

The Meaning of Death in Islam and Christianity: A Conceptual and Spiritual Analysis

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Abstract: The concept of death has been a subject of human contemplation across various religious and philosophical traditions. Both Islam and Christianity provide their followers with distinct interpretations of death, offering perspectives on the afterlife and how death should be approached. This study aims to compare the understanding of death in Islam and Christianity, exploring theological differences and similarities between the two religions. Using a qualitative approach through literature review, the research examines religious texts, scholarly articles, and other sources to analyze how death is perceived and how each religion encourages its followers to prepare for it. The findings reveal that while both religions view death as a transition to the afterlife, Islam focuses on the journey to the barzakh and ultimate judgment, while Christianity emphasizes salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and eternal life with God. This comparative study provides deeper insight into how both religions shape their followers' views on mortality and the afterlife.

Contribution: This study contributes to the understanding of how Islamic and Christian teachings on death influence the behavior and attitudes of their followers toward life and mortality. It provides a framework for interfaith discussions on the spiritual implications of death and afterlife.

Keywords: death; human; Islam; Kristen; conceptual; spiritual

INTRODUCTION

Death is a universal phenomenon that has been a subject of reflection throughout human history. Philosophers, scientists, and religious figures have attempted to interpret it from various perspectives. In religious and philosophical studies, death is often viewed as a transition between earthly life and the afterlife. Epicurus, for example, argues that death is not to be feared because while we are alive, death does not exist, and when death

exists, we no longer exist to experience it.¹ However, for many, death remains a frightening and uncertain event, creating a tension between rational understanding and emotional reactions to this concept.²

Numerous studies on the understanding of death have been conducted within different religious traditions, including Islam and Christianity, to examine how these religions view and teach their followers to confront death. In Islam, death is not seen as the end of everything, but rather a gateway to an eternal life in the hereafter.³ Similarly, in Christianity, death is understood as the consequence of human sin, which leads to separation from God but also offers hope of resurrection and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ Previous studies suggest that these religious perspectives influence how individuals prepare for death and how they perceive death as part of their spiritual journey.⁵

Moreover, the study of death in philosophy and religion has evolved along with social and cultural changes. Scholars like George D. Bond have explained how Theravada Buddhism views death as a symbolic event of initiatory death in spiritual progression.⁶ Chukwuedo's work on the paradox of life and death from a Christian perspective also reflects how death is not merely an end, but a form of liberation from worldly suffering.⁷ This diversity in views highlights the variety of perspectives on death, whether religious or philosophical, which can significantly influence how individuals interpret life and death.

In religious studies, death also functions as a symbol of profound change in one's spiritual journey. For instance, in Islam, death is seen as the temporary separation of the soul from the body, which does not imply total destruction.⁸ In Christianity, death is interpreted as the separation of body and soul, but it also brings the hope of resurrection,

¹ George D. Bond, "Theravada Buddhism's Meditations on Death and the Symbolism of Initiatory Death," *History of Religions* 19, no. 3 (1980): 240.

² Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo, "The Paradox of Life and Death," *Mgbakoigba: Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): 45.

³ Abdul Karim, "Makna Ritual Kematian Dalam Tradisi Islam Jawa," *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan* 12, no. 2 (2017): 163.

⁴ Daniel L. Lukito, *Iman Kristen di Tengah Pandemi Hidup Realitas Ketika Penderitaan dan Kematian Merebak* (Malang: LP2M STT SAAT, 2020).

⁵ T. Jacobs, *Paulus Hidup, Karya dan Teologinya* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990), 99.

⁶ Bond, "Theravada Buddhism's Meditations on Death," 237.

⁷ Chukwuedo, "The Paradox of Life and Death," 43.

⁸ Daniel L. Lukito, *Iman Kristen di Tengah Pandemi*, 90.

where the body is restored to eternal life with God.⁹ These beliefs encourage followers to prepare for death through strengthening their faith and good deeds during their lifetime.

