

**BUILDING BRIDGES
OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY
IN NIGERIA**

By

MUHIB O. OPELOYE



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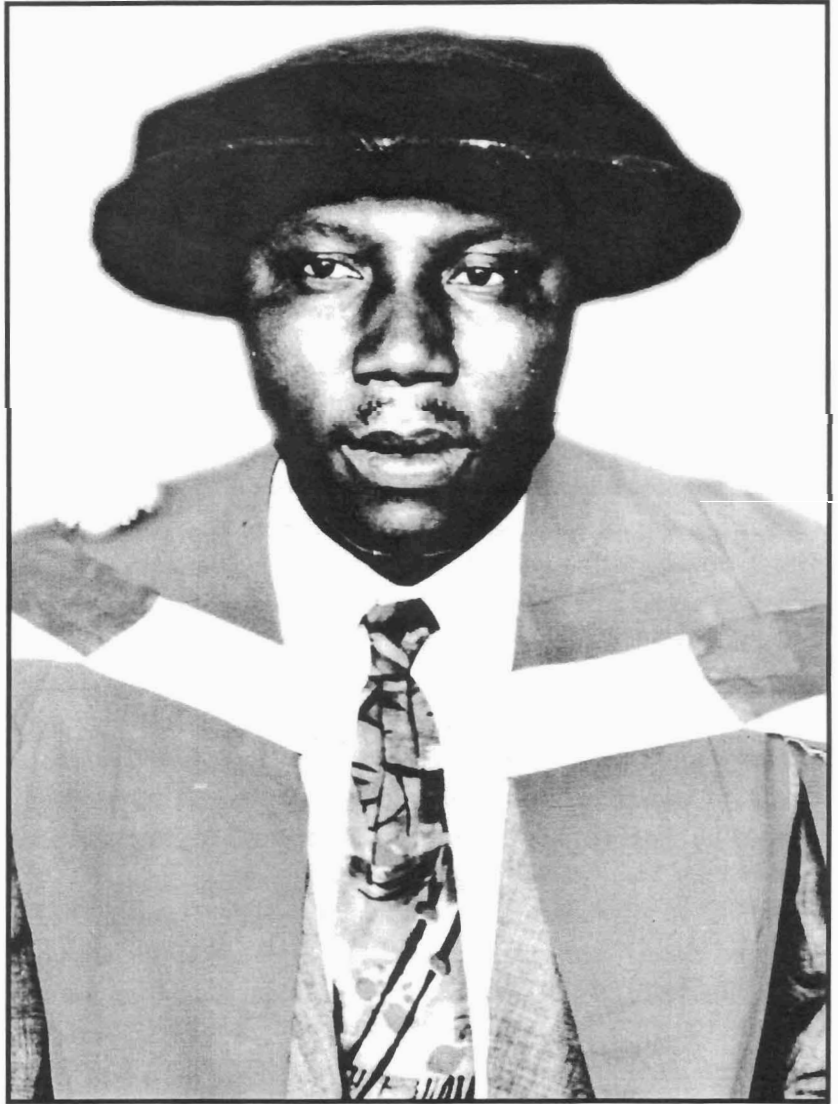
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Vice-Chancellor,
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Principal Officers of the University,
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Distinguished Members of Senate
Deans of Faculties,
Friends of the University,
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,
All other protocols duly observed.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

I would like to start this lecture by acknowledging the favour of God on me for He has made it possible for me to reach the peak of my noble career. If not for Allah's will, this would have been impossible, in view of my background which was rooted in traditional Islamic Education with no opportunity to step into the four walls of the secondary school. I thank Allah for His mercies. I should also thank the Vice-Chancellor for giving me the rare honour to give the 12th Inaugural Lecture. I call it a rare honour because my Department, the Department of Religions, produced the last Inugural Lecturer, though from the Christian Studies Unit.

An Inaugural Lecture, the way I understand it, is to give the Inaugural Lecturer an opportunity to share with the academia and the public the fruits of his research efforts. This is what informed the choice of my topic: "***BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA.***" Colleagues who are familiar with my studies are not left in doubt that, for more than fifteen years my research efforts have been geared towards the promotion of harmonious Muslim-Christian relation in recognition of which the Lagos State University appointed me Professor of Islamic Studies in November, 1996.

BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

Of the great monotheistic faiths having Abrahamic descent, Islam and Christianity enjoy the widest universal acceptance. Islam with about 1171 million adherents has 23.2% of the total world population which stands at about 5 billion, while Christianity with about 1424 million adherents attracts 29%.¹ The adherents of the two religions therefore constitute more than half of the world population. Nigeria as a nation has a substantial percentage of the world population of Muslims and Christians. Archbishop John Onaiyekan makes a correct observation when he says: "Nigeria is one of the greatest Islamo-Christian nations in the world."² What the archbishop means by this is that Nigeria is about the only country in the world where one finds a very large population of Muslims living side by side with a large population of Christians. There are nations with fairly large population of Muslims and Christians but more often than not we find one dominant over the other. Where Muslims and Christians are fairly balanced, the population would not be as large as Nigeria's. Though we cannot ascertain the actual population of the Muslims and Christians of this country because religious affiliation was not put into consideration during the 1991 controversial headcount, what is however certain is that the giant North remains the stronghold of Islam in spite of intensity of the Christian evangelism going on in the area, while the dominance of Christianity in the South East remains unchallenged. It is in the South-West that the two faiths attract a balanced population of adherents. The large population of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria gives the country an advantage of being a nation to be reckoned with in the global search for religious peace and harmony.

In the geographical entity known today as Nigeria, Islam predated Christianity by about eight centuries. The first contact with Islam in the region was through the old Kingdom of Kanem. According to al-Bakri, Islam reached Kanem through the Kavar-Fezzan route in A.D. 666. Though there are various claims regarding the exact date of Islam's penetration to the Kingdom, what is certain is that by the 11th century, Islam was already made a state religion. Humme Jilme who ruled the Kingdom between 1085 and 1097 C.E. became a Muslim and made Islam the official religion of the Kingdom.³ Islamic culture had also been deeply entrenched in the Kingdom during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603). The second wave of Islamic penetration to Nigeria was through Hausaland and this was during the first half of the 14th century C.E. By the 15th

century, during the reign of Sarkin Kano Muhammad Rumfa between 1463 and 1499, the religion had been well established in the region.

It was in order that the Emir could be guided in the proper administration of his emirate in accordance with the dictates of the *Shari'ah* that he commissioned Muhammad b. Abdul Karim al-Maghili to write his famous book known as *The Growth of Religion Concerning the Obligations of Princes*. By the 18th century, the entire Hausa States had been Islamised and that meant Islamisation of the people's way of life. The socio-economic system, the political system and even the educational system were all organized in consonance with Islamic principles. However, before the turn of the century, what remained of Islam in most parts of Hausaland was no more than a shadow of true Islamic teachings. The Fulani Jihad of Shaykh Uthman b. Fodiye launched in early 19th century aimed at restoration of the pristine Islam in Hausaland and it recorded a huge success.

Also in Yorubaland, Islam predated Christianity. Adam al-Ilori suggested a period around middle of the 14th century as against the close of the 18th century proposed by Samuel Johnson.⁴ If the 14th century date would be considered too early for Islam's penetration to Yorubaland, certainly the 18th century date is rather late because as rightly observed by Crowther, Islam had made its influence felt in Oyo Empire before 18th century.⁵ A date around the middle of 17th century may be more appropriate. It should be noted as rightly observed by Gbadamosi that the percolation of Islam into Yorubaland did not result from the direction of any organized evangelisation movement, neither was it introduced under the warrant of any Islamised political authority, nor was it spread at the point of sword of any soldier, rather the religion spread quietly and peacefully among the Yoruba by the itinerant scholars and traders.⁶

This had implication for the practice of *shari'ah* among the people. It made *shari'ah* a personal concern and Islam a private religion. It should however be noted that by the time Lagos became British colony Islamic influence had grown considerably among the Yoruba. It is on record that in 1899, the Muslims in Lagos forwarded a petition to the British Colonial Government demanding for the establishment of the *shari'ah* legal system. Their action was motivated by the desire for dispensation of justice according to the law and usages of their faith. It was the same year that the famous Shitta Bay Mosque was opened in Lagos.

