

SECTION

9

INTERPRETATION &  
MISINTERPRETATION  
OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS



# RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES, MORAL VALUES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## The Major Beliefs of the three Religions

### Introduction

In Africa, and Ghana in particular, there are many different religious beliefs. Sometimes, these beliefs are misunderstood or misinterpreted, which can lead to suspicion or fear over differing religious practices. However, when different religious beliefs are understood correctly it can lead to greater appreciation and respect for others and promote peaceful coexistence. Learning about these beliefs can help promote understanding and harmony among multi-faith communities. This section will therefore introduce you to the interpretation and misinterpretation of beliefs in AIR, Christianity and Islam.

### At the end of this section, you will be able to:

Examine the interpretations of religious beliefs of the three main religions

### Key Idea

The idea of predestination - that God controls everything - can be comforting in tough times. But when taken too far, it can undermine our free will and responsibility, making us less accountable for our actions. Misinterpreting religious beliefs such as God's providence and generational curses in Christianity and Jihad in Islam can lead to harmful consequences.

## INTERPRETATIONS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF AIR

There are various ways in which African Indigenous Religions (AIR) have been seen and misinterpreted. Inaccurate notions frequently result from ignorance and other forces creating misinterpretations. It's critical to examine AIR ideas in detail, taking into account both their own customs and the influence of outside forces.

## The meaning of predestination and how it is expressed in AIR

According to AIR, predestination is the idea that human existence on earth has been preordained by the Supreme Being and that humans are powerless to alter it. It is, in essence, the conviction that God has predetermined everything that will happen to humanity and that this cannot be altered. That is, the Supreme Being has already determined the course of human life on earth. This means that every event, including one's fate, is predetermined and cannot be altered by human actions. This concept is deeply rooted in various aspects of AIR, including:

### Proverbs and songs:

Proverbs like “God’s plan is already made” and “The river’s course is determined by its source” suggest that each person’s life is already determined. “What is written on the forehead will happen” implies that fate is sealed. The proverb “When the time comes, it will come” is a clear indication of the African Indigenous Religious practitioner’s acceptance and surrender to destiny.

There are lyrics that speak of fate, destiny, or the will of the Supreme Being (e.g., “My path is chosen by the ancestors.”). Mournful songs (dirges) in particular show AIR practitioners surrender to destiny. In sum, some proverbs and songs reinforce the idea that life’s journey is predetermined, encouraging adherents to accept and align themselves with their destined path. These proverbs and songs encourage followers of African Indigenous Religions to accept and embrace their predetermined life path rather than trying to change it.

## (Mis)interpretation of predestination

The concept of predestination may be misinterpreted to mean that humans have no control at all over their lives. This misinterpretation can cause people to feel helpless, leading to inaction or a lack of effort to improve their circumstances in life.

This misinterpretation can have negative consequences, including:

1. **Laziness:** If individuals believe that their lives are predetermined, they may feel less motivated to make efforts to improve their circumstances or work towards their goals and powerless to change their circumstances: This mindset can foster a sense of hopelessness, leading individuals to feel trapped in their current situation instead of working to improve it.
2. **Poverty:** Believing that fate is predetermined can lead to a lack of effort and motivation, as individuals may feel that their actions won’t change their outcome. It does not encourage people to take initiative or make efforts which can lead to financial struggles and poverty, as individuals may feel that their economic situation is outside of their control.

3. **Religious apathy:** If people believe that their lives are predetermined, they may feel:
- Disconnected from their faith: Thinking that their fate is already sealed can lead to a sense of detachment from their religious beliefs and practices.
  - Less inclined to engage in religious practices: If individuals believe that their outcome is already determined, they may see no point in actively practicing their faith or participating in religious rituals.
  - Less motivated to strive for spiritual growth: Believing that one's path is predetermined can lead to a lack of enthusiasm for personal spiritual development, self-reflection, and self-improvement.

However, it's important to note that the concept of predestination can also be interpreted in a way that emphasises the importance of human effort in every area of life. That while a higher power may have a plan, humans still have the power to make choices and shape their own lives.

## Predestination, free will and responsibility

You have already learned that predestination, the belief that God or a higher power determines the course of events, including human decisions and actions creates the impression that life events are unchangeable and human decisions and actions are part of a predetermined plan.

In contrast to predestination is freewill and responsibility. Freewill and responsibility are based on having options and choices and the ability to make decisions without external influence or coercion. There should be no compulsion or force. They (freewill and responsibility) are the basis of reward and punishment. Responsibility makes one accountable for one's actions and decisions because one is free to make those choices.

Essential conditions for freewill and responsibility:

- availability of alternatives to choose from
- absence of external pressure or coercion that might influence decisions.

The consequences of freewill and responsibility is accountability for actions and inactions.

The belief in predestination challenges human free will that makes a person responsible for his or her actions. Serious acceptance of predestination implies that human beings have no choice to make (no room for personal decision making). Another implication is that no human being can be held accountable for their choices.

Freewill and responsibility are essential for personal growth, morality, and spiritual development. Belief in predestination can undermine these values, leading to fatalism and resignation. Balance between faith and personal responsibility is very important for a fulfilling life.

## Correct interpretation of predestination in AIR

Though indigenous Africans believe in destiny, they don't think every single human action is predetermined. Instead, they believe that humans have the freedom to make choices and act within the larger plan of the Supreme Being. This belief is reflected in some indigenous proverbs, which suggest that human beings have a certain level of freewill and are responsible for their actions and inactions even if the overall direction is guided by destiny.

Some of the indigenous proverbs that support this assertion are as follows:

- *Mmɔdenmmɔ bu mmusuo aba so* (Akan). This literally means “Hard work dispels curses”. According to this adage, hard work and perseverance can triumph against unfavourable situations or outcomes (curses). A curse can be cancelled, or its effects reversed with hard work. This expression basically implies that perseverance and hard work can:
  - » Break bad luck or cycle of hardship
  - » Bring harmony and optimism back into one's life
  - » Enable people to take charge of their situation and determine their own fate.

