

Islam – Christian Christologies, Sufic Pantheistic Monism and The Birth Of New Religious Movements In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Islam and Christianity tend to have conflicting perceptions about the person of Christ despite his recognition in both traditions. In Christianity, Jesus is part of a Triune God and the son of God the father. Islam rejects the sonship and deification of Christ and sees it not just as anthropomorphism, but as a desecration of God and blasphemy. Many Sufis in their states of ecstasy made the pronouncement, which could be perceived as confirmation of Christian beliefs. These pronouncements are rooted in the Sufic theory of *al-Fanā* (annihilation) in which a Sufi ends in a state of union with God, he ceases to exist, while existence belongs to Allah alone. This explains Jesus' annihilation into the ultimate reality and forming part of it. The resuscitation of *Tarbiya* in the reformed Tijaniyya Order in Nigeria has led to the spread of ideas of monism and pantheism among the followers of the sect. Also, due to interaction with Christians and familiarity with Christianity, some new religious movements with a synthesis of Islamic and Christian Christology emanated. This paper looks into the christologies of the Imaniyya movement and the 'Īsā Zāhīran groups.

INTRODUCTION

The theological discussion about the nature and person of Christ has been characterized by many controversies throughout the history of Islam. Christian polemicists had used the Qur'anic description of Christ as "word of God" to argue for his deification and the incarnation of God. This, according to some theologians, was the genesis of the subsequent controversy on the *createdness* and eternity of the Qur'an in *Islamdom*. Christians argue that the Qur'an describes Jesus as the "word of God," the same way the Qur'an is itself called the word of God. Therefore, if the word of God is co-eternal with Him, then Jesus is co-eternal with God and as such part of Him.¹ Thus, Christian's reaction to Islamic presentation of the nature of Christ from the time of John of Damascus (675-753) has been through the use of grammatical and philological approaches to interpret the Qur'an to suit Christian teachings. The Qur'an also describes Jesus as the *Rūḥ Allah* (Spirit of God). This supposedly made John of Damascus posit that word and spirit are inseparable from the one in whom any emanated from and separating them from him makes God without spirit and word, and this leads to the mutilation of God.²

Muslim scholars, however, refute these arguments and describe them as mere twisting of

Qur'anic verses. They argue the position of the Qur'an in rejecting the Christian doctrines of incarnation, the deification of Christ and the Trinity is unambiguous in many Qur'anic passages. For example, 9:31; 4:116; 5:73; 9:30; 4:17 4:72; 5:75 et cetera. Moreover, some of the passages with the description of Jesus as the "word of God" also contain the rejection of Trinity and God's incarnation. This can be exemplified with 4:171, it states:

O people of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah anything but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Do not say "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him: (for Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.

Nevertheless, some Christian writers continued to uphold such interpretations of Qur'anic passages to the present time. Islamic Sufism, on the other hand, has a lot to do with the person of Christ and his emulation. The term *Şūfī* is said to originate from the Arabic word *şūf* (woolen garment) which was said to be the regalia of Jesus, a *Şūfī*, therefore, must be Jesus like regarding asceticism, simplicity and piety. *Şūfīc* teaching (that all things emanated from God, that He is in everything and everything is in Him, and He is everything without distinction), has led some *Şūfīs* to find meaning in the Christian deification of Christ through a peculiar esoteric interpretation that the unity of God with Christ is just in the sense of the *Şūfīc* pantheistic monism.

This paper examines the basis of the Christologies of two new religious movements in Nigeria; the 'Īsā Zāhīran group and the Imaniyya.

AN APPRAISAL OF THE ISLAMIC AND CHRISTIAN CHRISTOLOGIES:

Principally the Qur'anic account of the person of Christ is arguably meant to refute the Christian Christology. In Islam, Jesus is not more than a prophet whom other prophets have preceded. He was a contemporary of prophet Yaḥyā. Qur'anic passages that mention that include 3:42-63 in which the story of the conception and birth of Christ was given. Verses 48-52 specifically mentioned that he was an apostle of God sent to the Israelites, whose mission abrogates the mission of Moses. Qur'an 19:16-40 also conveys the same message, while verses 30-31 even quoted Jesus describing himself as the servant of Allah. Thus the verses read: "he said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He has given

me revelation and made me a prophet, and he has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and Charity as long as I live”³ Other Qur’anic passages with such information include 4:157; 171; 5:46; 5:75; 43:59. Furthermore, the Qur’an stresses the human nature of Christ to refute his deification by Christians. To bring in focus his human nature, the Qur’an often refers to him as Ibn Maryam (Son of Mary) to show that he was born like any other man. The Qur’an additionally gives an account of his birth and also gives a narrative of the severity of the pain associated with conception and childbirth. Opeloeye remarks that “conception and pain are unnecessary if not that the Qur’an wants to emphasize the human nature of prophet ‘Isa’.”⁴ Other passages that stress his simple human nature as recognized by Islam include the Qur’anic emphasis that Jesus and his mother ate food like any other human to solve the problem of hunger and even depended on it for survival (Qur’an 5: 75). Allah also emphasizes the human limitation of Jesus in Qur’an 5:17, where He rebukes those who deify him when He says:

“who then has the least power against Allah, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, his mother, and all every that is on the earth?”