Subsequent to this development was the establishment of *shari'ah* courts by some Yoruba Muslim traditional rulers in their domains. The rulers include Oba Momodu Lamuye of Iwo (d. 1906), Oba Aliyu Oyewole, the 7th Akirun of Ikirun (d. 1912); Oba Abibu Lagunju, the Timi of Ede (d. 1900).⁷ It is evident from the foregoing that inspite of the fact that Islam never attained the status of State religion among the Yoruba, it still

wielded considerable influence in the society.

Organized Christianity arrived in Nigeria in the middle of the 19th century. Though there were efforts to introduce Christianity around the 15th and 16th centuries, such efforts, according to Ayandele, were feeble and unrewarding.⁸ The early missionaries in Nigeria like any other part of Africa had a dual purpose: to promote legitimate trade between Africans and Europeans and to convert Africans to Christianity.⁹ Their enterprise in the country took the form of a three pronged attack: the Church of Scotland Mission occupied itself with Calabar; the Church Missionary Society established missions in the Niger Delta and up to the Niger; while the Methodists, the Church Missionary Society and the Baptists advanced into Yorubaland.¹⁰

These regions represent parts of the country where Christianity had made considerable impact. The South East including the Niger Delta where Islam made no remarkable inroads remains till now homogeneously Christian and the South West, where Islam already had considerable influence lost many of his adherents to Christianity through the Western type schools. The North is probably excluded due to late arrival of Christianity to the area. However, the influence of Christianity in the region cannot be underestimated on that account.

Missionary enterprise as observed by Ayandele¹¹ passed through three distinct phases in Northern Nigeria. The first phase covering the period between 1870 and 1888 was one of relative success for the missions. Their achievement, albeit limited was owed to their ability to win the affection of the Emirs and convince them that they were not torch-bearers of imperialism. The second phase was 1888-1900 when missionary enterprise and British imperialism were to the Northern rulers synonymous. It was a period when the missionaries were highly discredited. During the period in question, many missionaries did not hide their desire to see the British remove the Fulani obstacle by force and thereby pave way for the massive conversion of the Hausa. This explained why the 1897 expeditions against Ilorin and Bida which were interpreted purely in missionary terms were hailed. The last phase was the period between 1900-1918 when the British administration not only dissociated itself from missionaries but declared opposition to missionary enterprise in the North.

This last phase covered the period of Lord Lugard as the Governor of Northern Nigeria. He divided the North into three areas: the first consisting of the Muslim emirates where the Emir and the people were mainly Muslims, here the missionaries were not allowed to evangelize; the second consists of the areas where the Chiefs and the people were predominantly traditionalists, here Government encouraged missionary work, the third consists of areas where most of the people are traditional-

ists but the rulers were Muslims. These were areas where the Government and missionaries disagreed and they remain the spots of religious crises in the country till date.

Lugard's policy of restricting the missionaries from providing education for the Muslim North in spite of the government's inability to provide same due to lack of funds had its adverse implication. It accounted for the people's retardation in acquisition of Western education. This meant non-utilisation of what was in the Southern Nigeria; the main agency of education. Though the policy is believed to have been introduced because Lugard met in the North well organized Qur'anic school system which was part of the socio-political structure upon which the system of indirect rule was built, he should have known that the Qur'anic system in the emerging secular society would have limited utility value. In the South West where the missionaries were given unrestricted freedom to establish schools, the Christian participation in educational venture served as motivating factor for the Muslims to found Islamic Educational Institutions.

Another policy of the colonial administration which adversely affected the lives of the Muslims had to do with the *shari'ah*.¹² In spite of the colonial masters' promise to the Emirs not to interfere with the faith of their subjects, they evolved a policy confining the application of the *shari'ah* to the aspect of personal status. This limitation meant non-recognition of Islam as a complete way of life. The policy was not only an attempt to mutilate the *shari'ah* but to eliminate it in favour of the English law which is basically Christian as explained by Lord Sumner when he asserts:

Ours is and always has been a Christian state. The English family is built on Christian ideas and if the national religion is not Christian there is none. English law may well be called a Christian law, but we apply many of its rules and most of its principles with equal justice and equally good government in heathen communities and its section, even in courts of conscience are material and not spiritual.¹³

Since independence, Muslims had tried through constitutional means to widen the scope of application of the *shari'ah* but such efforts have met with resistance by the Christian evangelists who have been influenced by the Europeans to hate Islam. It is apparent therefore that the age-long *shari'ah* controversy in Nigeria originated from the colonial era. The controversy is without doubt a manifestation of misconception of Islam by the Christians. The acrimonious relationship between Nigerian Muslims and Christians resulting from the colonial legacy of religious intolerance makes it compelling to find a means of building bridges of religious understanding between the two traditions so that harmonious relationship

of their adherents can be promoted.