The proverb urges people to stop blaming their situations on outside forces (curses) and instead concentrate on what they can control, their effort and deeds.

- *Ba ba bagna Nuobile sɔglaa gye le* (*Dagbanle*). This means that you cannot look at the colour of an egg to tell the colour of the chick that would be hatched.. This proverb implies that you cannot evaluate an outcome or consequence based only on outward appearances or preexisting circumstances.
- It is important to wait and observe how events develop before passing judgement or forming assumptions because things may not always go as planned or anticipated. As a result, maintaining a strong belief in predestination prevents one from being practical and from effectively overcoming obstacles in life. This method of thinking recognises that outcomes can be influenced by a variety of factors and surprises along the way and fosters patience, flexibility, and open-mindedness.
- *Kɛji Nyɔŋmɔ egbeko bo le, ogbooo* (Ga). This means God is the only determinant of the day you will die.

The exact timing and circumstances of one's death are ultimately determined by God or a higher power. Human efforts or actions cannot change or prevent the appointed time of death. God has sovereignty over life and death, and the duration of one's life is predetermined by Him.

The above calls us to hang unto destiny if and only if there are unexplained repetitions of events in the life of an individual or society.

- *Kuliga zua dagi apala zua amaa alomi tikazota* (*Ninkare*). Literally speaking, this saying means that the river flows because it chooses to, not because it was meant to. This saying implies that the river's natural course is decided by its own intrinsic qualities and attributes (choice), rather than only by outside forces (destiny). It suggests that the river has free will and agency in its course.

Instead of having a predetermined course, it takes on its own dynamics and relationships. The river has no set direction; instead, its flow is determined by its own “choices” or tendencies.

It applies to human life in the following way: Destiny or outside forces do not control our existence exclusively. It is our duty to mold the lives that we lead. Who we are is ultimately determined by our decisions and deeds, not by outside forces. Are you convinced, based on these clarifications, that life is not fixed?

## The way forward to correct the misinterpretation of predestination in AIR

Life is not fixed, and our circumstances are not permanent. Just because some people face challenges or struggles, it doesn't mean they're stuck with a bad fate or are destined for a life of hardship. Our choices, beliefs, and actions have the power to change our path for better or worse. We have the ability to shape our own destiny through hard work, determination, and resilience. By making positive changes and taking control of our lives, we can overcome obstacles and improve our circumstances. Don't assume that difficulties are just a matter of fate or bad luck - we have the power to create our own opportunities and write our own success stories. Every challenge is a chance to learn, grow, and come out stronger on the other side. By embracing this mindset, we can break free from the constraints of a predetermined fate and forge a brighter future for ourselves.

### Activity 9.1

In small groups, or as a class, discuss the differing interpretations and misinterpretations of predestination in AIR. Your teacher may ask you specific questions but consider if you have stories to share on predestination, or what your interpretation is of the conventional story of predestination in AIR. Make notes of areas you wish to learn more about, or still have questions on.

### Activity 9.2

Your teacher may invite a resource person, such as a traditional leader, opinion leader, a lecture of AIR to discuss the interpretation and misinterpretation in AIR. Before the visit compose a set of questions you could ask during the discussion.

**Table 9.1:** Questionnaire

S/N	QUESTION	RESPONSE
1	Example, What does predestination mean?	
2	How is it expressed in AIR	

### Activity 9.3

Prepare to participate in a debate in class on the motion 'Success is solely determined by destiny'. Within your group assign roles along the following lines-

- i. Principal / main speaker
- ii. Supporting speaker
- iii. Moderator
- iv. Time keeper
- v. Cheer group

Listed below are some points to consider when preparing arguments for either side of the motion:

In support of:

- a. Everything is determined by fate: Success is one of the events that fate has predetermined.
- b. Insufficient control: The extrinsic elements that affect success are beyond human control.
- c. Predestined path: People have defined routes that lead to success.
- d. Cosmic plan: Beyond human control, success is a part of a greater cosmic design.
- e. Inevitable result: Success or failure is certain to happen according to fate.

Opposed to:



- a. Individual effort matters: Success is greatly impacted by decisions, hard work, and dedication.
- b. Free will exists: People can make decisions that affect their chances of success.
- c. Circumstances are malleable: One can work to overcome or alter outside influences.
- d. Skill development: Gaining information and abilities can help you succeed.
- e. Self-determination: People can consciously choose their own path in life.

Remember the ground rules of debate; listening respectfully without interrupting, keeping to the time given and in rebuttal, only criticise or challenge ideas rather than the individuals making them.

### Activity 9.4

Watch scenes of a Ghanaian or African movie that portray predestination to increase your understanding of the concepts of 'My destiny' and 'Predestination'

Use the following links:

<b>My destiny</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAfoqQlM0Ss">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAfoqQlM0Ss</a>	
<b>Predestination</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P1vKDv_nn8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P1vKDv_nn8</a>	

Take notes as you watch the films and be prepared to engage in a class discussion on how each concept is portrayed.

## INTERPRETATIONS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS OF MAJOR BELIEFS IN AIR– WITCHCRAFT

In Ghana, many practitioners of AIR believe that when misfortunes like sudden death of a young person among others happen, witches are the cause. The purpose of this lesson is to help you to appreciate the interpretation and misinterpretation of the belief in witchcraft in AIR.

### Witchcraft

Witchcraft can be defined as the practice of magic for either bad or good intentions. Often, it involves the use of incarnations, spells, and rituals. It is believed to be a practice carried out throughout history and across various cultures.