The Qur’an further argues that the similitude of Jesus in terms of having no biological father is Adam, who was created from clay while Jesus was created with the word “Be” And he becomes (exists).⁵ The Qur’an puts it in the following way: “The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, and then said to him: “Be” and he was” (3:59).

Also, as it has alluded earlier, the Qur’an is primarily concerned with rebuffing the Christian conception of the dual nature of Christ as human and God at the same time. The Qur’an, therefore, refutes the doctrine of Trinity in passages such as 4:171-173. The Qur’an emphatically warns that “Do not say “Trinity,” desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him (for Exalted is He) above a son.” Qur’an 5:73 says, “they do blaspheme who say: “God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no God except one God (Allah)...” In 5:116, Allah asks Jesus (AS) if he initiates his deification himself or taught his followers to deify him. The Qur’an reports that Jesus’ Answered and rejected the doctrine. This verse and the subsequent verses of the chapter, which are in the form of a dialogue between God and Jesus, illustrate the rejection of the doctrine by Jesus himself. Islam, therefore, affirms only one nature for Christ, which is his human nature.

Islam also rejects the Christian doctrine of the divine Sonship of Christ. Qur'anic passages such as 9:30; 19:34-35; 19:88-93 allude to this. Another important area of difference between Christianity and Islam on the person of Christ is the doctrine of Crucifixion. The Qur'an strongly refutes this doctrine in 4:157, where it says, "... But they did not kill him, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them....." while 4:158 specifically mentions that "Allah raised him up unto Himself."

On the other hand, the Christology of Christianity ascribes what Islam rejects about the person of Christ. In Christianity, the humanness and the divinity of Christ are held together without distinction, thus having two natures. The tradition maintains that "Jesus Christ is truly man, that He is truly God..."⁶ Though scholars argue that there are no direct and explicit explanations of the dual nature of Christ in the New Testament, these have been affirmed for him through interpretations and inferences from various Biblical passages.⁷ Jesus' human nature is clear in many passages and does not require any interpretation. For instance, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5 thus, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus." John 14:28 quotes Jesus saying: "..... for the father is greater than I" and 20:17 Jesus was quoted saying, "I am returning to my Father and your Father to my God and your God." Many biblical passages were also cited to support the divine nature of Christ. They include John 1:11, which states that "in the beginning was Word and Word was with God and the Word was God." Thomas' description of Jesus as "my Lord and my God," among many other passages, (J.N. 20:28) is also used to argue for the divinity of Christ.

Before the final arrival of the Church at the conception above Christ, there had been many Christological controversies. In what is called the Apostolic Age, the three Synoptic Gospels emphasized the humanity of Christ. The Gospel of John was first to provide information on the divinity of Christ, as in the above-cited verses.⁸ Muslim polemicist, Abu Ameenah Bilal Phillips, argues that "these verses do not constitute evidence for Jesus' divinity, especially considering the doubts held by Christian scholars about the Fourth Gospel".⁹ This is due to the historical contradiction between the Gospel of John and the three other synoptic Gospels. The Gospel of John describes Jesus as *Logos*, a Greek term that means "word" thus identifying him with the pagan divine reason of Greek philosophy, which is contained in the cosmos. In the early Church,

Christian apologists made much effort to present Christianity in an intelligible way to the Hellenistic world. Thus, they described Christ as “the pre-existent *Logos*.”¹⁰ Furthermore, they argue that the Greek word used for God in John 1:1 is in the definite form *hotheos* “the God” while the second which was used for “word” is in an indefinite form *tontheos*. “A God” therefore could not be used to argue for the divinity of Christ, as *tontheos* was used for the devil in 2Corinthians 4:4. Moses was also referred to as such in Exodus 7:1.¹¹ The reply of Jesus to the Jews who accused him of blasphemy for claiming divinity as recorded in the Gospel of John 10:34 was that “is it not written in your law, “I have said you are Gods?” Quoting Psalm 82:6 is also used to argue for this position.