THE GULF BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

To appreciate the gulf between Islam and Christianity, we must first and foremost examine the theological foundation of the Christian faith. The divine message preached by Christianity has to be understood within the context of the Biblical central themes of creation, sin, fall, redemption and salvation.¹⁴ The scripture teaches that in the beginning God created man and he was in the state of well-being until he was tempted to sin and consequently fell. God started a plan of redemption with Abraham and made promises contained in Genesis Chapter 12. Thus Israel was to be a prototype to reach out to the entire world. Under the leadership of Moses, God made a covenant with the Israelites. They settled in Canaan and established a monarchy. Corruption reigned supreme and consequently, prophets appeared on the scene. The kingdom later fell: the north was captured by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. while the south (Judea) was subjugated by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The incident was followed by the exile of the Israelites. The first of the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. The return saw the beginning of the intertestamental period when the Messianic expectation was rife.

The New Testament was ushered in by John the Baptist. With the advent of Jesus (the expected Messiah) the gospel was declared and after him the apostles propagated it with emphasis on the second coming of Jesus, while the eschatological events were being anticipated as enunciated in the book of revelation. Thus from the point of view of the Christian scriptures God's singular programme of salvation developed progressively from Genesis to Revelation. The Christian programme of salvation requires faith in the doctrine of original sin. The doctrine traces mankind's sinfulness to Adam. According to Christian theology mankind became sinful in consequence of Adam's sin. Adam and his wife Eve committed the sin of transgressing divine command. The command recorded in Genesis 2:16-17 reads:

"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Rather than abide by the divine instruction, Eve yielded to the temptation of the serpent and ate of the forbidden tree. She also lured her husband into participating in the sinful act. This incident is recorded in Genesis 3:1-7. The passage shows serpent as an agent of temptation. There is no suggestion in the narrative that the serpent is a supernatural demonic figure to be equated with Satan.¹⁵ Scholars like Guthrie have expressed the view that the serpent was used by Satan.¹⁶ This view is considered

plausible in view of the fact that Satan is in many passages of the Bible associated with the turning of man's God-given probationary opportunity into an avenue of temptation. As evident in the passage, the woman is engaged in an apologetic discourse with the serpent but she eventually succumbed to its temptation, thereby violating the law of God while yielding to the authority of Satan. Within the context of Christian theology, the implications of Adamic sin are multifarious. In Genesis 2:16-17 quoted above, death is destined to be the punishment for the disobedience of Adam and Eve. By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God and became dead in sin and wholly defiled. Mankind in general is believed to have in consequence of Adam's sin become sinful and like Adam's become defiled and destined to die. In this regard, Romans 5:12 declares:

Sin came to the world through one man and death through sin,
so death spread to all men because all men sinned.

The Adamic sin was the first sin and once it had entered the world, no one was able to escape its power according to the Christian belief. In Earnest Best's view, the way man picks up the sin that is already in the world is analogous to the way a Christian picks up word, and gestures of those with whom he interacts.¹⁸ In his view, no man can ever be back in the position of Adam when there was no sin in the world and so be unaffected by the sin of Adam. Man is in consequence of the sin wholly defiled in all his faculties to the extent that he is wholly contrary to God in his action. He cannot on his own do anything good except he abides in Jesus and Jesus abides in him. This is why he is considered to be a deprived man, a born sinner who needs salvation through Christ.

The Christian programme of salvation involves the doctrines of justification, regeneration and adoption. Justification is the judicial and declarative act of God by which He promises those who believingly accept propitiatory offering of Christ as absolved from their sins, released from their penalty and accepted as righteous before Him.¹⁹ Therefore to justify a sinner is to account and consider him relatively righteous notwithstanding his past unrighteousness. This divine grace, according to Christian belief, is effected through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Regeneration, on the other hand, denotes the change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life, when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.²⁰ The change is seen as a new birth and it is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Before a Christian can experience a regenerating grace, he must first make use of prevenient grace by repenting, believing and calling on God. Adoption is the declaratory act of God by which upon being justified by faith in Jesus the Christian is believed to be received into the family of God.