#### The belief in Witchcraft

One aspect of the African Indigenous Religion (AIR) belief system that still influences people's behaviour is witchcraft. The perception of witchcraft still affects how individuals act or carry themselves. Stated differently, the idea of witchcraft is ingrained in the AIR belief system and shapes the attitudes, deeds, and choices of those who follow it. This can be seen in a number of ways, including:

- Fear of being cursed
- Charges of sorcery directed at other people
- Looking for protection or ways to ward off witchcraft
- Behaving well in order not to be bewitched etc.



Thus, within the AIR belief system, witchcraft continues to be a powerful and significant factor that shapes people's views and behaviours.

Witchcraft is viewed as an innate (natural) quality of the human condition, akin to a gift or aptitude. It frequently carries negative connotations, such as being malicious or harmful however, those who possess this ability are free to choose how to use it. In some circumstances, they may decide to use it for good, such as assisting others or bringing about positive change. This suggests that witchcraft is a neutral power that may be used in a variety of ways depending on the goals and circumstances of the practitioner, rather than something that is intrinsically good or bad.

The concept of witchcraft has a different name depending upon the dialect of each ethnic group. Some examples are as follows;

- a. *Bayie* – Twi
- b. *Ayɛn* – Fante
- c. *Sotali* – Dagomba
- d. *K'gba* – Gonja
- e. *Adjeto* – Ewe
- f. *Ayɛ* – Ga

### Variations in the understanding of witchcraft

Witchcraft is interpreted and understood differently in different cultures and communities. The idea of witchcraft is not universal; rather, it differs depending on the location.

To be more precise, Certain tribes, such as the Akan, hold the belief that witchcraft is exclusive to members of the same family. It is believed that witches confine the use of their abilities to their own families.

On the other hand, witches are seen to possess the capacity to work outside of their family in other cultures, such as those in northern Ghana. They have the ability to influence those who are not related to them.

### Modes of acquisition

This refers to the different methods that people think one can become a witch and include:

- **Family lineage:** Getting witchcraft abilities from relatives, frequently by bloodline.
- *Purchase:* Purchasing magical abilities from someone else, such as a spiritual guide or fellow witch.
- **From friends:** Getting magical abilities from a friend, maybe via initiation or information exchange.
- **Through food:** Developing magical abilities through the consumption of particular foods or beverages that may contain magical elements.
- **Through gifts:** Getting witchcraft abilities through presents that can include charms or magical items. Thus, witchcraft may be acquired through relationships, transactions, inheritance, and even routine acts like eating or receiving presents.

## Perceived means of operations

The following are some perceived means by which witches carry on their operations:

- **Nocturnal:** It is believed that witches are most active at night, when they perform rituals, spells, and other magical tasks in the shadows.
- **Working with other living things:** It is thought that witches can work with other living things. For instance, animals are used by them to shape-shift their appearance. They also use plants to cast spells or magical herbs. Thus, they conduct their activities, potentially by manipulating these living organisms
- **Not restricted by geography:** Witches are believed to be able to function over great distances, surpassing actual bounds.

## People who are often falsely accused of witchcraft

The following types of individual have historically been charged with witchcraft:

- **Older people:** Considered as a burden to society or as having magical abilities gained through age and experience.
- **Greedy people:** Charged with utilising magic to amass riches or resources at the detriment of other people.
- **Extremely reserved individuals:** They are accused of possessing magical abilities due to their introversion or concealment, which arouses suspicion and mistrust.
- **Individuals with peculiar physical characteristics** were viewed as “different” or “cursed,” and their odd look was frequently associated with alleged supernatural prowess.
- **Rivals in polygamous marriages:** Charged with utilising magic to hurt their rivals or obtain an advantage over fellow wives.
- **Individuals possessing extraordinary attributes:** Admired or terrified of their: A person’s physical attributes (attractiveness) or intelligence

## Perceived consequences of their operation

The following are some of the perceived reasons why witches operate:

- **Defense of their family and loved ones:** It is said that witches utilise their abilities to protect their families and loved ones from danger, bad luck, or evil.
- **Spiritual guidance:** It is believed that witches may help individuals get over bad luck, tough times, or spiritual crises by providing advice and support.
- **Making individuals fail in life:** Witches are said to have cast spells to obstruct someone’s advancement, making them fail at their pursuits or keeping them from succeeding in life. Witches are thought to be capable of preventing delivery or killing infants by causing infertility or miscarriages, directly or indirectly injuring or killing children.
- **Bringing misfortunes:** It is said that witches bring about ill luck or injuries, illnesses or diseases and joblessness.

### Activity 9.5

Click any of the links below and watch a video about alleged witches.

Reflect on the problems they go through and suggest five ways of restoring the dignity of these people. Share your written work with your class.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAL5YtJziLA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzmXXWPIAXU>

## Effects of the belief in witchcraft

It is obvious that belief in witchcraft affects the lives of people who believe in it or are accused of practicing it. Consequences include:

1. **Rural-urban migration:** People relocate to cities from rural areas in search of safety and protection from what they consider to be witchcraft.
2. **Cultural alienation:** Some people are separated from indigenous cultures, customs, and family homes as a result of a fear of witchcraft.
3. **Family dissolution:** Accusations of witchcraft sever kinship relationships, leading to breakdown in trust and communication which eventually separates people from other family members
4. **Abuse and stigmatisation:** Suspected witches experience social alienation, injuries to the body, sexual assault and forced removal to “witch camps” (segregated locations for suspected witches)
5. **Death:** Charged witches or wizards could experience lynching, murder, destructive assaults and deaths due to abandonment in “witch camps”.

## Witchcraft in the proper perspective

In African Indigenous Religion (AIR), witchcraft is seen as one possible cause of evil or bad luck, but it is not the only one. It’s an explanation for things that can’t be explained.