The Nazarenes, under James in the Jerusalem Church, held Jesus as a man. They were later called the Ebonites and after the ascendancy of the Greco-Roman Church, they were declared as heretics.¹² This group argued that Jesus was an ordinary mortal.¹³ Another Christian movement, which is non-Jewish, developed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and carried on the Ebonites’ conception of Christ. The movement was called Monarchianism.¹⁴ Similarly, Arianism also rejected the divinity of Christ. Arius taught that Christ was human, and several Church Councils discussed this controversy. Arius attracted to himself much followership; he was declared heretic at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E.¹⁵ It was at this council that it was also declared that “the one God exist in these persons (father, son, and Holy Spirit),”¹⁶ and that Jesus was full divinity and full humanity.¹⁷ The return of Arius from ex-communication was made possible by Emperor Constantine’s daughter, and he was readmitted into the Church. In the Church Council held at Antioch in 341, his presence led to the omission of the clause that Jesus has the same divine nature with God in the affirmation of faith that was issued at the council. The ascendancy of Emperor Constantius II in 350 CE suppressed the Trinitarian creed; it was, however, resuscitated after his death in 361 CE and consolidated among the Orthodox Christians of the West while it continued to be suppressed in the East under Arian emperor Valens (364-383 CE). Arianism was finally crushed under Emperor Theodosius I (379-395 C.E.). Yet some people continued to hold the strict monotheism of Arius up till the 7th century.¹⁸

The non-divine nature of Christ, which is taught by Islam, still exists among Christians of different denominations based on their interpretation of the scripture. These groups include

Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Christian Scientists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Oneness Pentecostals and so forth.¹⁹ In 1977, a group of seven Biblical scholars published *The Myth of God Incarnate*. The work raised much controversy in the Church of England. The writers argued that as in Acts 2:22ff, Jesus was a man accredited by God and that his deification is a mere "mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us."²⁰ Phillip further quotes many modern biblical scholars who are in accord with the preceding argument, among which is the Late Archbishop Michael Ramsey, who wrote that "Jesus did not claim deity for himself"²¹.

PECULIAR ŞŪFĪ CHRISTOLOGY EMANATING FROM ITS GNOSTIC PANTHEISTIC MONISM

Bishop Kenneth Cragg wrote in his work *Jesus and the Muslims: an Exploration* that:

Nowhere is Islamic awareness of Jesus more lively or more perceptive than in the Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu Poems of mystics of Islam. Sitting loosely by doctrinal contentiousness, they are free to aspire towards that soul-affection which first kindled the theology pundits dispute and which transcends what punditry can attain. The Jesus of Sūfism kindles mutual recognition.²²

It has been mentioned in this paper that Sufism is strongly connected with the person of Christ, and the term Şūfī represents poverty, being ascetic and saintliness. Some Muslim anti-Şūfīs and some Orientalists even argue for a Christian influence in the emergence of Şūfī movements in Islam. Scholars, however, argue that "the hypothesis of more borrowing is untenable."²³ Moreover, the diverse attribution of Şūfīsm to foreign sources had contradicted one another, and there is no historical basis for rejecting the Islamic origin of Şūfīsm.²⁴ Jesus is seen as a great Şūfī personality by the Şūfīs due to his exemplary and exceptional character of renunciation of the world through self-denial and asceticism, love for the weak, humility, recompensing evil with goodness and above all his description by the Qur'an as among the *al-Muqarrabīn* (3:45), i.e., somebody that is of the company of those nearest to Allah; a position which is the goal of every Şūfī. This description makes Christ a personality of emulation to the Şūfīs.²⁵

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah related that Muhammad b. Sīrīn heard about a particular group which gives preference to wearing of (*al-Şūf*) wooden garments over other clothing in emulation of Jesus. Upon this, he remarked that the guidance of our Prophet (Muhammad) is preferable to

us, as he was reported to have worn cotton and other garments.²⁶

Şūfīc “truth,” knowledge, and metaphysics which this paper refers to as “Pantheistic monism” (also referred to by some as *Waḥdat al- Wujūd* (Unity of Being) led some Şūfīs to a peculiar Christology which exoterically negates the teachings of Islam on Christ and which could only be reconciled with an esoteric interpretation. Although the term above of pantheistic monism and *Waḥdat al- Wujūd* are rejected by some scholars and Şūfī advocates as misrepresenting the Şūfī ontology,²⁷ this writer has no other epithet to designate it but to resort to the description of others.²⁸

Following the Şūfī path, therefore, means to “die gradually to oneself and to become oneself, to be born anew and to become aware of what one has always been from eternity (*azal*) without one’s having realized it until the necessary transformation has come about. It means to glide out of one’s own mould like a snake peeling off its skin”.²⁹ A Şūfī comes to realize, as Ibn Arabi puts it, that “Being belongs to Him and non-existence belongs to you. He does not cease being, and you do not cease not being”.³⁰ Or as Anawati describes the idea of al- Ḥallāj, a soul attains union with God by being ‘made perfect, consecrated, deified, becoming the free and living instrument of God’.³¹