The entire doctrines of the Christian Salvation programme revolve round the belief in divinity of Jesus. It must be pointed out that it is only in John's gospel that Jesus is presented as divine figure who becomes man. Saint John is the only gospel writer who unequivocally talks about Jesus' pre-existence. John 1:1-2 in this regard declares:

In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In verse 14 of the same passage, we are told that the word became flesh and dwelt among men. Also in John 14:8, we read that there is no distinction between God and Jesus as the passage reads:

Lord (Philip said to Jesus) show us the Father and we shall be satisfied. Jesus said to him. "Have I been with you so long and yet you do not know me Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father, how can you say show me the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

Everything that Jesus is conceived to be is contained in the gospel of John as evident in the seven "I am statements" which provide seven Messianic self-reflections.²¹

I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35)

I am the Light of the World (John 8:

I am the Door (John 10:7)

I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)

I am the Resurrection (John 11:25)

I am the Way, Truth and Life (John 14:6)

I am the True Vine (John 15:5)

Let us now discuss Islam and examine how it differs from Christianity on this subject. The kernel of Islamic message enshrined in the Qur'an is essentially to guide man to what is right and to bring him out of darkness to light. The message is an invitation to belief (*al-Iman*) and to engage in righteous works (*al-amal as-Salih*). These being the two requirements for salvation in Islam, a Muslim is on the one hand, required to believe in Allah, His angels, His prophets, His revealed books and the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, he is called to engage in the works of righteousness including observance of the prescribed acts of devotion, keeping within the limits of the law, the limits of divine commands and prohibitions to be able to maintain good relation with God as well as to maintain good relation with his fellow man, while the former comes under worship (*'ibadah*) the latter comes under transaction (*mu'amalat*). Consequent upon these two requirements, Islam rejects the

doctrine of inherited sin, it denies divinity of Jesus, or his death on the cross, and it does not acknowledge the doctrines of justification, regeneration and adoption as preached by Christianity.

In Islam, mankind is not believed to have become sinful in consequence of Adam's sin. Even though the Muslims believe that Adam and Eve (Hawa) disobeyed Allah by yielding to Satan's suggestion, the Qur'an exonerates them from wilful disobedience of the divine instruction. Their action was attributed to forgetfulness as evident in *Surah 20:115* which reads: 'We had already before this given a command to Adam, but he forgot and we found on his part no resolve (to sin)'. According to the Qur'anic accounts, Adam and his wife Hawa regretted their action and asked for Allah's forgiveness and He turned towards them in mercy.²¹ Apart from forgiving them, He also assured them of divine guidance through the revealed scripture. In the event of man following revealed guidance he is free from any fear, grief or sorrow in the hereafter.

Man, according to Islamic teaching is born in a natural state of purity (*fitrah*) and submission to God. The apostolic tradition corroborates this when it says:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَدُّ عَلَى فِطْرَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ إِلَّا مَا آبَاؤُهُ
يَهُودِيَّةً أَوْ نَصْرَانِيَّةً أَوْ مَجَسَّيَّةً

Every child is born into the natural religion (i.e. into the natural state of Islam) its parents later on make him to be a Jew or Christian or Pagan.²³

This *hadith* teaches the Muslims that every man is created with sound heart (*al-Qalb as-Salam*) without inheriting any sin from any ancestor. And to attain salvation, he must return to God with sound heart. Therefore, the determination of one's salvation depends on his exercise of freedom of choice. This is why the *Surah 41:46* reads:

مَنْ عَمِلْ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۚ وَمَا
رَبُّكَ بِظَالِمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ

Whoever works righteousness benefits his own self. Whoever works evil, it is against his own self. And your Lord is not unjust in the least to his servants.

Interestingly a similar message is enshrined in several Biblical passages including Deut.24:16, Jer. 31:30, Ezek.8:20 and Gal.6:5. Deuteronomy 24:16 reads 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin.' Similarly, Ezekiel 18:20 declares:

The soul that sins shall die'. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the Father nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son, the righteousness of The righteous shall be upon himself and the wickedness of the Wicked shall be upon himself.

The New Testament has this to say in Galatians 6:4-5 on the same subject:

'Let each one test his own work and then his reason to boast shall be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each man will have to bear his own load.'

