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# READINGS IN PEACE & CONFLICT



*Essays in honour of*  
**Professor Isaac Olawale Albert**

**Editors:**  
Elias Suleiman Bogoro  
Matt Meyer  
Nathaniel D. Danjibo

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# The Dilemma of Not Seeing Outside from Inside and the Inside from the Outside in the Nigerian Religious Mirror

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## INTRODUCTION

As background information, it is important to note that, the term insider and outsider was first used by Russell McCutcheon in relation to the study of Religion with bias for research methods and methodology in Religious Studies. The term was adopted as an appropriate template to interrogate the challenge many Nigerians face for being practitioners of one religion at one time or the other. The aim of this study is to examine what the term insider and outsider stands for, provide a bird's eye view of the texture of the Nigerian religious milieu, prove with fact while the term constitutes a challenge in the Nigerian religious milieu with a view of suggesting ways of creating a minimally challenged - free religious environment capable of advancing socio-political development in the present drive for change that has to begin with you and me and particularly religious leaders and religious organisations which are hitherto known as the houses of peace and stress less

To interrogate this topic scholarly; we adopted experiential approach accompanied with data generated from newspapers and magazine to showcase challenges inherent or prevalent in Nigerian religious milieu. The data obtained through the methods were discussed within the ambits of Bentham utilitarian theory which considers a good action as the one which its effects are in the favour of the majority at the expense of the minority.

## THE NIGERIAN RELIGIOUS MILIEU

It is significant to note that the Nigerian religious milieu is pluralistic in nature given the different types of religions and denominations charactering it. Consequent upon this plurality, religions in Nigeria, in our estimation, can be classified into four broad categories, namely: African Traditional Religion, Foreign-originated religions, Civil religion and Terrorist-laced religion. African Traditional Religion, which is the first of the four, is rooted in African culture. It has no historical founder, but it is as old as the beginning of humanity because immediately Africans find themselves on the surface of the earth, they begin to think, act, behave and hope religiously. The

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idea of religion came to them in their attempt to provide meanings and interpretations to bewildering questions about man's destiny, how they came into being, who brought them into existence, what happens to them now and in the future<sup>1</sup>. After a long pondering over the above matter, Africans conceived the idea of religion, which constantly reflects in their day- to- day activities.

Foreign-originated religions, as the name implies, comprise religions practised in Nigeria but which do not have their root in African culture. Notable among them are Christianity that has its root in Jewish community, Islam, with its root in Arabian environment, Buddhism and Hinduism that hail from India and the Hindus cultures respectively. One important thing to note for the purpose of emphasis is that the parent/ home of the religions particularly Christianity and Islam still have influence on how the religions are practised in their different foreign lands. For instance, the Vatican City still influences Catholicism in Nigeria while Saudi Arabia, as it were, influences Islamic practices in Nigeria. The influence as we shall demonstrate later has both negative and positive implications on the application of the term insider and outsider in the Nigeria religious milieu.

The Civil religion, which is the third in the classification according to Jean-Jacques implies:

a purely civil profession of faith, the articles of which, it behooves the sovereignty to fix, not with the precision of religious dogma, but treating them as a body of social sentiments without which, no man can either be a good citizen or a faithful subject<sup>2</sup>.

The idea of civil religion refers to the view of some people that the foundation of their societies and the events that mark its progress through history are parts of a larger, divine scheme of things. This thesis could also best explain the religious colouration of Nigerian national symbols such as currency, statue, tower, national anthem and national pledge. These symbols among others are of national significance because they signify common national traits which, by implications, remind Nigerians of their origin, history, and political development. The consequence of these symbols propels them to work in unity as people of common identity and origin<sup>3</sup>.

The last on the list is terrorist laced religion. We coined this term to describe a set of religion that believes that salvation is guaranteed on the basis of destruction of lives and property of whoever does not succumb to the doctrine of their religion. Members of this type of religion are hidden from the general public while their identity of their members could not be ascertained and their places of worship are also hidden from the public. By their deeds, the religion can be judged to have relations with notable and unpopular terrorist organisations across the globe.