People who do bad things are more likely to be affected by witchcraft because they lose protection from God, gods, and ancestors.

Witchcraft is considered the weakest supernatural power. Its effects can be cancelled out by doing good and its powers can be overcome by staying connected to God, the gods, and ancestors.

## Correcting misrepresentations of witchcraft beliefs

There are many ways by which misrepresentations of witchcraft beliefs can be corrected.;

- Many witchcraft accusations are false and unfair, especially against women and older people. Education can help correct these mistakes.
- Stories about witchcraft are often unproven and don't make sense. We need to think critically about these stories.
- People with health issues are often wrongly accused of witchcraft.
- Some religious leaders use witchcraft to control people and gain power. We should question their motives.
- We should also be careful when watching African movies, as they can spread false ideas and create division.

### Activity: 9.6

With a partner or in small groups watch scenes of Ghanaian movies or videos that portray belief in witchcraft. After watching do one or more of the following;

- Describe scenes that show misinterpretation of witchcraft belief.
- Identify statements from the film that show the misinterpretation of witchcraft beliefs.
- Analyse myths or misconceptions in the film that show the misinterpretation of witchcraft beliefs.

### Activity: 9.7

You are to investigate and analyse the terms “witch” and “wizard”, exploring the gendered narratives around them, for example. computer wizard vs. old witch.

Use different resources to research this activity and write a report to share with your religious studies teacher. Remember to reference your sources in your report.

### Activity: 9.8

In your community, pay a visit to any of the following resource persons; traditional leader, [traditionalist, king/queen mother], opinion leader, or any other person with knowledge of the subject matter to discuss the interpretation and misinterpretation of witchcraft belief in AIR. Bring your report to class for presentation. Prepare a set of questions to ask ahead of your visit. Your questions may include the following;

- a. What term is used in this community for witchcraft?
- b. When do witches operate /What time do they operate?
- c. How do people acquire the power of witchcraft?
- d. How do witches operate?
- e. What category of people are accused of being witches?
- f. Why do witches operate?
- g. Are there effects of the belief in witchcraft?
- h. What should be the appropriate perspective of witchcraft?
- i. How can misinterpretations of witchcraft beliefs be corrected?

### Activity: 9.9

1. Search for information from newspapers, books and on the internet about alleged witches in Ghana. Share your findings with your class. Engage in a discussion with your peers on the credibility of these stories and alternative explanations for the events described.
2. Think about places and people that have been stereotyped for witchcraft. With a partner, or as a class, discuss why these stereotypes are wrong.

## INTERPRETATIONS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS OF MAJOR BELIEFS IN CHRISTIANITY

“God will provide” syndrome is the conviction that, in the absence of human effort or accountability, God will meet all needs, find solutions to issues, and step in to handle dire circumstances. This way of thinking has its roots in Christian doctrine, especially in the Old Testament (OT). Biblical accounts of God’s provision are shown in stories like Abraham’s sacrifice (Genesis 22) and the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness (Exodus 16–17).



**Fig. 9.1:** Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22).

Similarly, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25–34), Jesus emphasised the need for his followers to rely on God for their sustenance. He confirmed this by performing the miracle of changing water into wine and the multiplication of bread.

Indeed, God is a good provider but over reliance on this may discourage human activity and responsibility in favour of passivity, encourage a lack of planning and create a justification for carelessness or sloth.

A fair interpretation of the “God will provide” doctrine is recognising God’s omnipotence alongside human accountability or responsibility. Thus, human beings must use the talents God gave them to improve their lives and that of others.

## Biblical quotations that support the belief that God will provide

Here are brief explanations for biblical quotations which support the idea of divine providence.

- Psalm 34:10: “*The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*” God’s people will be content even in a time of shortage, highlighting God’s provision.
- Psalm 103:1-22: A psalm emphasising the blessings of God, such as satisfaction, healing, and forgiveness.
- Psalm 145:15–16: “*The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*” God meets the wants and desires of people who trust in Him.
- Jeremiah 29:11: Extract from a letter to the exiles “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*” God intends for His people to succeed and have a better or brighter future.
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:25 to not worry about our wants since God knows us and will supply (“*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*”).
- Matthew 6:31–32: “*So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*” Prioritise seeking God’s kingdom, and He will provide for your needs.
- Matthew 7:11: “*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*” Even more than earthly dads, God bestows excellent gifts on His children.
- 2 Corinthians 9:8: “*And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*” God provides in plenty, encouraging giving and attending to necessities.
- Luke 12:24: Like the ravens that Jesus feeds, Jesus exhorts us to put our reliance in God’s provision. (“*Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!*”)
- Philippians 4:19: “*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*” This verse means that God will provide for all your needs abundantly, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. It emphasises the promise of God’s provision and supply for believers, encouraging trust and faith in His abundance.

## Consequences of the belief in “God will provide”.

A literal acceptance of the God will provide doctrine leads to:

1. An excessive dependence on God to fix issues without the need for human effort. Expecting miraculous answers without taking practical measures can easily lead to disappointment.
2. Wasting of resources, including time, by:
  - overindulging in religious activities or prayer in place of work.
  - putting off obligations and responsibilities in order to await divine intervention.
  - wasting assets (cash, talent, etc.) because one lacked initiative or preparation.
3. Lazy behaviour:
  - putting up the “God will provide” defense when defending a lack of drive or effort.
  - Depending too much on divine providence and failing to take initiative or acquire new abilities.
  - relying on others for assistance or support without making a personal effort.
4. The abuse of certain pastors: dishonest religious leaders abusing the confidence of followers by making promises under the guise of divine providence.

## Appropriate interpretation of the belief in “God will provide”

### 1. God steps in when human efforts are no longer sufficient:

God’s assistance is an addition to, not a replacement for, human effort. God intervenes to offer direction, power, or resources to overcome challenges when we’ve exhausted all other options. This interpretation promotes the prudent management of resources while acknowledging God’s omnipotence and human limitations. It encourages reliance on God after all human resources have been utilised.