According to Rustom, this Şūfī metaphysics contrasts pantheism, which is derived from Greek words *pan* meaning “all” and *theos* meaning God. Therefore, Pantheism identifies God with the Cosmos and that all the things in the universe are God.³²

This Şūfī Ontology is expressed by Abū Yazīd Al-Bisṭāmī in his ecstatic mode in which a peculiar Christology emanated. He states:

Everyone who denies the world and humbles himself through fasting and worship changes into a spiritual being. He who steadfastly continues in this manner until the end of this life will alternately be permeated by the Spirit of Holiness and receive immortality. From then on he is no longer a mortal son of Adam but a part of God in the same way as Jesus.³³

A similar expression was made by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī in his *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (“Universal Man”), he writes, as mentioned by Burckhardt, that:

The message of Christ unveils certain- inner and, therefore, esoteric- aspects of monotheism of Abraham. In a certain sense, Christian dogmas, which can be all reduced to the dogma of the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, sum up in a “historical” form all that

Ṣufism teaches on union with God. Moreover, Ṣufis hold that the Lord Jesus (*Sayyidinā* ‘Īsa) is of all the Divine Envoys (*rasūl*) the most perfect type of contemplative saint.....³⁴

These peculiar expressions are taken to another level by the founders and adherents of some new religious movements in Nigeria, and these serve as precedence to the notions held by the religious movements.

INTRODUCTION OF *TARBIYA* IN REFORMED TIJANIYYAH ORDER TO NIGERIA

Tijaniyyah Ṣūfī order was founded by Aḥmad Al-Tijāni (d. 1851 C.E.) in Morocco. He was born in 1734 C.E. at a place called ‘Ayn Mādī in Algeria. He founded the *Ṭarīqa* in 1781. The Order spread to many parts of the world, including Nigeria afterwards.³⁵ Sheikh Maulūd Fāl can arguably be said to be the first person to spread the Tijaniyyah Order in Nigeria.³⁶ Sheikh Umar al-Fūtī (d. 1864) is the second and most important personage in its spread in Nigeria. Umar was initiated into the Order in the 1820s by Abd Al-Karīm al-Nāqil, who received the *Ṭarīqa* from Maulūd Fāl.³⁷ Umar visited Sokoto and stayed for seven months in 1826 then moved to Mecca. On his way back, he visited Borno in 1833; from there, he visited Bauchi, Kano, Zaria and Katsina. He established a Zāwiya (Centre) in Zaria.³⁸ The next important personage in the spread of Tijaniyya in Nigeria was the Mauritanian Sheikh Abd al -Wāhib Ujdūd, who came to Kano and died in 1920 at Katsina.³⁹ The Order continues to gain more following in different parts of Nigeria, and the city of Kano was the main centre for the spread of Tijaniyya in Nigeria as all its personages from North Africa and Mauritania that came to Nigeria specifically aimed at Kano.⁴⁰ Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass was the reformer of the Tijaniyya Order in the Twentieth Century, and he was able to bring many traditional followers of the Order under his authority and, as Quadri puts it, became known as the leader of the Tijaniyyah throughout Nigeria.⁴¹ The basic feature of Nyass’ reform was solely *al-Tarbiya al-Inyāsiyya al-Tijāniyya* (spiritual training).⁴² He brought a new vigor into it and made *Tarbiya* accessible to all Muslims, including the laymen, a spiritual experience which was hitherto strictly for well-learned persons.⁴³ The essence of the spiritual training is to attain the knowledge of Truth about God *al-Haqīqa*, or as Loimeier puts it, a secret process through which an initiated novice arrives at gnosis (*Wuṣūl*).⁴⁴ The process of *Tarbiya* entails initiating a *Murīd* (novice) into the process through prayers and invocations until he attains his aim, which is to reach God. The process is devoid of seclusions (*Khalwa*) and subjection of self to difficulties, as is the tradition of other Ṣūfī Orders. The process entails having a guiding Sheikh (*al-Sheikh al-Murshid*), who will lead the adept (*al-Murīd*) to God and “show him his God”.⁴⁵

Hiskett explains *tarbiya* in the reformed Tijaniyah or Fayḍa al-Tijaniyya as paraphrased by Loimeier in the following way:

Tarbiya is a process of initiation in five stages. In the first stage of this process, the adept is shown by his Shaykh murabbī (Master of tarbiya) the Unity of God (*tawhīd*) and the creation of man through God. In the second step, the disciple learns that the Prophet Muhammad was God's first creation. In the following stages, the chain of argument is continued by presenting Aḥmad al-Tijānī as a creation of the Prophet and Ibrahim Niass as a creator of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Finally, the adept learns that Niass embodies the present earthly manifestation of the wholeness of creation.⁴⁶