Having explained the four categories of the religion, it is important to note that Nigerians became /became members of these religions through the following.

**Birth:** This is a class of people who were bom by practitioners of traditional religions on the other hand, or whose parents are Christians or Muslims and by so doing automatically become Christians or Muslims.

**Coercion:** This is the category of Nigerians who were hitherto practitioners of traditional religions but who later became Christians or Muslims. They were the people who the Christian and Islamic missionary bullied, intimidated, manipulated or persuaded to become Christians or Muslims. They are the set of people whose missionaries and missioners described their religion as idolatry and fetishism.

**Conversion:** This belongs to those that were converted from Traditional religions to Christianity or Islam or converted from Christianity to Islam or from Islam to Christianity. Historically, most of them were at one time or the other practitioners of traditional religion. People in this category may have had some religious conviction which could be predieu^vt oil tllCir ICll^IOUS experience. We need to note that religious expression is predicated on religious experience.

**Nationality;** The fact that someone is a citizen of a nation like Nigeria makes him/her a member

of civil religion in which the President is the Bishop/ Imam /Chief priest as the case may be while the government functionaries such as the ministers and commissioners or caretakers at the Federal, State and Local government constitute the sub- Imam, Priest or Bishop.

**Wrong orientation:** Terrors-laced religion which goes with killing is a product of wrong religious orientation. Religion is concerned about preservation of life and its sanctity and the soul of man in preparation for its harvest by God, the creator and the owner on the day of reckoning. Anything contrary to this and which goes with killing of people of other faith is regarded as a product of ignorance and wrong religious orientation<sup>4</sup>.

What is worthy of note about the pluralism in the Nigerian religious milieu is the explanation of virtually every aspect of Nigerian life; social, political, scientific, education, environment, business, economy and technology religiously which is in tandem with Mbiti's and Idowu's theses which state that religion-qua-religion permeates the life of Nigerians like their counterparts in African continent. The theses are apposite confirmations to this fact. In the words of Mbiti:

Africans are notoriously religious, and each person has his own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it<sup>5</sup>

While domesticating this assertion among the Yoruba, Bolaji Idowu writes that the religion permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multifarious ways: it forms the themes of songs, makes topic for minstrelsy, finds vehicles in myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings, and is the basis of philosophy<sup>6</sup>. Another important issue arising from the practice of alluding religion to everything is the emergence of insider and outsider syndrome in the Nigerians' religious milieu. This takes us to discuss the concept, with attention paid to how it manifests, why it manifests and its implications for the Nigerian religious milieu.

#### THE CONCEPT OF INSIDER AND OUTSIDER

For the purpose of clarity, the term insider is used to describe an individual or group of individuals belonging to a religious group, assembly, denomination, clusters, associations, union or society like Anglican Church, Baptist Church, NASFAT and MSS. Conversely, anyone outside the four groups so mentioned such as RCCG, CAC, Sufi Movement and Quareeb are regarded as an outsider. The people that are regarded as outsider, however, see themselves as insiders in their own religious enclaves and consider the first group that calls itself insider as outsider because they do not belong to their group. The term insider and outsider are used in inter denominational group and sect senses. For instance, at the intra-religious level, Christians who belong to the Anglican Church will consider her co-members as insider while members of the Baptist, C.A.C. RCCG. TREM and Winners Chapel (which are also Christian denominations) to mention a few are considered as outsider.

Beyond this level, the term insider and outsider is equally used for religious differentiation especially at the broad religious level in which we make a line of demarcation among religions of the world such as African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, Islam, *Guru Maharaja*, *Hariskrisina*, *Eckankar*, *Buddhism*, *Shitoism*, *Confucianism* and *Judaism* as examples. For illustration at the interreligious level, Christians consider Muslims as outsiders while Muslims also consider Christians as outsiders. For this reason, members of different religious groups are fond of calling one another several names that have to do with different doctrines, beliefs and practices. Practitioners of ATR are called initiates/devotees; the words parishioners, brethren or congregation are used for Christians while the word Ummah is used in Islam to describe Muslims. Members of ATR are called (*Awo*) meaning initiates/devotees while non-members are known as *Ogberi*, that is, novice, whereas a Christian could be called brethren, believers or bom again while non- Christians are regarded as unbelievers. In the same vein, Muslims are regarded as *Ummah* while non-Muslims are regarded as unbeliever - *Kafir*.