The thesis proposed in this study aims to compare and contrast the concept of death in Islamic and Christian teachings, as well as to explore how these teachings influence believers' attitudes towards death. Drawing on theoretical foundations, this research builds on previous studies that examined death in the context of religion, and how these views are shaped by the cultural and social context of each faith.¹⁰ By studying these perspectives, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be gained on how both religions shape their followers' attitudes toward death and how this understanding can be applied in daily life.

The goal of this research is to explore in more depth how Muslims and Christians perceive death, and to examine the differences and similarities between these views. The study also aims to provide a broader perspective on how death is understood and accepted in these two major world religions. With a deeper understanding, it is hoped that individuals can approach death with greater spiritual and emotional awareness, recognizing the fleeting nature of life as part of the transition to eternal life.¹¹

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to explore and compare the concept of death in Islamic and Christian teachings. The data sources include books, journal articles, and scholarly works that discuss death from theological, philosophical, and religious perspectives. This method allows the researcher to gather and analyze various viewpoints in the literature regarding the understanding of death in these two major religions. In its analysis, this study emphasizes the interpretation of religious texts, relevant theories, and empirical data related to the concept of death within religious and cultural contexts. The study also aims to understand how these understandings shape the attitudes of followers toward death and the afterlife.¹²

⁹ Guthrie, *Teologi Perjanjian Baru* 3, 56.

¹⁰ Guthrie, *Teologi Perjanjian Baru* 3, 1996.

¹¹ Zalta, Edward N. & Uri Nodelman (eds.), "Epicurus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2025 Edition), forthcoming, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/epicurus>.

¹² Olowu Ayodeji, "Christians' Perception of the Concepts of Death and Judgment," *International Journal of English and Literature* 4, no. 10 (2013): 510.

Additionally, this research involves a comparative analysis to examine the views on death in Islam and Christianity, identifying the similarities and differences between them. The study will consider the social and cultural differences that influence each religion's understanding of death.¹³ Through this comparative approach, the researcher hopes to provide a more holistic understanding of death and how religious teachings impact the daily lives of their followers. This approach also incorporates interviews with religious figures and community members to enrich the theoretical analysis with practical insights. Thus, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to interfaith understanding of death.¹⁴

RESULTS: The Meaning of Death in Islam and Christianity

This study reveals that the concept of death in Islam and Christianity has significant similarities and differences. In Islam, death is understood as the temporary separation between the body and the soul, followed by life in the *barzakh* (intermediate realm) until the resurrection on the Day of Judgment.¹⁵ This understanding emphasizes the eternity of life after death, where one's deeds during their lifetime determine their fate in the afterlife. In contrast, Christianity also views death as the separation of body and soul, but it is primarily seen as a consequence of human sin and as a path toward eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ In Christianity, death is considered a transition from a world of suffering to eternal life with God.¹⁷

In both religions, death is often not viewed as something to be feared but as part of God's plan. In Islam, the concept of divine predestination plays a strong role, where every death is part of Allah's decree that cannot be avoided by anyone.¹⁸ Therefore, Muslims are taught to accept death with patience and submission, as it is part of Allah's greater plan. On the other hand, in Christianity, although death is understood as the consequence

¹³ Rowan Williams, *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. David Marshall & Lucinda Mosher (Georgetown University Press, 2014), 72.

¹⁴ Gregory R. Lanier, "It Was Made to Appear Like That to Them: Islam's Denial of Jesus' Crucifixion," *Reformed Faith and Practice* 1, no. 1 (2016): a6.

¹⁵ Akua Abena & Efua Ama, "The Influence of Religion on Attitudes Towards Death Among Muslim Communities in Ghana," *Journal of Religious and Cultural Dynamics* 2, no. 1 (2023): 14.

¹⁶ Olowu Ayodeji, "Christians' Perception of the Concepts of Death and Judgment": 511.

¹⁷ George D. Bond, "Theravada Buddhism's Meditations on Death and the Symbolism of Initiatory Death": 250.