### 2. The conviction that God will provide keeps diligent individuals going when they want to give up:

It encourages tenacity and motivation, particularly in trying circumstances. It increases trust in God’s assistance and direction. It provides support and fortitude in the face of adversity or failure.

### 3. The purpose of the belief is to give one the fortitude to endure in all of life’s endeavours:

Having faith in God’s supply gives one bravery to take chances and meet obstacles head-on. It helps you to dream big and work to achieve your goals with confidence. It enables one to use hope and faith to overcome fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.



#### 4. Only those who are prepared to work are provided for by God (Heaven aids those who assist themselves):

God's provision is a collaboration with human effort rather than a gift. This interpretation promotes individual accountability and initiative and encourages people to acknowledge that God rewards and increases sincere efforts.

It highlights the value of putting in a lot of effort and being responsible for one's actions and inactions.

According to the aforementioned understanding of God's will, it is crucial to strike a balance between human labour and faith in God's supply, which promotes good stewardship, tenacity, and bravery in the face of difficulties.

### Generational curse

A generational curse refers to the idea that the harmful effects of past mistakes, sins, or rituals - often from a family member or ancestor - can continue to affect the lives of current and future family members, causing ongoing problems and difficulties. In other words, it is the belief that past family mistakes or wrongdoing can bring ongoing suffering and problems to future generations. According to this belief, our ancestors' deeds may still be affecting us today, and in order to overcome their bad effects, we might need to deal with these old problems.

#### Biblical verses that support generational curses

- Exodus 20:5 ("You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me"), 34:7 ("...maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."): God highlights the idea of generational repercussions by punishing children for their fathers' transgressions for up to three or four generations.
- Numbers 14:18: *"The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."* This verse highlights the consequences of sin, saying that those who reject God will face God's anger for three to four generations.
- Deuteronomy 28:1-68: This book explains how, if sin continues, there will be blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience that will harm future generations.
- Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Cursed are those who trust in humans," suggesting that poor decisions have an impact on future generations.
- Ephesians 6:12: *"...For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms..."* Dark spiritual powers have an impact on families, implying intergenerational conflicts.

- Galatians 3:10–12: *“For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.””* If God’s commandments are disregarded, curses result, which will have an impact on future generations.

The above biblical texts support the concept of generational curses and emphasise the importance of addressing past mistakes and seeking redemption.

### **Biblical verses that provide appropriate interpretation of generational curses**

- Deuteronomy 24:16 emphasises personal accountability by saying that each person is accountable for their own sin, not the sins of their ancestors. (*“Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.”*)
- Ezekiel 18:1–20: God emphasises human responsibility by judging people according to their deeds rather than the history of their family.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* Believers in Christ are freed from the sins and curses of previous generations, making them new creations.
- James 5:16: *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”* Generational curse patterns are broken via mutual prayer and confession of faults.
- Romans 8:2: *“... because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you<sup>[a]</sup> free from the law of sin and death.”* Through Christ, believers are set free from the power of sin, including generational curses.
- 1 John 1:9 covers light and darkness and sin and forgiveness: Admitting faults results in pardon and release from inherited sins.
- Galatians 3:13: *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.””* The curse of the law, including generational curses, was lifted from us by Christ.

The biblical verses above imply that generational guilt is replaced by individual accountability; personal accountability and confession end curse patterns; and Christ’s atonement and forgiveness releases people from generational curses.

## Effects of the beliefs of generational curses

### 1. The exploitation of congregants by certain pastors who may:

- Take advantage of people's need for deliverance and terror.
- Request money or allegiance in return for "deliverance" services.
- Establish a mindset in which spiritual liberation is derived from reliance on the pastor or church.

### 2. Laziness and resignation:

Not accepting personal responsibility for decisions and actions; Thinking that one's destiny is predetermined because of generational curses may result in a lack of motivation to work in order to improve one's living conditions. People become lazy because they think that their problems can be solved by others or by God through miraculous deliverance without doing their part.

### 3. Tension within the family:

Assigning blame for present issues to relatives or ancestors breeds division. It also creates tension in the family because the suffering of young ones is attributed to the elders in their families.

Promoting an atmosphere of distrust, dread, and suspicion - inciting animosity towards relatives or ancestors who are thought to be the source of curses.

It causes psychological problem such as fear and anxiety

- Fear of the unknown: Anxiety and trepidation can be brought on by the thought that a curse could suddenly and unpredictably impact a person's life, causing fear of the unknown.
- Feeling of helplessness: Believing that a curse is to blame for issues can make people feel hopeless and helpless, which exacerbates anxiety and fear.
- Anxiety about the future: Stress and anxiety can be brought on by anxieties about the future that stem from worries about the possible effects of a curse.

### Activity 9.10

With a partner, or in small groups, discuss how the meanings of "God will provide" and generational curses have been misrepresented.

Make notes and produce a summary to share with the rest of the class or your Religious Studies teacher.

Example:

**Table 9.2:** Curses and its misrepresentation

<i>Concept</i>	<i>How this has been misrepresented</i>	<i>Where we see this</i>
<i>Generational curse</i>		
<i>God will provide</i>		

**Activity 9.11**

Your teacher will provide you with a case study or scenario of an individual who has misinterpreted the belief that “God will provide”.

Write a short report on how this belief has informed the individual’s attitude, and the effect it has had on their circumstances.

**Activity 9.12**

Visit a traditional leader or a person knowledgeable in the differing interpretations of generational curses and the notion that “God will provide”. Share your findings with a colleague or your Religious Studies teacher.

Alternatively, your teacher may arrange for an expert such as a Christian leader, to come and present to the class. Prepare questions that you could ask as part of the discussion.

**Table 9.3:** Questionnaire

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

**Activity 9.13**

With a partner or in small groups watch scenes of Ghanaian movies or videos that portray belief in generational curses or the notion that “God will provide” and assess how the concepts have been represented. Your teacher may provide you with recommendations of suitable films or research these on the internet.

After watching the films do one or more of the following;

- a. Describe scenes in which either concept is represented. Do you think this is a fair representation or do they perpetuate the misinterpretation of these beliefs?
- b. Identify statements from the film that show the misinterpretation of either belief.
- c. Analyse any misconceptions in the film that support the misinterpretation of these beliefs.

## INTERPRETATIONS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS OF MAJOR BELIEFS IN ISLAM

This session aims at helping you to understand the true meaning of Jihad in Islam so that you may be able to distinguish between accurate and misleading interpretations about Islamic beliefs and practices.

### The Concept of Jihad

In the 20th century, various Islamic groups exploited the concept of Jihad for religious and political gain. However, the true meaning of Jihad in Islam, rooted in the Quran and Hadith, encompasses both spiritual growth and physical action. Jihad comes from the Arabic word *Jahada*, which means “to exert power”, “exercise strength” or “apply any form of effort.” Initially, Jihad meant striving for moral excellence and combating evil. During the early Islamic period, it was seen as self-defense against aggression.

Therefore Jihad, in Islam, refers to the concept of struggle or effort, encompassing both spiritual and physical dimensions but it is often misunderstood as solely “holy war”. Jihad in Islam can be seen in two dimensions; Greater Jihad and Lesser Jihad. Despite these nuances, the concept of Jihad has been misinterpreted and misused, leading to diverse understandings and application of the term. The Hadith differentiates between the ‘Greater Jihad’ - an internal battle against sin and the ‘Lesser Jihad’ - armed conflict as follows:

- **Greater Jihad:** This is the internal struggle against one’s own shortcomings and striving to live a virtuous life according to Islamic teachings.
- **Lesser Jihad:** This involves physical struggle, including self-defense against aggression. The Qur’an permits military action primarily for self-defense, emphasising strict ethical guidelines during conflict.

Jihad is a multifaceted term rooted in the struggle to uphold justice and faith.

### Quranic passages on armed struggle

- Allah has granted believers in Islam to fight back those who have done them wrong or are disbelievers of the faith in order to support Islam. (Qur'an 22:39-40)
- Fight in the cause of God, to elevate His religion with those who prevent you from the worship of God but agrees not against them. God do not love the one that overstep His boundaries. (Qur'an 2:190)
- Qur'an 2:178-179 outlines the law of retaliation by which believers may deliver punishments ("a freeman for a freeman, a slave for a slave, a woman for a woman" etc.)
- All worship is for God, alone and none are worshipped apart from Him. (Qur'an 2:193-194)
- Muslim should fight for the growth of Islam knowing that God is with them. (Qur'an 2:244)
- Believers should fight in the way of God, for the growth of His religion, those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter; indeed, die in the cause of God. There is nothing to prevent you from fighting, in the way of God. Those who believe fight in the way of God and who disbelieve fight in the way of deity, Allah will support believers over the disbelievers. (Qur'an 4: 74-77).

### Narrow meaning of Jihad

- It is used in three contexts in Islam. Jihad is classified into three such as; inner/greater Jihad which involves a struggle against one's own passion. Another part is outer/lesser Jihad, which also involves the fight with pen, tongue and persuasion. The last one is Jihad with the sword (warfare).
- One's internal striving, the struggle against one's lower desires and temptations. It is also known as the greater Jihad.
- The common struggle to build a good (morally upright) Muslim society. Thus, Jihad in this sense will mean the collective efforts of the Muslim community to a morally upright society.
- Struggle in defense of Islam as Prophet Muhammad and his companions exemplified – preaching, education, etc. and defending Islam and the community in case of attack. Jihad in this sense will mean Prophet Muhammad and his companions engaging in preaching, education good behaviors and defending Islam and community in case of attack.

### Wider meaning

Fighting the enemies of Islam or the Muslim community, primarily refers to the struggle to live a virtuous life, promote good, and prevent evil. This includes both the internal struggle against one's own shortcomings (greater Jihad) and external efforts, which can involve self-defense or community protection (lesser Jihad). The Qur'an emphasises both spiritual and physical measures of Jihad, advocating for peaceful means of persuasion alongside the right to defend against attack.

## Misinterpretation of the concept of Jihad

Jihad is often interpreted or understood as a “holy war” by both Muslims and non-Muslims, chiefly after 9/11. The concept of Jihad progressed significantly, often linked with terrorism due to the actions of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS (A militant Jihadist group that emerged from al-Qaeda, claiming to establish a caliphate). The U.S. response included military interventions aimed at breaking these organisations, which led to a global war on terror, costing trillions and resulting in ongoing instability in regions like Afghanistan and Iraq.

The perception of Jihad shifted, with a focus on local rebellion rather than militant ideology advocating for armed struggle to achieve a worldwide Islamic governance through violent means.

This misinterpretation of Jihad as “holy war” has been informed or is justified because, in the Hadith (prophetic traditions), Jihad was the term used to describe Muslims’ participation in various battles for self-defense during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. This misinterpretation has been used by extremist groups to justify violence, but it does not reflect the mainstream Islamic understanding of Jihad.

The term has also been applied to the propagation and/or enforcement of religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, if a clan or ethnic group that had accepted Islam refused to profess their belief or observe a practice, any action to draw the clan’s attention or influence the clan to profess their belief was referred to as Jihad.