Hiskett upholds the reliability of this account of *tarbiya* despite obtaining the information from a defected member due to much secrecy in which the process is characterized. He argues that the practicing Tijānī friends he showed the account to did not object to it. They only made amends to the conclusion of the fifth *ḥaḍra*, that instead of Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass being the earthly manifestation of “the whole being,” the conclusion is that the Prophet, Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī and Sheikh Ibrahim are all one and “in that each is part of *kawn dukka*.”⁴⁷

Rüdiger Seesemann faulted Hiskett's process of arriving at the reliability of the above account of *tarbiya* as he writes that:

The procedure of interviewing a former member of the Tijāniyya, who had joined a religious movement ideologically opposed to Sufism and then presenting the response as the correct model of *tarbiya* is certainly problematic from a methodological point of view, even if the attempt is made to verify the statement through other sources. Informants I asked about Hiskett's model did not object either- they simply declined to comment. Although it is not impossible that the model conforms to local understanding of *tarbiya*, my research does not corroborate its validity for the Tijāniyya as a whole.⁴⁸

However, the above explanation of the model of *tarbiya* implies an element of pantheism and monism as all creatures are conceived as being emanated from God. This is why some anti-Ṣūfīs like Maigari describes it as *Ḥulūl* (pantheism) and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (monism).⁴⁹ Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, in 1964,⁵⁰ sent a letter to clarify what is meant by *tarbiya* as he saw followers of Sheikh Ibrahim, who passed through *tarbiya* ending up to calling whatever they see as God. He specifically inquired that “*wa mā al-farq baynahu wa bayna al-ḥulūl aw qaul al-Naṣara aḥd al-Thalātha*,”⁵¹ (what is the difference between this doctrine and pantheism and the Christian saying of a triune God).

In his response, Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass explains the states of an adept which he reaches

through the initiation of *tarbiya* as *al-wuṣūl* (arrival at gnosis), *al-Sulūk* (conduct) *al-faṭḥ* (opening) and *al-fanā* (Annihilation) which occurs through the love of God (*al-Ḥaq*) and sinking in his presence until that adept ceases to hear or see anything in the world. He calls Allah in all his situations, and that does not imply that the things he sees are really God. A similitude is the case of Ibrahim as contained in Qur'an 6:75- 79; Ibrāhīm describes the stars as his Lord, then the moon and the sun, yet the Qur'an affirms that he was never a polytheist. More so, the adept does not remain permanently in the state of ecstasy, and that whosoever says anything contrary to the Qur'an should be considered an infidel until he repents.⁵²

This Ṣūfī state of ecstasy is the same with what was expressed by previous Ṣūfīs such as Ibn 'Arabi and Ḥallāj but presented differently in the reformed Tijjaniyya. Burckhardt referred to Ibn 'Arabi's exposition of the doctrine of an adept's union with God "as a mutual interpretation of Divinity and man".⁵³ The divine nature (*al-Lahūt*) becomes the content of *al-Nāsūt* (the human nature), which received it, and from another end, "man is absorbed and, as it were, enveloped by Divine reality. God is mysteriously present in man and man is obliterated in God".⁵⁴

The Ṣūfīs often cite the following Ḥadīth al-Qudsī to affirm their position: "He who adores Me never ceases to approach Me until I love him, and when I love him I am the hearing by which he hears the sight by which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the foot with which he walks."⁵⁵

The introduction of *tarbiya* and Fayḍa al-Tijjaniyya was done by Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass himself, and the spread of the *tarbiya* was the most important thing he brought into the Tijjaniyya Order. The first thing he did was to distribute his work, *Kāshif al-Ilbās 'an Fayḍati al-Khatmi Abī al-'Abbās* (the removal of confusion concerning the flood of the saintly seal Aḥmad al-Tijjāni).⁵⁶ The term Fayḍa is translated by Loimeier as "overflowing Grace"⁵⁷, this gives a more precise meaning of the term. The book was distributed to some prominent Kano scholars, and it was well-received. The work is an exposition of *Tarbiya*. His teachings were accepted, and it became a mass movement known as the *Ahl al-Faiḍa al-Tijjaniyya*, (the community of overflowing grace). The spread of the *Tarbiya* in Nigeria among *Ahl al-Faiḍa* led to the birth of many offshoot groups, some with less concern about the obligatory rituals of Islam and some

peculiar ideologies. They include the ‘Īsa Zāhiran group (Nāsutiyya) and the Īmāniyya movement.

THE BIRTH OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN NIGERIA AND THEIR PECULIAR CHRISTOLOGIES

The focus of this paper is on two religious movements that activities are strongly connected to the person of Christ, and whose Christologies emanated from the *Tarbiya* in the Ṣūfī Order of Tijaniyyah. Imaniyya movement was founded by Sheikh Isa Mamuka in Jada Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. He is a follower of Tijaniyya Order. The *Tarbiya* led him to found a new system of worship and to accommodate Christians into his place of worship. Its members still refer to themselves as Muslims of the Tijaniyya Order with a spiritual chain starting from Sheikh Ahmad Tijani to Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass, Sheikh Abdullah Ja’far⁵⁸ and Isa Mamuka.⁵⁹ It is a focal point in this movement, as in the other groups to be mentioned, not to criticize or attack the religious practices of anybody, and that man should follow any religion that he thinks will give him salvation. This group has 12 centres in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State namely: Daiman Abadan, Madinat Dar al- Salam, Miftahul-Khairat, Dar al-Salam, Safwa al-Iman, Mahdi Dar al-Salam, Saifu Mahdibatu al-Arsh, Miqat Bait al-Arsh, Jam‘ul Muminina, Kanz al-Azim, Silsilatu al-Nabiyin and Tabaraka Allah.⁶⁰

Dairat Daiman Abadan under Dahiru Yakubu Madugu has Baitul Shafi’ah (House of salvation), and this house presents the Christian influence on the practices of Imaniyya. Bait al-Shafa’ah has three doors, namely, the door of faith, peace and good deeds. Through this, the group has interpreted the three degrees of Islam, namely; Imān, Islām and Iḥsān to suit Trinity. The most significant issue that is related to Christology is the presence of three flags around Bait al-Shafa’ah. These flags have inscriptions of erroneous Trinity; the first is the flag of the father; then the flag of the mother; and that of the son, and in addition to each inscription is the portrait of Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass. This erroneous presentation of Trinity, even as it does not conform to the Qur’anic teaching on the issue,⁶¹ portrays a peculiar Christology of the Imaniyya movement. The movement’s centre at Maisamari has chairs for sitting instead of mats for Muslim worship. The interior of “the house of salvation” has at its middle a place of circumambulation as it is done at Mecca. It is pertinent to say that most followers of this group have less knowledge about

the teachings of Islam.

The ‘Īsā Zāhīran group is another group whose teaching is pantheistic and monistic. The followers of the group uphold that nothing exists but God. The group leadership currently operates like ‘a secret society’ possibly because they don’t want their identities to be disclosed for fear of being attacked by the society for blasphemy, especially in the core part of Northern Nigeria.⁶² The group uses the social media platforms to disseminate its teachings and recruit followers. The leader of the group does not have a permanent base; he, however, moves from around different places in Nigeria. According to an informant of this researcher, the leader of the group contacts his followers through phone calls whenever he arrives in the towns which they live. According to the blog⁶³ of the group, the name of the founder is given as Abdullahi Ibn Abdullah.⁶⁴

He also calls himself Imam Mahdi Isa Alaihi Salam (Jesus de Messiah).⁶⁵ He also refers to himself as ‘Īsā Zāhīran.⁶⁶ He is said to be of Nupe parentage from Niger State Nigeria, although he was born at Cotonou, Benin Republic. He is said to be a businessman who shuttles between Lagos and Cotonou. From the Audio made available to this researcher by informants, he speaks Hausa language fluently, understands Arabic and also speaks Nigerian Pidgin English.⁶⁷ His followers’ base seems to be stronger among the people of Niger and Nassarawa States. His most ardent follower and companion, who uses the name Aryan Osaze in the social media, is from the area judging by his accent of Hausa language.⁶⁸ The focal teaching of the group is that God manifests Himself in the person of Adam and other prophets, but people could not comprehend because they said that God sent them. According to ‘Īsā Zāhīran:

In another place, they will be saying the message exactly as it is just like Jesus was telling people to come to their God while their God is with them. He was talking about himself and also when Prophet Mohammed said that he is Ahmadu without min. In another way, they will be saying that they are the God. Now in this second time of Jesus (Isa Alehi Salam), he came direct; he is not hiding under any abstract God. He is the God Himself (sic).⁶⁹

The founder of the group further maintained that after the era of the prophets, the saints also taught the same message. The founder was a follower of the “community of grace” of the Tijaniyya Order. His teaching, therefore, can be described as an offshoot of the Order since the

Şūfī *tarbiya* teaches a metaphysic close to that. This is why ‘Īsa Zāhīran wrote: “the intention of the prophets and saints is to make the whole world become one thing (the unity of all creation) to make everything know where they came from, where they are and where they are going to.....”⁷⁰ He believes that God manifested Himself in the person of Aḥmad Tijānī and then after him in the person of Ibrahim Nyass, ‘who prophesied that the last manifestation of God will come.’⁷¹