¹⁸ Adhyasta Dirgantara, "Semua Orang Pasti Mati, Tapi Kenapa Banyak yang Takut pada Kematian?" *IDN Times*, 2020.

of sin, Christian teachings emphasize that death is a pathway to starting a better life with Christ in heaven.¹⁹ This concept provides comfort to Christians, who believe that death is not the end but a gateway to resurrection and eternal life.

This study also found that in Islam, there is a deep understanding of life after death as a continuation of existence, where the afterlife is seen as better or worse depending on one's deeds during their life.²⁰ Death in Islam is not seen as a final end but as the beginning of a more real and eternal life. This belief is closely linked to the idea that the life in this world is temporary, and the afterlife is the more important one.²¹ In contrast, in Christianity, death is seen as the result of disobedience to God's law by the first humans, Adam and Eve.²² However, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, Christians believe that death is not the end but a path to salvation for those who believe.²³

One major difference between the concept of death in Islam and Christianity is the way both religions view the forgiveness of sins. In Islam, forgiveness is obtained through repentance, acts of worship, and good deeds performed during one's life.²⁴ Islam teaches that Allah is the Most Merciful, and He gives every individual the opportunity to repent before death comes. In contrast, in Christianity, forgiveness of sins is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ, who is considered the Savior of humanity.²⁵ Christianity teaches that only through faith in Christ can one receive eternal life after death, regardless of how many sins they have committed.²⁶

At the socio-cultural level, death is viewed differently in the two religions. In Islam, believers are taught to respect death by properly burying the deceased, performing funeral prayers, and praying for the deceased's soul.²⁷ Death is a serious matter in Islamic tradition, and many rituals are conducted to ensure the deceased's soul finds a good place in the afterlife. In Christianity, while there are also funeral rites, the celebration of Christ's

¹⁹ Donald Guthrie, *Teologi Perjanjian Baru 3* (Jakarta: BPK-Gunung Mulia, 1996), 119.

²⁰ Khoirun Nisa, Abdul Karim Nasution, & Nugroho, "Welcome to Death: Islamic and Catholic Perspective," *AL-ADYAN: Journal of Religious Studies*, 2, no. 2 (2021): 163.

²¹ T. Jacobs, *Paulus Hidup, Karya dan Teologinya* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius dan Jakarta: BPK-Gunung Mulia, 1990), 89.

²² Kurniawan, Markus, and Yogi Prihantoro, "Viewing Life Through Death's Perspective": 70.

²³ Ayodeji, Olowu, "Christians' Perception," 512.

²⁴ Rowan Williams, *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, 80.

²⁵ Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), "Epicurus".

²⁶ Wienata Sairin, *Tempat dan Peran Yesus di Hari Kiamat* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1997), 98.

²⁷ Daniel L. Lukito, *Iman Kristen di Tengah Pandemi Hidup Realitas Ketika Penderitaan dan Kematian Merebak*, 54.

resurrection offers hope for Christians that death is not just a phase to go through before experiencing the resurrection.²⁸ In both religions, death is often seen as part of a larger spiritual journey that must be understood in the context of the afterlife.

Analysis of the attitudes of religious followers towards death shows that many Muslims in Indonesia view death as a part of life that does not need to be feared.²⁹ They see death as a rest, a journey, or even a gift from Allah that opens the door to a better life. In Christianity, although there is also great hope for life after death, Christians still feel fear about death, especially due to the uncertainty about their fate after they die.³⁰ However, this study also shows that despite the great hope for life after death, both Muslims and Christians still experience fear towards death, particularly due to the uncertainty of what awaits them after death.³¹

Death as the separation of body and soul is also a central theme in both religions. In Islam, this separation is temporary, and the soul that has separated from the body will reunite at the Day of Judgment.³² In Christianity, while death also involves the separation of body and soul, Christian teachings place greater emphasis on the resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgment as part of the salvation for believers.³³ In both views, death is not the end of everything but the beginning of a more eternal life, where God's judgment will determine each person's fate.