Some Islamic movements in West Africa consider Jihad as a struggle for the installation of an Islamic government and the promotion of the rule of law based on the *Shari’a*. This, for them, is to provide a background for creating an ideal Islamic state. In West Africa some Islamic movements view Jihad as a struggle, particularly in the context of social and political reform such as Usman dan Fodio’s Jihad, Boko Haram and the Al-Qaeda. These movements illustrate the diverse interpretations of Jihad in West Africa.

Boko Haram, a group which is seeking to establish Nigeria as an Islamic state and overthrow the current government, has declared Western education as *haram* (prohibited) because the group believes that exposing Muslim children to Western education will lead to indoctrination and corruption of the Muslim child... The group believes that Western education undermines Islamic values and promotes ideas such as gender equality and democracy, which they reject. Their ideology, views education as a form of Western cultural development. This stance is rooted in historical grievances against colonial education systems and reflects a broader resistance to perceived Western influences in Islamic societies.

The group also considers Muslim girls’ education as *haram* and believe that girls should not pursue education but instead marry young and fulfill domestic roles.

Boko Haram believes that every Muslim has a duty to engage in armed combat, based on their strict interpretation of Jihad as a religious obligation to fight against perceived enemies of Islam. They think armed struggle is necessary in order to establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law and combat Western influences that corrupt Islamic values.

This idea stems from their salafist (fundamental) beliefs, which advocate for violent means to achieve a purer form of Islam and reject any governance that doesn't align with their interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law).

## Appropriate interpretation of Jihad

Within the context of Islam, the formation of a purely Islamic government is recommended only when Muslims form the majority in a particular environment, where *Shari'a* can be the rule of law. The recommendation for a purely Islamic government often stems from the belief that such a system aligns closely with Islamic principles and values, particularly the implementation of Shari'a law. Proponents argue that an Islamic state promotes justice, moral governance, and community welfare, as it is based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (tradition or way of the Prophet).

Key concepts include al-Shura (consultation), where decisions are made collectively, ensuring that governance reflects the will of the community while adhering to Islamic tenets. This model is seen as a response to perceived failures of secular states, aiming to create a society that plans out spiritual and ethical values over thinking mainly about physical things pursuits.

The phrase 'holy war' does not feature in the Qu'ran or Articles of Faith." It is a Western idea that has been used in the media to describe Jihad. The phrase "holy war" does not appear to be a common Islamic concept or term. It is likely a mistranslation or misinterpretation of some other Arabic phrase.

The Quran does discuss the concept of Jihad however this primarily referred to as a spiritual struggle to follow God's will and defend the faith, not a literal war. The Quran allows fighting in self-defense or to protect the oppressed but forbids aggression and transgressing limits.

Islamic scholars emphasise that war is only permissible in Islam under very specific circumstances, such as defending against attack, protecting religious freedom, or preventing greater harm. Most scholars interpret the Quran to allow war only for self-defense. Verses critical of those who fought against early Muslims refer to specific historical contexts, rather than serve as a general condemnation of other faiths.

The "Jihad" and its variance occurs 36 times in the Qur'an, and in all the cases, it refers to a moral struggle, e.g. with self (*nafs*), the tongue (*Lisan*), the pen (*qalam*), of faith (*Iman*) or ethical/moral values (*akhlaq*). It is used in three contexts in Islam. Jihad is classified into three such as; inner or greater Jihad which involves a struggle against one's own passion. Another part is Outer or lesser Jihad, which also involves the fight with pen, tongue and persuasion.

Armed confrontation does not constitute a major classification of Jihad in the Quran. Armed confrontation is a recognised aspect of Jihad, but not its primary classification in the Quran. The Quran emphasizes that fighting is only permissible in Islam during self-defense or against those who actively oppress Muslims (Qur'an 2:190).



The acquisition of formal education (scientific knowledge) is considered an obligation for all Muslims. Knowledge is essential for understanding God and fulfilling one's duties as a Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad reinforced this by declaring that seeking knowledge is a duty for every Muslim, regardless of gender. This obligation extends to both religious and secular education, promoting a holistic understanding of the world. "Whoever takes a path in pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise" (Bukhari Hadith 47). This highlights the value placed on seeking knowledge in Islam.

Though there are instances when armed confrontation is permitted, limitations are placed on them. Islamic law permits armed confrontation under specific conditions, primarily for self-defense, protecting oppressed individuals, and preventing humanitarian crises. The authority to declare Jihad rests solely with a Muslim ruler, and limitations include military necessity, distinction, and proportionality in warfare. Additionally, the targeting of civilians is strictly prohibited, emphasising the holiness of life and the need for humane conduct even in conflict situations. The overall principle is that peace is preferred, and warfare should only be a last resort in response to aggression or oppression.

### Activity 9.9

Your teacher may invite a professional such as an Imam, religious Scholar, traditional leader, an opinion leader or a lecturer on religious studies to talk to you on the interpretation and misinterpretation of Jihad.

Prepare a set of questions that you could ask during class discussions with the religious scholar.



For example;

**Table 9.4:** Questionnaire

1	Is Jihad only about military warfare?
2	
3	
4	
5	

### Activity 9.10

Click on the links provided below and watch the documentary on Boko Haram and West African Jihadists and assess their misinterpretation of Jihad.

<i>Boko Haram: A decade of terror explained - BBC Africa</i>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsVgXJLXtdw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsVgXJLXtdw</a>	
<i>Why extremist militias are on the rise in the West African Sahel   DW News</i>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L9VxCg-VQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L9VxCg-VQ</a>	

Before you watch the videos complete a “quick writes” activity, for example set a timer for five minutes and write a series of questions or ideas you would like to answer through watching the video.

You may also wish to write prompts for yourself on specific issues, for example “Pay attention to...”

When you are watching, allow time for processing and discussion to prevent “TV mode” and enhance understanding.

After you have watched the films, write a short report after watching the documentary and present it to your teacher before your next lesson.