The Quranic verse 17:15 (no bearer of load shall bear the load of another) is corroborated by the above Biblical passages.

Islam recognizes that man has the potential capacity of evil and good deed latent in him without one being greater than the other. If he chooses to actualise the potential of sin instead of potential of goodness he will be adding a new external element to his pure nature for which he is liable to divine punishment except he is forgiven.²⁴

Since Islam considers the doctrine of inherited sin extraneous to its teachings all other doctrines associated with it become equally repugnant to Islamic tenets. Little wonder that the Qur'an in different passages vehemently denounces such doctrines. On the doctrine of crucifixion Surah 4:157 declares:

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا

And because of their saying (in boast) "We killed Messiah 'Isa (Jesus) son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah – but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof, they have no knowledge save pursuit of conjecture. Surely they killed him not..."

Also in *Surah 5:72-73* the doctrines of Jesus' divinity and trinity of God are rejected as the passage declares:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ
ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا
اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمِمَّنْ
إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ

They surely disbelieve who say God is the Messiah, Son of Mary. But the Messiah (himself said) "O children of Israel worship Allah my Lord and your Lord. Whosoever ascribes partners unto Allah for Him Allah has forbidden paradise... They surely disbelieve who say Allah is the third of the three when there is no god save one God...

It needs to be stated that this conception of Jesus which the Quran presents was the concept which Arius and his followers propagated before it was declared heretical at the Council of Nacea in 325 CE and it is the same concept which the Jehovah witnesses of the present day Christianity have of Jesus, based on their interpretation of the scriptures. It therefore shows that there is nothing novel in the Quaranic view of Jesus after all.

THE LINK BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

The primary link between Islam and Christianity as belief systems is the doctrine of God's existence in which their adherents must believe. God in the two traditions share common attributes. He is the Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and earth, the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient, the Sovereign Lord, the Source of wisdom, the Source of peace, the Guardian of faith, the Irresistible, the Supreme, the Hidden, the Manifest, the First and the Last, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the All-Forgiving, the All-Knowing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Just, the Ever-Living, the Self Subsisting, the Self Sufficient, the Most High. The attributes of God as conceived in the two faiths are inexhaust-

ible, they reflect the way the Muslims and Christians conceive their Creator. The similarities in the tenets of the two religions have prompted some orientalist to conclude that Islam is a slavish imitation of Christianity. Orientalists propagating such a view include William Muir, D.S. Margoliouth and Montgomery Watt. Muir²⁵ is of the view that Muhammad obtained his idea of God and revelation from the Jews and Christians. Margoliouth²⁶ opines that Muhammad's knowledge about these concepts was faulty and superficial though his knowledge of the Biblical stories improved as time went on. Watt, in his own opinion argues that the greatness of Islam is largely due to a fusion of some Arab elements with certain Judeo-Christian conceptions.²⁷ The question should then be asked, if Muhammad's knowledge of Judaism and Christianity was second hand, superficial and erroneous, would he have the courage to challenge the validity and correctness of two prevalent traditions of his time as he did? There could be no question of the Prophet taking over the concept of monotheism from the Jews and Christians because of the way he unequivocally controverted and rejected what they presented to be the teachings of their scriptures.

It is in fact not plausible to suggest that Islamic idea of monotheism was influenced by the Judeo-Christian precept considering the fact that the God in the Old Testament is depicted essentially as a racial god openly partial to the children of Israel while the New Testament text obscures and blurs the concept of one God by inextricably tying it with manifestly difficult and admittedly mysterious doctrine of trinity which is extraneous to the teachings of Islam.

One important point worthy of note about the message propagated by Prophet Muhammad is the fact that he did not claim to have come with a new religion. He only claimed to have come to revive, reform and fulfil the same message preached by the earlier prophets. This is why Qu'ran in *Surah 42:13* declares:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا
إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ
وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا فِيهِ كِبْرًا عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا نَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ اللَّهُ
يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

The same religion has He (Allah) established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah, that which We have sent by inspiration to thee (Muhammad) and that which We enjoined on

Abraham, Moses and Jesus, namely that ye should remain steadfast in religion and make No distinction therein.