The relationship of this group with the person of Christ is that its message claimed to be connected with the second coming of Christ, which is well documented in the Islamic literature of Hadith.⁷² Isa Zahiran posits that Christ has come for the second time and has clearly stated that he is God. His manifestation is in the person of Abdullahi bn Abdullahi, the founder of the group. He is also said to be the Imām al-Mahdi, who was also prophesized to appear at the end time by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). He thus equated the two personages. The name ‘Īsa Zāhīran (Christ outwardly or manifestly) signifies the appearance of Christ in Abdullah bn Abdullah. The followers of this group explain this through the Şūfī *Ḥaḍrat al-Nāsūt* (a stage in which God is said to appear in human form), that is why the followers of the sect call themselves Nāsūtiyya.⁷³ To the founder of this group, his message entails the abolishment of all religious practices and rituals including that of the Şūfīs. He believes that non-practice of religion will bring progress while he holds that the Western world progresses only by its shunning of religious practices.⁷⁴ The only thing humankind is expected to do now is to “know God” in the sense which they preach and that is the solution to all calamities that are prevalent in the world. The leader of the group posits that since the Prophet of Islam prophesized that Jesus will bring peace to the world in his second coming, through the knowledge of God,⁷⁵ it is the knowledge of Jesus that will bring peace to the world. ‘Īsa Zāhīran also posits that Jesus is omnipresent. He states: “Jesus Christ is in (sic) everywhere because He is the spirit of God. He is the spirit that dwells in the heart of everything and the hear (sic) [heart] is the controller of everybody and everything”.⁷⁶ The cardinal teaching of this group according to, to its members, is to eradicate greed, jealousy, hypocrisy, dishonesty and discrimination.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

Islam and Christianity have a different conception of Christ. Some doctrines are irreconcilable as they negate each other. Islam rejects the Christian doctrine of Trinity and Sonship of Jesus. Christians, on the other hand, uphold Jesus as a component of the Triune God, and he is conceived as the begotten son of God the Father. Some factors led to the emanation of peculiar Christology among some Muslims which include the position of Jesus in Islam, his conception by the Sūfīs by connecting his person to Sūfism and the Sūfī ontology which holds that no being exists but God's being and as Rustom puts it: "the things are existentiated by the divine fiat, what is the difference between their state in their immutability and their "existing" as entities? Regarding their fixity, there is no difference. However, each immutable entity, when *existentiated*, acts as a locus (*Mazhar*) for God's manifestation (*Zuhūr*) or self-disclosure (*Tajallī*)."78

The Imaniyya movement operates physically in Adamawa and Taraba States of Nigeria as a religious movement with its centers and modes of worship and some Islamic, Sufic and Christian symbols of Christology in addition to non-discrimination against practitioners of other religions. The followers of 'Īsa Zāhīran still operate in secrecy, especially for fear of been attacked for blasphemy in the core parts of Northern Nigeria. The founder calls himself the manifestation of Christ and God. The group seeks the abolishment of all forms of religious practices and rituals and that the world will only know peace by accepting the true knowledge it brought.

ENDNOTES

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2 Joseph Kenny. *Jesus and Mary in Islam, a Christian look*. Lagos: Dominican Publications, 2000.

3 Abdullah Yusuf Ali. *The Qur'an Translated*. Sayed A.A. Razwy ed. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 1995.

4 Muhib Omolayo Opeloye. *A Dictionary of Peoples and Places in the Qur'an*. Lagos: West African Book Publishers, 1996, p 74

5 *Ibid*.

6 Christology" *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14597a.htm> accessed on 01/11/2014.

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- 8 “Christology” Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia; Abu Ameena Bilal Philip. *The True Message of Jesus Christ*. Lagos: Hamzat International Islamic Publishing House, 2001, pp 49ff
- 9 Abu Ameena Bilal Philip, *Ibid.*, pp 49- 50
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- 13 “Christology” Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia
- 14 Abu Ameena Bilal Philip, *Ibid.*, p54
- 15 *Ibid.*, 55
- 16 “Christology” Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia
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- 25 Chentu Dauda Nguvugher. *Conflicting Christologies.*, pp284- 5
- 26 ‘Abd al-Qādir bn Ḥabīb al-Llah bn al-Sindī. *Al-Taṣawwuf fī Mizān al-Baḥth wa al- Taḥqīq*. Madinah: Maktabatu Ibn al- Qayyim, 1990, p 37.
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- 31 Georges C. Anawati “Philosophy, Theology, and mysticism,” p 371
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- 35 Y.A. Quadri. “Ibrahim Niass (1902- 75)- The Tijaniyyah Shaykh”. *Islam and Modern Age*, Vol. xvi: 2, 1985, p 109. Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari. *Sheikh Ibrāhim Inyāss al-Sanigālī*. Lebanon: Dār al- ‘Arabiyya, 1981, p 9
- 36 Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, *ibid.*, pp 46- 49
- 37 *Ibid.*; Roman Loimeier. *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*. Illinois: Northern University Press, p 24