### Activity 9.11

In mixed groups, discuss the effects of misinterpreting Jihad.

Prepare a worksheet and record your findings of the effects of the misinterpreting Jihad on the lives of Muslims and the perception of Islam. You may want to record your responses in themes such as:

- Effects of livelihoods of Muslims
- Effects on economic development in affected countries
- Effects on the perception of Islam as a religion

### Activity 9.12

Search online for news reports about Jihadists and make a list of their activities and their consequences on your community. An example article has been provided below:

[https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/Jihadism-in-portugal-grasping-a-nebulous-reality-ari/?utm\\_source=perplexity](https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/Jihadism-in-portugal-grasping-a-nebulous-reality-ari/?utm_source=perplexity)

After going through the news reports, record the consequences of the Jihadists' activities on your community or the areas in which they have operated, in the worksheet below.

**Table 9.5:** Worksheet

Event	Consequence

### Self-Assessment Questions 9.1

Answer at least one of the following questions re review your learning from this section.

1. Describe how the belief in predestination in AIR is misinterpreted.
2. Explain how the belief in predestination in AIR should be interpreted.
3. Critique some misinterpretations of predestination in AIR and suggest measures to correct them.

### Self-Assessment Questions 9.2

Answer at least one of the following questions to review your learning from this section:

1. Describe how the belief in witchcraft has been misinterpreted.
2. Explain how the belief in witchcraft influences negative behaviours.
3. Critique social practices that are influenced by a misinterpretation of belief in witchcraft.

### Self-Assessment Questions 9.3

Answer at least one of the following questions to review your learning in this section:

1. Describe how the Christian belief of “God will provide” and “generational curses” can be misinterpreted.
2. Explain the appropriate interpretation of “God will provide” and “generational curses” as Christian beliefs.
3. Critique the misrepresentation of “God will provide” and “generational curses” as Christian beliefs.

# Review Questions

1. Read the following scenario and answer questions that follows;  
Mr. Apoo succeeded in all his academic work, and he got a well-paid job after completing his university education. However, the maximum period he worked in any job was only a year, after which time he was sacked for reasons that cannot be explained.
  - In the context of AIR, which beliefs could be interpreted to underpin the events described in Mr. Apoo's scenario?
  - How would you challenge this if a friend gave the same belief as justification for events in their life?
2. How does studying of witchcraft in African Indigenous Religious help you, as a learner to comprehend cultural differences?

# Answers to Review Questions

1. You can make references from the text by reading the following sub-headings;
  - (Mis)interpretation of predestination
  - Predestination, free will and responsibility
  - The way forward to correct the misinterpretation of predestination in AIR
2. Studying witchcraft can help in any of the following ways:
  - Understanding diverse beliefs about witchcraft, which may differ from their own cultural background.
  - Understand the cultural, social and historical factors that shape beliefs and practices.
  - Challenge stereotypes or preconceived notions about witchcraft and African cultures.
  - Recognition that beliefs and practices are relative to each cultural context (cultural relativism).
  - Enhancing empathy and tolerance, etc.

## Extended Reading

1. <https://ideas.respec.org>
2. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
3. Traditional African religions-Wikipedia
4. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English-Page 1287
5. <https://www.britannica.com>
6. <https://en.wikipedia.com>

## References

- Armstrong, K. (2000). *The battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Harper Collins.
- Aslan, R. (2005). *No god but God: The origins, evolution, and future of Islam*. Random House.
- Bowker, J. (2007). *The Oxford dictionary of world religions*. Oxford University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.
- Hoffman, V. J. (2011). *The essence of Islamic mysticism*. Wipf and Stock.
- Kugle, S. A. (2010). *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims*. Oneworld Publications.
- Lincoln, B. (2006). *Holy terrors: Thinking about religion after September 11*. University of Chicago Press.
- Marty, M. E. (2008). *The mystery of the child*. Wipf and Stock.
- McGrath, A. E. (2015). *The big question: Why we can't stop talking about science, faith, and God*. St. Martin's Press.
- Nanda, M. (2003). *Prophets facing backward: Postmodernism, science, and Hindu nationalism*. Rutgers University Press.
- Pennington, M. B. (2018). *Centering prayer: Theology and therapeutic applications*. Routledge.
- Ramadan, T. (2004). *Western Muslims and the future of Islam*. Oxford University Press.
- Riesebrodt, M. (2010). *The promise of salvation: A theory of religion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sells, M. A. (1996). *The bridge betrayed: Religion and genocide in Bosnia*. University of California Press

## Glossary

### WORDS

### MEANING

<b>Boko Haram:</b>	It is a militant group that opposes Western education, particularly for Muslim girls, because it views such education as a threat to Islamic values and a form of cultural imperialism
<b>Cultural alienation:</b>	This is separation of people from their indigenous cultures.
<b>Dirges:</b>	Mournful songs

- Generational curses:** It is the idea that the consequences of past mistakes, sins, or negative patterns can be passed down from one generation to the next, affecting the lives of family members and their descendants.
- Jihad:** It refers to a spiritual struggle to follow God's will and defend the faith, not a literal war.
- Nocturnal:** It refers to something that is related to or occurs at night.
- Predestination:** is the idea that human existence on earth has been preordained by the Supreme Being and that humans are powerless to alter it.
- Witchcraft:** It is the practice of magic for either bad intentions or good intentions.

## Acknowledgements



Ghana Education  
Service (GES)



## List of Contributors

Name	Institution
Kyei Addai Daniel	Fumbisi SHS, Upper East Region
Emmelia Sablah	Pope John SHS, Koforidua
Clement Nsorwineh Atigah	Tamale SHS, Tamale
Abdul-Rahaman Abdul-Wahab	Gambaga Girls SHS
Joseph Abass	Okuapeman SHS, Akropong