It requires more than a cursory glance at the text of the Qur'an to appreciate the modifications it has made on some of the accounts narrated by the Bible. Opeloye's *Dictionary of Peoples and Places in the Qur'an* sheds some light on this subject.²⁸ Muhar Ali's *Sirat al-Nabi and the Orientalists* deal extensively with the same subject matter with reference to Prophet Yusuf. To appreciate the fact that the Qur'anic accounts are not a slavish imitation of the Biblical accounts it would be worthwhile to highlight some major modifications contained in the Quranic presentation of similar accounts, using for the purpose of our illustration some notable scriptural personages namely: Prophets Ibrahim, Musa, Nuh and Maryam, the mother of Jesus.

Ibrahim is acknowledged to be the symbol of faith of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. The two scriptures contain the accounts of agonizing test of the faith of Ibrahim in which he was divinely commanded to sacrifice his only son. The Qur'an and the Bible however differ on the son in question. While the Bible believes it was Ishaq (Isaac) the Qur'an insists it was Ismail (Ishmel) since reference in the scriptures is to the only son of Ibrahim at the time of the incident. Nevertheless, there are accounts peculiar to the Qur'an. It is only in the Qur'an that Ibrahim vigorously preached monotheism to his people starting with his father. The Qur'anic accounts narrate how Ibrahim destroyed his peoples' idols and how the people in turn tried to set him ablaze before he was rescued by God. It is also only in the Qur'an that we read about Ibrahim's connection with the Ka'abah and Makkah. Even though this connection is denied by the oriental scholars, the popularity which pilgrimage to Makkah continues to enjoy among the Muslims worldwide as predicted by Prophet Ibrahim and recorded in *Surah 22:23-27* remains the proof of authenticity of the Qur'anic claim. With regard to Prophet Musa, the Qur'anic accounts agree to a large extent with the Biblical account on:

- (i) how he was born and saved from being slain;
- (ii) how he was brought under Pharaoh's care;
- (iii) his encounter with the Egyptian;
- (iv) how he was sent to Pharaoh and his encounter with Pharaoh's magicians; and also
- (v) how he led the Israelites across the Red Sea.

Despite these, there are points of conflicts in the narratives, one of which is the Biblical claim that Aaron (Harun) instigated the Israelites to worship the molten calf while the Qur'anic accounts insist that it was one Samiriy. Peculiar to the Qur'an is the accounts of Prophet Musa's

encounter with Khidr which has been given mystical interpretation by many exegetes.

Prophet Nuh in the two scriptures is associated with the deluge. However, unlike the Biblical accounts, it is the Qur'an which specifically mentions that those who believed in God were saved from the deluge. Also it is the Qur'an which tells us that the deluge did not come until after Nuh had become despaired of his people's ever receiving divine guidance. Moreover, it is from the Qur'an we read about what happened to his son for refusing to believe in his father's mission in consequence of which he was drowned. Qur'an does not contain the Old Testament assertion that God regretted his action for causing the devastation leading to His resolve never again to do so. According to the Bible in order that God may remind Himself of this resolution and covenant with Nuh, He had to set a rainbow in the sky which also implies that God could be forgetful. The Qur'an is free from such accounts which it views as undermining God's infinite knowledge.³⁰ The Qur'anic accounts of Mary (the mother of Jesus) are full of glowing remarks which show the respect accorded her by Islam. The Qur'an clears her of all imputations of being an unworthy character and emphatically declares her purity and chastity and states that God selected her as the noblest lady for the extraordinary honour of being the mother of Jesus.³¹ Chapter 19 of the Quran, *Surat Maryam* is indeed named after her.

THE BASIS FOR THE DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS

Why is it that we have the gulf between the Islamic and Christian narratives and precepts when they are both believed to have derived from a common source? The reason according to the Muslims is due to interpolation of the Bible. Based on the assertion in Qur'an 2:79, the Muslims believe that the original text of the Bible had been mixed with the interpretation of the Writers in a way that makes it difficult to determine what constitutes the words of God. The problem is further compounded by the identification of seemingly contradictory passages which may not be easily reconciled. Such passages include:

- (i) 2 Chr. 36:9 and 2Kgs. 42:8 (here we are not sure whether Jehoachim was 8 or 18 years old when he began to reign)
- (ii) 2 Sam. 10:18 and 1 Chr. 19:18 (here it is not certain whether David slew or the Syrians, the men of 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen or men of 7000 chariots and 40,000 foot soldiers);
- (iii) 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1Chr.21:1 (here we are not sure whether the Lord or Satan prompted David to number Israel);
- (iii) 2 Chr. 9:25 and 1Kgs. 4:26 (here it is not certain whether Solomon had 40,000 or 4000 stall of horses)

The problematic nature of the Biblical text is further confirmed by the statement recently credited to Pope John Paul II who opined that the virgin Mary (and not Mary Magdalene) was the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection.³² Responding to this view Victor Oshisade³³ in his article "Rewriting the Gospel," remarks that the assertion is one of the most controversial in the annals of the Roman Catholic Church since the time of St. Peter on the papacy. Perhaps the Pope's opinion might have been informed by the innate sentimental obsession for Virgin Mary being the Mother of Jesus Christ. This assertion might also have been informed by the fact that only St. John and St Mark categorically specify that Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus after resurrection as St Matthew and St Luke fail to clarify the position.³⁴ Whatever may be the reason for this view, it buttresses the fact stated in the preface to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible that the Scripture is not error free. Metzger³⁵ identifies the following factors as responsible for this problem:

- (i) speed of production of the scripture which outran accuracy of execution because of rapid increase in the number of Christian converts during the first century;
- (ii) faulty translation as a result of imperfect knowledge of the original languages of the scripture, namely, Hebrew and Greek;
- (iii) cumbersome method of transcription coupled with extensive dictation of the text by the lector.

Besides these, Metzger mentions other factors attributed to changes involving harmonistic corruption, addition of natural complements and adjuncts, clearing up historical and geographical difficulties. One other important factor unmentioned by Metzger is the use of diverse source traditions by the writers in the presentation of their accounts. These are Yahweh (J) tradition, Elohist(E) tradition. Deuteronomistic (D) tradition and Priestly (P) tradition.³⁶

What we have today as the 66 books of the Bible (that is if we exclude the 12 apocriphal books recognized by the Catholics) are the best that we could have in the absence of the original *Torah* and *Injil* and in view of the long and tedious process canonization of the scriptures.

Canonization of the Biblical books refers to the collection of the books which passed the test of authenticity and authority and were consequently coupled together as Bible. Such books were measured by the standard of divine inspiration and were adjudged to be God-breathed. Two factors necessitated the process of canonization : the emergence of dubious religious writing and the infiltration into the church heresies such as gnosticism and mercionism. It was in an attempt to get rid of the spurious books and the heretical teachings that a test of canonicity had to be passed

before a book could be adjudged God-breathed.³⁷ The 66 books (49 O.T. and 27 N.T.) are those that survived the tests of canonicity and therefore form the Canon of the scriptures. Several other religious books were written which fell below the standard of divine inspiration and were therefore not canonized. The process was gradual. Each Biblical book became canonical as from the time the Church accorded it recognition. According to Willey and Culbertson,³⁸ the books of Law were recognized as part of the canon by 440 BC. The books of the Prophets by 200 B.C. and the writing by 100 B.C. The New Testament canon was not formed until about 400 C.E. It is on the basis of the canonization process that the Bible in I Timothy 3:16 asserts that all scripture is God-breathed and it is on this basis that the Christians see the Bible as God's word.

The process of compilation of the Qur'an was not as cumbersome considering the fact that the whole exercise was completed in less than fifty years. According to Islamic tradition the revelation of the Qur'an came to Prophet Muhammad piecemeal for a period close to 23 years before it was completed (610-632 CB). Each time a revelation was brought, he not only committed it to memory together with his companions, but also instructed his scribe Zayd b. Thabit and others to write it down dictating the sequence of the chapters and verses. The literate ones among his companion also kept records of the revelation. Though the Qur'an was not compiled as a book during the life time of the Prophet, the arrangement of its chapters and verses effected by the Prophet made possible the various uses to which it was put in his time. The loss of life of many Quranic memorizers (*huffaz*) in the Yamamah war during the reign of Caliph AbuBakr led to the compilation of the Quran, while variation in the mode of reading led to the standardization of its text during the reign of Caliph Uthman (d. 656CE). This meant in effect that the revelation and the tasks of compilation and standardisation as a whole were completed between 610 and 632 CE. It is the Uthmanic copy that has been in circulation till today. