God through Grace vs. Self through Wisdom/Avatar, End of Story? New Heaven and Earth vs. Escape from Samsara/Return to Tao. The Problem: Can an impersonal order forgive? Can a personal God be bound by karma? The Nigerian-African Angle: Bolaji Idowu in *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*

shows that traditional African religion is closer to Abrahamic than Oriental. Olodumare is personal, moral, and judges. Yet there is also belief in cosmic balance. This is why CCBDS is a powerful bridge for theology in Africa.

CCBDS shows that all humans intuitively expect a pattern: Good beginning → Brokenness → Consequence → Hope. The difference is in the diagnosis. Abrahamic faiths say: The problem is the heart. The solution is a Savior. Oriental faiths say: The problem is ignorance. The solution is enlightenment. For philosophy of religion, this means theodicy cannot be answered in the abstract. You must first ask: What kind of universe do we live in? Personal or impersonal?

### **Implications For Africa And Mission**

Africa, and Nigeria in particular, is at the crossroads of Abrahamic and Oriental worldviews. Islam and Christianity dominate, but traditional African religion, New Age spirituality, and Eastern philosophies are growing fast through media, yoga, and “prosperity spirituality.” The CCBDS framework gives African theologians and missionaries a tool to engage all three.

### ***Pastoral Care in Times of Suffering***

In most African communities, when tragedy strikes the first question is “Who did this?” Suffering is rarely seen as random. It is spiritual, communal, and moral. The CCBDS model affirms that intuition but redirects it. Instead of only blaming witches or ancestors, it says: Check the Covenant. Has there been Betrayal? This is biblical and culturally resonant. J.B. Danjuma argues that African theology must not import Western abstract theodicy. It must speak in patterns people already live with. CCBDS does that. Destruction is not final. There is always a path to Salvation through repentance. This gives hope in contexts like Boko Haram, banditry, and economic hardship.

### ***Interfaith Engagement with Oriental Religions***

Through yoga centers, Buddhist meditation apps, and Chinese business communities in Lagos and Abuja, Oriental ideas are entering Africa. Many young people now say “It’s just karma” or “Everything is energy.” CCBDS allows us to find common ground without compromise. We can say: “Yes, there is a pattern of breakdown and restoration. But in the Bible, the one who restores is a Person, not a principle.” Ninian Smart’s comparative method helps here. We don’t start by attacking. We start by showing the parallel, then showing the difference. That is respectful and effective for mission in pluralistic cities.

### ***Tent-Making Mission: Rwanda, Namibia, Antananarivo***

This is where your burden fits.

1. Rwanda: After the 1994 genocide, the question was “Where was God?” A CCBDS sermon says: Betrayal of covenant tribalism, hatred led to Destruction. But God is raising a Remnant. Churches and clinics can be signs of Salvation.
2. Namibia: Many struggle with poverty and ancestral fear. CCBDS says: God created you good. He made covenant. When we turn to idols, there is consequence. But Christ is the final Salvation.
3. Antananarivo, Madagascar: Ancestor veneration and fatalism are strong. CCBDS reframes it: Life is not a cycle you are trapped in. It is a story moving toward God’s Salvation.

Your skill as an engineer/educator is “Tent Making.” Your clinics and schools will embody the last stage: Salvation. People see light, water, and healing, and then they ask “Why?” Then you tell them about the God of the Covenant.

Prof. Nnaji’s Relevance: Prof. Nnaji’s work on Education Personification Theory shows that teaching is most powerful when it is embodied. Mission is not just preaching CCBDS. It is living it creating, covenanting with communities, addressing betrayal through justice, and bringing salvation through service. Seminaries in Nigeria must teach comparative theodicy. Our pastors will face Hindus, Buddhists, and secularists online. If we only teach “God is good,” they will be asked “Then why karma?” CCBDS gives them an answer that is biblical, philosophical, and cross-cultural.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the comparative analysis of CCBDS in Abrahamic and Oriental traditions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Institutionalize Comparative Theodicy: Departments of Religion and Philosophy in Nigerian universities should include CCBDS as a case study in courses on philosophy of religion. Collaboration with UK institutions like Oxford and Cambridge can strengthen research output.
2. Support African Scholars: Funding bodies should prioritize works by African philosophers like Prof. Charles Ogundu Nnaji, K.C. Anyanwu, and Emefie Ikenga-Metuh who are interpreting global patterns through African lenses
3. Use CCBDS as a Bridge, not a Weapon: In dialogue with Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist communities, begin with the shared pattern of Creation to Restoration. Then carefully articulate the difference: personal vs impersonal ultimate. This builds trust without syncretism.
4. Frame the Gospel as CCBDS Fulfilled: Missionaries in Africa and Asia should present Christ as the answer to the final stage Salvation. Clinics, schools, and justice work are modern expressions of “Salvation” that validate the message.

5. Train Pastors in Theodicy: Seminaries must equip pastors to answer “why do we suffer?” using Scripture and culture. The CCBDS model is simple, biblical, and memorable for congregations.
6. Expand CCBDS to Indigenous Religions: Future studies should test if CCBDS patterns exist in Yoruba, Igbo, and Akan cosmologies. Bolaji Idowu’s work suggests they do.

## Conclusion

The CCBDS pattern resonates right through human history in dealing with God. It is evidence that after the new covenant with Christ Jesus, there is no more any other Divine equilibrium. Before salvation man must go through tribulation and destruction. The only way of escape is true repentance and faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This paper has argued that CCBDS Creation, Covenant, Betrayal, Destruction, and Salvation is a recurring pattern for understanding divine-human relations and the problem of evil. In Abrahamic religions, CCBDS is moral and historical. Suffering is the result of betrayal against a personal God, and salvation comes through divine grace and judgment. In Oriental religions, CCBDS is cosmic and cyclical. Suffering is the result of imbalance and ignorance, and salvation comes through enlightenment and restoration of order. Despite the differences, the pattern reveals a universal human intuition: life is not random. There is a beginning, a breaking, a consequence, and a hope. For Africa, and for your mission sir, CCBDS is more than theory. It is a pastoral and missionary tool. It allows us to speak to suffering people with both truth and hope. It allows us to engage other religions with respect and clarity. As Prof. Nnaji reminds us, philosophy must serve life. The burden you carry to “win more souls” is the burden of declaring that in Christ, the CCBDS cycle has been broken and a new covenant of Salvation has begun.

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