- 38 John N. Paden. *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*. Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, pp 76- 77.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p 82-3; Y.A. Quadri. “Ibrahim Niass (1902- 75)- The Tijaniyyah Shaykh”, p 109
- 40 Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, p 64.
- 41 Y.A. Quadri., p 109
- 42 Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, p 131.
- 43 Mervyn Hiskett. “The ‘Community of Grace’ and its Opponents, ‘Rejecters’: A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to its Hausa Expression.” *African Language Studies*, XVII, 1980, p120
- 44 Roman Loimeier. Islamic Reform, p 35
- 45 Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, pp 128- 29
- 46 Roman Loimeier. Islamic Reform, p 35; Cf. Mervyn Hiskett, p 120
- 47 Mervyn Hiskett, p 121
- 48 Rüdiger Seesemann. *The Divine Flood Ibrāhīm Niass and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 70- 71
- 49 Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, pp 327- 28
- 50 Roman Loimeier. Islamic Reform, p 36
- 51 Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass. *Ijābat al-Fatwā*. A response to the enquiry of Abubakar Gumi, a pamphlet in handwritten form circulated by al-Ḥājj Maḥmūd Dan Goggo, printed by Northern Maktabat Printing Press, Kano, 1344 A.H., p1
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp 2-3
- 53 Titus Burchardst. An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine. P 92
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Qtd in *Ibid*, the hadith is originally in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī
- 56 This translation is taken from Zachary Wright, Mukhtar Holland and Abdullahi El-Okene Trans. *The Removal of Confusion concerning the Flood of the Saintly Seal Aḥmad al-Tijānī*. Egypt: al-Imam Shaykh Tijani Ali Cisse; Loimeier translated it as “The Exposer of the Veils of Overflowing Grace of the Seal of Abī al- ‘Abbas,” p 35 Seal A
- 57 Roman Loimeier. Islamic Reform., p35; Rüdiger Seesemann translated it as “the Divine Flood”; Mervyn Hiskett translated it as “an infusion of grace” p 102, and the followers of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Nyass as ”Community of Grace”
- 58 There is much controversy over the person of Abdullah Ja’far, Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass expelled him from his followership and sent out a letter in accordance to that to his followers in Nigeria this was due some activities he was engaged in, which include negligence of religious duties, indulgence in vices and making of peculiar utterances. For more information, see Muḥammad Ṭahir Maigari, pp 139- 140.
- 59 Oral interview with Bello Ali who conducted a research on the movement as part of his M. A. programme at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.
- 60 Bello Ali. “Problems and Prospect of Da’wah in Taraba State” M. A Dissertation Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University Sokoto, 2014.
- 61 On the Qur’an and the components of the Trinity, see Muḥammad Mohar Ali. *The Qur’an and the Orientalists*. Ipswich: Jam’iyyat Ihya’ Mnhaj Al-Sunnah, 2004, p 64
- 62 There are instances in which people expressed some peculiar expressions such as deification of Nyass and then go into hiding. This researcher has an audio of one Ismail Shuaibu Kabutu alias Na Gausu Llahi al-A’zam who released a song on deification of Nyass in early 2013. He titled it “Shehu baka haifa ba” this

in consonance with the Qur'anic description of God in Surah 112:3: "He begets not, nor is He begotten" he thus referred to Nyass as "*Lam yald wa lam yūlad*, Umaru Musa Yar' adua University, Katsina.." The song generated much controversy in Kano, the artist however did not state his address but a phone number, he afterward went into hiding.

63 "The Star of Judgment has Appear (sic.)", starofjudgement.blog.com/ accessed 21/09/2014.

64 *Ibid.*; this was also affirmed by the informants of this researcher.

65 *Ibid.*

66 An audio of the conversation with the group leader secretly recorded by the informant of this researcher at his hotel room in Kano, marked as Audio A.

67 *Ibid.*

68 An informant told this writer that the real name of Aryan is Nura

69 Isa Zahiran, "The Universal Message the Advice" starofjudgement.blog.com/ accessed 21/09/2014.

70 Isa Zahiran "Universal Message 26/06/2010" starofjudgement.blog.com/ accessed 21/09/2014.

71 *Ibid.*

72 He mentioned that there are over 600 *Aḥādīth* on that. See The Star of Judgment

73 The account name of the group leader on Face book bears 'Nasutiyya' as the user name.

74 Audio A; "Universal Message 2010 August 9" starofjudgement.blog.com/ accessed 21/09/2014

75 "Unveiling Isa Alehi Salam (Jesus) 2010 August 9" starofjudgement.blog.com/ accessed 21/09/2014

76 *Ibid.*

77 The Star of Judgment has Appear (sic.)", [starofjudgement.blog.com.](http://starofjudgement.blog.com/)

78 Mohammed Rustom, p 59