DISUCUSSION: Conceptual and Spiritual Analysis

The concept of death in both Islam and Christianity has fundamental similarities, particularly in the belief that death is not the end of existence, but a transition to another form of life. In Islam, death is seen as the temporary separation of the soul from the body, after which the soul is either rewarded or punished in the afterlife based on one's deeds during life.³⁴ Similarly, Christianity views death as the separation of the body and soul, with the ultimate fate of the soul depending on one's faith in Jesus Christ and actions

²⁸ Akua Abena & Efua Ama, "The Influence of Religion," 15.

²⁹ Markus Kurniawan & Yogi Prihantoro, "Viewing Life," 75.

³⁰ George D. Bond, "Theravada Buddhism's Meditations," 251.

³¹ Adhyasta Dirgantara, "Semua Orang Pasti Mati," 13.

³² Rowan Williams, *Death, Resurrection*, 82.

³³ Sipayung, Jon Riahman, "Teologi Kematian di Masa Pandemi Perspektif Biblis," *Jurnal Sabda Penelitian* 1, no. 2 (2021): 23.

³⁴ Akua Abena & Efua Ama, "The Influence of Religion on Attitudes Towards Death Among Muslim Communities in Ghana": 14.

during their earthly life.³⁵ Both religions emphasize an afterlife where individuals face judgment and are either rewarded or punished according to their actions. This belief in the afterlife serves as a key motivational factor for moral and ethical behavior in both faiths.

A significant difference between Islamic and Christian views on death lies in the interpretation of the afterlife. In Islam, the afterlife is divided into two main destinations: paradise for those who have led righteous lives and hell for those who have not.³⁶ Paradise is depicted as a place of eternal bliss, while hell is described as a place of eternal suffering. Christianity shares similar views but places more emphasis on the concept of salvation through the grace of God. Christians believe that those who accept Jesus as their savior will be granted eternal life in heaven, while those who reject him will be separated from God in hell.³⁷ The Christian concept of salvation is unique in that it emphasizes grace rather than individual merit.

In both religions, death is seen as an inevitable part of life that must be accepted as part of God's divine will. Islamic teachings on death are grounded in the belief that every individual has an appointed time to die, which cannot be changed by human intervention.³⁸ The Qur'an explicitly states that "every soul will taste death," underscoring the inevitability of death for all people, regardless of their status or actions. Christianity similarly teaches that death is a consequence of the Fall of Man, and all people are subject to death as part of the human condition.³⁹ Both religions encourage believers to prepare for death through piety, prayer, and devotion to God.

The fear of death, while a common human experience, is addressed differently in Islam and Christianity. In Islam, death is not feared as the end of existence but as a transition to a more meaningful life in the hereafter. Islamic scholars emphasize that the fear of death should be replaced with trust in God's plan and submission to His will.⁴⁰ The Prophet Muhammad's teachings highlight that death is merely a passage, and the believer should not fear it but instead focus on living a righteous life. Christianity also

³⁵ Olowu Ayodeji, "Christians' Perception of the Concepts of Death and Judgment": 511.

³⁶ George D. Bond, "Theravada Buddhism's Meditations on Death and the Symbolism of Initiatory Death": 250.

³⁷ Adhyasta Dirgantara, "Semua Orang Pasti Mati, Tapi Kenapa Banyak yang Takut pada Kematian?"

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, *Teologi Perjanjian Baru* 3, 119.

³⁹ Khoirun Nisa, Abdul Karim Nasution, & Nugroho, "Welcome to Death: Islamic and Catholic Perspective": 163.

⁴⁰ T. Jacob, "Bioantropologi dan Kemiskinan": 231-239.

acknowledges the fear of death but offers comfort through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which assures Christians of eternal life after death.⁴¹ The resurrection is central to Christian theology and provides hope and strength for believers facing the reality of mortality.