## HOW THE TERM MANIFESTS

In practical terms, the term manifests in both private and public lives in Nigeria. At the private level, the concept of insider and outsider marks the beginning of religious identity in which individual religious practitioners are differentiated on the basis of whether they are Christians or Muslim. It becomes an issue so much that when someone says he/she is a Christian or a Muslim. We still want to know what domination, parish, unit, association, camp, sect, order, province or circuit an individual or groups of individuals belong/belongs to. Hence we are left with dichotomy such as ‘we’, ‘they’ ‘us’ ‘them’. More often than not this demarcation leads to division, differentiation and sometimes alienation in the Nigerian religious space. God has nominated us, but we have de-nominated ourselves.

In public arena, the term surfaces as required biographical information to be provided by any Nigerian citizen while filling application forms of public significance. This is applicable to forms related job seeking, admission exercise, recruitment into public service and general documentation on issues related to a Nigerian’s nationality. It is an issue recurring in population census and demographic documentations. The term also is a factor in determining who occupies the Nigerian political spaces at the ward, local government, state, national assembly and presidency levels. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, religious affiliation to which a Nigerian belongs becomes an issue in determining who occupies a political space. It is no wonder why we hear or read about the terms “Catholic vote”, “Muslim vote”, “Baptist vote” or “Pentecostal vote” in election periods in Nigeria. Such religious interest’s according to Johnstones, gives very explicit recognition to the correlation that exists between religious affiliation and commitment on the one hand and voting behaviour on the other hand<sup>7</sup>. In Nigeria, religious differentiation in political circle is spearheaded by religious bodies such as CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) so much that the choice of a candidate is with reference to Christian /Muslim or Muslim/ Christian ticket. This is common where we have two positions running concurrently such as those of President and Vice President, Governor and Deputy Governor. This practice is evident in the political history of Nigeria’s past leaders as shown below:

- (1) Nnamdi Azikiwe/Tafa Balewa (Christian / Muslim ticket), (1960-1966)
- (2) Shehu Shagari/Alex Ekwueme - (Muslim/Christian)-1979-1983
- (3) Buhari / Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim Ticket)-1983-85
- (4) Babangida/Ebitu Ikwe, Aikhomu (Muslim/ Christian)-1985-93
- (5) Shonekan/Abacha (Christian / Muslim ticket)-1993-97
- (6) Abacha/Diya, (Muslim/Christian Ticket) 1997-98
- (7) Abudusalami/Akhigbe (Muslim/Christian) 1998-1999
- (8) Obasanjo/Atiku (Christian / Muslim ticket) -1999-2007
- (9) Yaradua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian Ticket (2007 - 2011 )
- (10) Jonathan/Sambo (2011-2015)
- (11) Buhari/Osibajo (2015- to date)

### WHY THE PHENOMENON MANIFESTS

The dichotomy between insider and outsider becomes an issue over and over again in Nigeria because of some factors which are inexhaustible. We shall explain a few of them. The major one to the best of our ken to which others emanate from is what we describe as religious ignorance. That is the knowledge about what religion is, or is not, its essence, characteristics, its functions and the parallelism existing among the religions which is practised in Nigeria. The first is the concern for identity. The issue of identity in Nigeria is usually a combination of a number of factors: a shared language or related dialects, myth of common origin, shared cultural traits, a core territory, and often, a shared religious or spiritual universe. The identity of a religious group is always an important issue in the history of politics and governance in Nigeria. This account for incorporation of issues concerning federal character, national integration, national question, federalism, minority and majority dichotomy among others in the Nigerian political framework<sup>8</sup>. This is so because religion to a large extent enhances communal allegiance. It is no wonder why failure on the part of individuals or group of individuals to take the above issues into consideration in politic always causes religious conflicts, which has been the bane of national disunity in Nigeria<sup>9</sup>.

