

An Observer Commentary on the Allah Issue: A Guide to Muslim Reactions

Currently there are 4 main forces in the debate amongst Muslims. I resorted to the convenience of labelling for the purpose of identification.

Group A – (Previously referred to as “The Confused”)

This is not accusation that people in this group are confused. The label was previously attached to refer to their use of the word "keliru" (to confuse/confusion) so many times under various circumstances.

After surveying the internet, the main characteristics of this group are as follow (the list is not exhaustive):

- They believe that "Allah" is for Muslim only
- Only Christians who are Arabs can use "Allah"
- Muslims will get "confused" if Christians use "Allah" in their worship
- Although "Allah" is the one and only proper name for the Supreme Deity, only Muslims can use it because theologically, Muslims hold the correct belief
- Although Christians believe in "God of Abraham" (as do Muslims and Jews), their "God" is not Allah because Christians believe in a Triune God.
- Although Arab polytheists and Arab Jews and Christians all believe in "Allah", the word "Allah" has been "Islamised" by Prophet Muhammad and therefore now exclusive to Muslims only (as claimed by some of Al-Attas' "students")
- Theologically, Christians do not have the "right" to use "Allah" (similar to the immediate point above)
- Muslims must “protect” the word "Allah". Add "ibadat", "Baitullah" etc to the list if you like.
- Muslims who support the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims are confused and has committed blasphemy.
- Christians do not believe in Allah

The last 2 points are at the extreme.

Please find below a few examples of such opinions.

- <http://rausyanfikir.com/>
- The statement by Dr Haron Din, Deputy Mursyidul Am of PAS
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/121161>
- http://khairaummah.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=294&Itemid=1
- http://khairaummah.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=246&Itemid=170

Group B (Previously labelled as “The Moderate”)

Previously labelled as “The Moderate”, this group takes the middle point between the 2 “extremes” within the conservative forces.

This group basically accepts they Quranic injunction that "Allah" is the only proper name of the Supreme Deity, and they accept that the Quran allows its use by non-Muslims from the verses I will outline below.

The point which makes them the middle point is that they support the ban on Christians using the

word "Allah" out of fear that the ill-educated Malay populace can be "confused" by the similarity of the terms used both by Muslim and Christian liturgies. Such a view is not uncommon, especially since Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three sisters in the greater Abrahamic Faith family.

Also, if the name is widely used, it is feared that the name might be attached to other deities, at which point is considered an abuse.

Some views are sound, some are not. However, my personal opinion is I find that "confusion" is a feeble excuse for any ban.

- <http://www.zaharuddin.net/content/view/900/72/>

The Mursyidul Am of PAS, Nik Aziz, also expressed the view that it may be permissible to put some restriction, although so far he has not spoken of any need for a ban.

Group C (Previously labelled as "The Liberal")

This in no way means that this group is liberal. It is still a conservative group. The reason behind the previous label was that some quarters, especially from Group A above accuse some of this group of embracing "Islam Liberal". Or because this group takes a "liberal" stance from the common perspective. There is nothing liberal in this group's position because in my opinion, as it adheres to established opinions within orthodox Islamic schools.

This group basically accepts the Quranic injunction that "Allah" is the only proper name of the Supreme Deity, and they accept that the Quran allows its use by non-Muslims from the verses I will outline below.

Hence, they "allow" the use of "Allah" by non-Muslims, since this is what they believe in.

They believe that the only "cure" for the "confusion" as feared by Groups A and B above is better education.

At the same time, they call for guidelines on the usage of the word "Allah". Polytheist Quraish Arabs, despite worshipping different deities, still adhere to the belief that there is only one Supreme Being, Allah. This is the basis of the "guideline" proposed so far.

I am in this group. Or at least my views mirror this group's views.

On an extreme point, people like Dr Asri openly called for the abandonment of Kalam studies, or studies related to Kalam, or using Kalam in any delivery. Kalam, to my understanding, is "Islamic theology" following the lines of Greek theology. This was popularised by Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ashaari and later taken to a new height by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali.

- <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/opinion/mujahid-yusof-rawa/48436-perkataan-allah-dan-golongan-munafik>
- <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/opinion/mujahid-yusof-rawa/49772-the-day-i-spoke-at-the-hall-of-the-holy-spirit->
- <http://drmaza.com/home/?p=566>
- <http://drmaza.com/home/?p=931>
- http://www.harakahdaily.net/v2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24114:penggunaan-kalimah-allah&catid=83:presiden&Itemid=127

Unlike the classical theological thinking which includes the studies of the existence of God, attributes of God, essence of God, behaviour, etc, the earlier Islamic thinking is limited only to what is in the Quran. People like Dr Asri called for the abandonment of convoluted theological discourse in basic teachings, quoting Al-Qaradawi and T.J. Winter that "Kalam is never part of Islam/aqidah (creed), but a necessary tool in understanding Islam in modern day" (give and take a few words).

Much has changed since the old days. Philosophy is no longer the monopoly of the Greek. In fact, it has never been.

Group D

Previously labelled as "The Dunno", I believe that this group mainly consists of "clueless" members of the public. Various opinions have been heard from this group, although none of which I would consider "original". Many participated in various demonstration.

Addenda

Addendum 1

While you may be aware of the concept of difference of opinion in Islam, here is just a light reading to refresh your memory, if you need a dose or two.

- <http://drmaza.com/home/?p=710>
- <http://www.zaharuddin.net/content/view/903/72/>
- http://majalahikhwah.blogspot.com/2010/01/memahami-asas-perbezaan-pandangan-dalam_2670.html

On the difference of opinion between Dr Haron Din and Haji Hadi Awang:

- <http://drdzul.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/pas%E2%80%99-ulama-%E2%80%98disunited%E2%80%99-stance-on-%E2%80%98allah%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-2-sides-of-the-same-coin/>

Addendum 2

I cannot verify each and every fact but most are consistent with what I came across. I have seen excerpts on a version, written in Jawi in Indonesia in late 1800's. From the (old) Malay language used, I am confident that it was original.

<http://www.bible.org.my/updates/body.php?id=57>

Addendum 3

While there are similarities between the 3 Abrahamic Faiths, there are also differences. I will not touch on the differences as I believe we can go through that separately. Of the similarities, I will highlight some below.

Following the bitter dispute between Imam Al-Ashaari and the Muktazili, the earlier was credited as the "founder" of the Sunni creed (I contest this), another scholar came up with a collection of Quranic

verses concerning Islamic creed. According to famous opinions, this was the teaching of Imam Abu Hanifah, the “father” of the Hanafi School, handed down all the way through the writer. This compilation (with some commentary) is simple and straight-forward, and consistent with the mainstream Sunni creed. This essay is called “The Creed of Al-Tahawi” after the writer, Imam Abu Jaafar Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Tahawi.

On the translation of this work by Hamza Yusuf, the Archbishop of Canterbury commented:

"Shaykh Hamza Yusuf has rendered a service not only to Muslims, but also to a wider audience by his new translation of the *Creed of Imam al Tahawi* accompanied by an illuminating historical introduction and by helpful biographies and extensive notes. His translation is formal without being archaic and is written in a style that Christians can recognize from their own credal formulations. The work is of value to others than Muslims, for two reasons: first, it provides in 130 short paragraphs a clear presentation of core Muslim belief in a way that is not easily available by other means, thereby providing a very positive instrument for the essential work of dialogue. Secondly, it provides Christians, who have also developed and continue to use credal formulations, with the opportunity to see just where the Islamic understanding of God comes close to the Christian understanding of God. This does much to reduce the credibility of approaches which insist on a thoroughgoing bipolar understanding of Christianity and Islam. Muslims and Christians should welcome this publication."

- **Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, UK**

<http://www.zaytuna.org/tahawibook.asp>