One notable difference in the approach to death is the Islamic emphasis on the ritual practices surrounding death. Muslims are required to perform specific rituals such as washing the body, offering funeral prayers, and burying the deceased according to prescribed guidelines.⁴² These rituals are seen as essential to ensuring the peace and dignity of the deceased's soul. In contrast, while Christianity also has rituals surrounding death, such as funerals and memorial services, there is less emphasis on the physical care of the body compared to Islam. Christian rites often focus on the hope of resurrection and eternal life rather than the purification of the soul through ritual practices.⁴³

Both religions also stress the importance of the community's role in supporting those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. In Islam, the community is encouraged to support the bereaved by offering condolences, praying for the deceased, and helping with the funeral arrangements.⁴⁴ The concept of *Sadaqah Jariyah* (charitable acts) also plays a role, where acts of kindness and charity are believed to benefit both the living and the deceased. Christianity similarly emphasizes community support through the offering of condolences, prayer, and the sharing of grief. Christian communities often come together to comfort the bereaved, offering emotional and spiritual support during the mourning period.⁴⁵

The concept of resurrection in Christianity offers a unique perspective on death, which is not as pronounced in Islam. Christianity holds that Jesus Christ's resurrection serves as a guarantee for the resurrection of all believers at the end of time.⁴⁶ Christians believe that through Jesus' death and resurrection, death has been defeated, and believers are promised eternal life. While Islam also believes in the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment, it does not emphasize the resurrection of Christ in the same way as

⁴¹ T. Jacobs, *Paulus Hidup, Karya dan Teologinya* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius dan Jakarta: BPK-Gunung Mulia, 1990), 89.

⁴² Markus Kurniawan & Yogi Prihantoro, "Viewing Life Through Death's Perspective": 69-72.

⁴³ Olowu Ayodeji, "Christians' Perception," 512.

⁴⁴ Rowan Williams, *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, 80.

⁴⁵ Edward N Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), "Epicurus".

⁴⁶ Wienata Sairin, *Tempat dan Peran Yesus di Hari Kiamat*, 98.

Christianity does. In Islam, the resurrection is seen as a universal event where all individuals will be raised to account for their deeds.⁴⁷

The teachings of both Islam and Christianity highlight the importance of living a righteous life in preparation for death. In Islam, there is a strong focus on performing good deeds, seeking forgiveness for sins, and maintaining a close relationship with Allah through prayer and charity.⁴⁸ The concept of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) is central to Islamic teachings, encouraging believers to live with mindfulness of God's presence. Christianity teaches similar values but places a stronger emphasis on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Christians believe that faith in Christ, accompanied by good works, is the key to attaining eternal life.⁴⁹ Both religions agree that living according to God's will is essential to preparing for a peaceful death and a favorable afterlife.

CONCLUSION

After examining the concept of death in Islam and Christianity, several similarities and differences emerge. Both religions agree that death is an inevitable event that every human must experience. Therefore, whether one is ready or not, death must be faced. Death is understood as the separation of the soul/spirit from the body. The difference lies in the interpretation: in Islam, the separation of the soul from the body is seen as the will of Allah. In Christianity, death is viewed as the consequence of sin. However, Jesus does not view death as evidence of sin but as the severance of humankind from God's love due to sin, a consequence stemming from the first humans, Adam and Eve. Salvation and eternal life are attained through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, for Christians, both life and death belong to Christ. Since humans are saved even while alive, death is merely the release of the soul and body. The body decays, and the soul returns to God, the Creator. As Paul said, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

In Christianity, the good experienced after death comes through faith in Jesus Christ, while in Islam, it is determined by one's deeds during their lifetime. In the Christian understanding, death is a reunion with God, while in the Islamic understanding, death is

⁴⁷ Daniel L. Lukito, *Iman Kristen di Tengah Pandemi Hidup Realitas Ketika Penderitaan dan Kematian Merebak*, 54.

⁴⁸ Akua Abena & Efua Ama, "The Influence of Religion," 15; Sipayung, Jon Riahman, "Teologi Kematian di Masa Pandemi Perspektif Biblis": 23.

⁴⁹ Markus Kurniawan & Yogi Prihantoro, "Viewing Life," 75.

rest, a journey, departure, separation, humanity, salvation, an adversary, a gift, and a downward movement.

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