The second point borders on the little or no understanding of the meaning and essence of religion which many religious practitioners in Nigeria have. The scant knowledge of what religion is makes them think that one religion is better than the other or that one religion is inferior to the other. This phenomenon is what I describe as religious ignorance, which in the context of our discussion refers to lack of knowledge or information about particular doctrinal religious beliefs and practices. It could be lack of sufficient knowledge or information about religion we ourselves practise by another person belonging to a religious faith different from our own.

The meeting point between the two is lack of sufficient knowledge about a particular religion in terms of its cardinal beliefs and practices at one point or the other. For example, an average Nigerian Christian/Muslim does not have sufficient knowledge of what Christianity or Islam stands for. This happens because majority of them either rely on their pastors, *Imams* or Sunday school teachers for the little they know about the religion. They hardly create time to read the Bible or the *Qur'an* on their own. The over dependence on the religious leaders probably heightens the degree of religious ignorance among Nigeria's religious practitioners.

Arising from the above, it is our belief that anyone who knows what religion is or is not will discover that religious difference as a syndrome or practice or phenomenon is immaterial because religion-qua-religion has some fundamental features which are indispensable to all the religions practice in Nigeria. We can therefore ask a question; What is religion and What is its characteristics.

### RELIGION AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Religion has many definitions and thus it is difficult to have any acceptable one. However, leaning on Kenny's definition in the context of our discussion, religion is anything that relates man to the ultimate value and such a thing embodies Creed, Code, Cult and Communion. Creed refers to accepted doctrine of a religion. For the purpose of illustration, beliefs in God, Divinities, Ancestors, Spirit, Magic and Medicines constitute creed of African Traditional Religion while belief in *Allah*, Angels, the Holy books, Prophets, Resurrection, Judgment and predestination constitutes the Islamic creeds; whereas Christian creed is exemplified in the concept of trinity- God the Father, Son and Holy spirit which goes with belief in one baptism, resurrection and divine judgment.

The creed of Civil religion earlier is expressed in the preface of the Nigerian Constitution which reads in part:

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, having firmly and solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation *under God*, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international co-operation and understanding and to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people, Nigerian

The second characteristic, which is Code, refers to system, principles, rules or regulations relating man to man or God and man's behaviour. Code in ATR is manifested in proverbs, taboos, fables, wise saying and *Ifa corpus*. *Sharia law* and *Hadith* constitute the code of conduct in Islam while the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the mountain and in the Plain represent code for Christianity. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria connotes the creed for the Nigerian Civil religion.

The third classification in the characteristic of religion which is cult is refereeing to religious group. The fact is that religion is a group thing. It is practised by people and not an individual thing. Christians, Muslims, Traditionalists and Nigeria nationals could be regarded as the cults of ATR, Christianity, and Islam and Civil religion respectively. Each of the religious group constitutes the insider at one hand or outsider at another point as the case may be. Interestingly, the cultic nature of religion has been modernized as can be seen in wordings of a numbers of car stickers such as Anglican family, Baptist family, The Redeemed family, the NASFAT and *Orummila* family. The colours such as Green, White and Green constitute the symbols of the Nigerian civil religion. A few of the religious organisations have some slogans/slangs which they use in the public to greet one another and possibly to differentiate them from another religious group. Examples of these are the words: 'Bless you', 'Ayo ni o' and 'Asalam alekum' used to greet one another in the public by members of the Winner chapel, Cherubim and Seraphim and Muslims respectively.

Communion, which is the last of the elements, is used in the context of worship, prayers sacrament and all activities pertaining to communication between God and man and man and man in a religious setting. All the religions in Nigeria except the terror-laced religions engage in prayer. Muslims have a duty to pray five times daily just as Christians are expected to pray without ceasing. The traditional religious practitioners pray, too, while walking, working and engaging in daily activities aside specific prayers they say at different religious worship centres. The NIGERIANS PRAYS project under the leadership of former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon coupled with the prayer points in the Nigerian Pledge and the National Anthems are all means of communication between Nigerians and their national God.

In addition to the above, religion is a product of culture. Culture, according to Iwe, refers to a way of life that reflects people's distinctive genius and spirit, their fundamental character or ethos, their value orientation, world-view, institutions and achievements in the various fields of human endeavour, legal and literary, artistic and scientific, religious philosophical and technological<sup>10</sup>. Our taxonomy of different types of religions in Nigeria earlier mentioned is premised on the thesis that religion is a product of culture. We can argue further that a systematic reflection and interpretations of what people see around them do inform religious encounter, which later translates to religious conviction and ultimately religious beliefs. The religious thinking of a people is reflected in what they say about God. For instance, the people in the riverside areas who experienced large expanse of water every day are likely to conclude that God is a God of water. Similarly, somebody in the forest area is likely to feel that God is a God of the Forest who sustains forests during the dry season.

Another important thing to note at this juncture is the fact that religion is man-made. It is based on man's projection. For instance, nobody has ever seen God, yet religious people believe that He exists. Nevertheless, what they see around them such as the sun, water, moon among others inform their religious convictions about the existence of God, who is regarded as the architect of those things. This goes with the impression that religion is also experiential. People conceive the idea of religion and become a member of a religious organization probably on the basis of what they experience at one time or the other. Religious experience could come in form of vision, voice, corporate, numinous, book and conversion. The place of religious experience is very sacrosanct in religion to the extent that Rudolph Otto, argues that there is no religion which does not live as the innermost core and without it no religion would be worthy of the name. To us, religious experience informs religious expression. Religious expression in most men is the outward manifestation of religious practices. At this juncture, we can argue that religion is a personal thing but even such personal experience is made public in religious assembly.

From the context of Bentham's consequential theory, the manifestation of the insider and outsider phenomenon in both the private and public life of Nigerians have both negative and positive implications for the Nigerian religious milieu. Regarding the positive implications, we observe that the fact that Christians/Muslims/Traditionalists see themselves as one has brought about cohesion among them. They always come together under an umbrella such as the CAN, or PFN among others to do things beneficial to them or at times to fight the *outsiders* during religious crisis.

Conversely, the manifestation of the term often leads to religious bias which goes with treating or approaching the religions of others with irreverence. This singular act as argued somewhere is capable of generating ripples among religious practitioners because every religious practitioner always places his/her religion in high esteem and would not be happy if anybody of any status notwithstanding treats his religion irreverently. Two, the use of derogatory languages to describe religions of outsiders and insiders such as animism, juju, totemism, fetishism, *Kafir*, and unbelievers is bad because it is offensive and in itself has the propensity to generate interreligious conflicts<sup>11</sup>. Appropriating this assertion Iwara remarkably writes that:

Language is like the atom bomb: depending on the use one makes of it, it can cause widespread devastation, as it can be a source for peace and harmony. So powerful, in fact, is language that it has sometimes been claimed that the pen is mightier than the sword ... This is possible because language impacts heavily on a wide range of domains where human beings have vested interest. For example, language, as public behaviour, influences our assessment of the individuals or group's personality, intelligence, social status, educational attainment, job qualification, identity and social survival<sup>12</sup>.

In other words, an expression of religious ignorance is attitudinal and has the capacity to provoke interreligious conflict. The attitude falls within the periscope of the variables of what Galtung labels as ABC Triangle, which is an analytical model that views conflict as a triangle with variables such as attitude, behaviour and contradiction<sup>13</sup>. An attitude in this regard manifests in perceptions, misconceptions and emotions/feelings; while behaviour manifests in hostility, fear, threats, coercion and destructive efforts. Contradiction manifests in actual or perceived incompatibility of goals, which has implications for interreligious conflicts because they often raise the question of values.

The manifestation of the phenomenon also leads to what can be described as social exclusion, which is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in, which they live. Social exclusion manifests in interreligious dialogue because in history, we discover that practitioners of traditional religion are hardly invited to participate. In public places much attention is given to Islam and Christianity and little or none to traditional religion as if it does' not exist or is not important. In other words, traditional religion is often treated as subsidiary. In some places where Islam and Traditional religion are prominent, little or no attention is paid to Christianity in interreligious enterprise, while little or no attention is also paid to Islam in community where Christianity and Traditional religion are much more prominent. For example, the Federal government donated land for the building of Christian and Islamic religious centres in Abuja with the exclusion of Traditional religion, whose adherents according to Census statistics constitute 10% of Nigerian population. Buttressing this fact, *West Africa Magazine* (1984) writes that the government had shown its generosity with a gift of ten million naira each to the Muslims and Christians to build a National Mosque and Cathedral, respectively. This generated mutual distrust among traditional religious practitioners who felt that their denominations were sidelined.

The practice of inclusion and exclusion always leads to religious discrimination contestation for space, suspicion and counter suspicion among members of insider and outsiders- traditional religious practitioners, Muslims and Christians and many at times intra and interreligious conflicts. The end result of this development is continuing struggle among Christians and Muslims as Ahanotu exclaims:

The struggle on how the Muslim or Christian communities will live and be governed in the modern state Nigeria has produced mutual fear, suspicions and tension. There is religious shivering, certain verbosity and quite a bit of irritation in both communities<sup>14</sup>

All these happen in the context or under the canopy of what Mala calls particularity thrust which is the belief that there is no good thing in other religions different from the one practised. The differentiations existing among the insiders and outsiders create allowance for politicians to manipulate them to do their will<sup>15</sup>. This development promotes mediocrity rather meritocracy. For example the need to factor Christian/Muslim tickets to who become President and Vice President as an example does not give allowance to elect them on the basis of merit or what meritorious service each of them could deliver.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

We want to ask a fundamental question: Is there any justification for alluding to insiders and outsiders in public life? What is the relevance of alluding to religions in this matter apart from satisfying the curiosity of Christian and Muslim? To me, the allusion is irrelevant and it is purely an academic exercise. It is hypocritical because the so called insiders and outsiders do not bother about the religious profile of taxi drivers that carry them from one point to the other, the medical practitioners who attend to their family medical needs, the man or woman who sell mat, fish, cloth to them and what they buy in the markets from them.

Our position is that, rather insiders struggling to outshine the outsiders or contending or contesting for space, it is more important for each of them to display the ethics of their religions so that we can know which among the religions is the best. If they go by this advice, I believe Nigerian society will be better. More importantly is that all the religions in the world emphasize the golden rule as exemplified below:

“Do to the doer in order to cause him to do for thee. That is thanking him for what he may do; that is parrying something before it is shot. *Egyptian wisdom literature*, “Is there one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one’s whole life? Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” *Confucianism: Analects 15:25*

“This is the sum of all true righteousness - treat others, as thou wouldst thyself be treated. Do nothing to thy neighbour do to thee”: *Hinduism*.

“No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself - *Islam*,

“A man is good only when he is willing not to do to another is not good for himself- *Zoroastrianism*

“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them for this is the law and the prophets”. *Christianity Matthew 7:12*

“This is the sum of duty do naught unto others which would cause you to pay if done to you” *Brahmanism, Mahabharata 5:1417*.

“Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful” - Buddhism - *Udanavarga 5:18* “Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss” *Taoism: T’ai-Shang Ken-ying p’ien*.

“What is hateful to you; do not to your fellow man. That is the entire law: all the rest is commentary” - *Judaism, Talmud, Shabbat, 319 (Rost 1986)*

“Whenever a person breaks a stick in the forest, let him consider what it would feel of it were himself (that was this broke) *Yoruba proverb*. Crawford, (1989)

In the light of this submission, we are tempted to subscribe to the view of Cory Booker, who rhetorically remarks:

Don’t speak to me about your religion; first show it to me in how you treat other people. Don’t tell me how much you love your God; show me in how much you love all His children. Don’t preach to me your passion for your faith; teach me through your compassion for your neighbors. In the end, I’m not as interested in what you have to tell or sell or preach or teach, as I am in how you choose to live and give<sup>16</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We have shown here that the application or reference to the insiders and outsiders phenomenon poses so much challenge to individual religious practitioners who live in constant fear and mutual suspicion. It also poses a threat to Nigeria’s religious milieu because as it is religious freedom and liberty are no longer guarantees where practitioners of religions struggle and contest and compete on everything because there is mutual distrust among them. Because of this factor among others we suggest that government and other stakeholders in religion should do the following as a matter of urgency:

- (1) Stop the use of religious affiliation as the criterion for choosing Nigerian leaders in an attempt to satisfy the insider and outsiders in religion. Such should be replaced with the moral probity and individual as displayed and the moral ideology he/she is known for. In other words moral deed and not religious profession should be the reference point. Such an arrangement would give allowance for humanists to have their way
- (2) Remove the column indicating religious type or denomination existing as a biographical information in any form of public significance
- (3) Ban Christian/Muslim/ and traditional religious practitioner’s prayers in public place. If there is need to pray at all, then the second stanza of the national anthem should be adopted as the prayer point
- (4) Censure religious propaganda that are capable of destroying their Nigeria religious milieu
- (5) Religious studies teachers should teach objectivity and bring out the areas of convergence and divergence in religion in order to promote religious tolerance

- (6) Religious education should be promoted in such a way that all insiders and outsiders will come to terms with the following sociological facts :
- (i) We are Christian or Muslim as an example by choice/ birth, conversion and conviction;
  - (ii) The choice of religion we practise is predicated on our personal conviction and not coercion
  - (iii) When two people argue about religion, they are both wrong.
  - (iv) That all religions are the same and that no one is superior to the other because their adherents are ready to live for them and if the need arises die for them. On this Mahatma Ghandi's observation is apposite when he says: all religions were true and also that all had some error in them. Whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism. So we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become Hindu. But our innermost prayer should be that a Hindu, should be a better Hindu; a Muslim, a better Muslim; a Christian, a better Christian.
  - (v) That religion is a private matter whose members and the constitution guarantees religious freedom for individual without fear or favour
  - (vi) That all religions have some similarities, differences and peculiarities but not withstanding each of them provide their adherents some convictions that they are ready to live and die for if the need arises
  - (vii) That every religion is a product of culture of where they came from
  - (viii) Religious scriptures and traditions were inspired but also have human hands in terms of their documentation and interpretation
  - (ix) Religious scriptures and traditions are contextual in terms of their content and intent and should be dealt with in that manner.
  - (x) Quoting Mahatma Ghandi, we postulated that the need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions;

It is my submission that we need to make the following pledge as a way of creating a Nigerian religious mile that guarantee religious freedom, liberty and justice particularly at a time when change needs to begin with us.

I, as someone who is a stakeholder in religious matter like my next door neighbours solemnly pledge that:

I am a Christian or Muslim as an example by my choice;

The choice is predicated on my personal conviction and not by coercion I will take cognizance of the fact that all religious are the same and that no one is superior to the other.

I will not through my religious actions or inactions superimpose my religion on my next door neighbour.

I will not disturb my neighbours from practising his/her religion as I don't expect him/her to do same to me.

I will understand that religion is a private matter whose embers could be peacefully fanned in the community of believers,

I will respect the fact that as my religion is important to me so is the religion of my neighbour's different from mine important to them.

All religions have some peculiarities but not withstanding each of them provides its adherents with some convictions that the adherents are ready to live and die for if need be.

I will abide by the *ethos* of religion in man/man relationship.

So help me God.

Finally, it is our humble submission quoting Abdu'l-Baha, the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith that:

"Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth, give birth to spirituality, and bring life and light to each heart. If religion becomes a

cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. For it is clear that the purpose of a remedy is to cure; but if the remedy should only aggravate the complaint it had better be left alone. Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion<sup>17</sup>.

## Endnotes

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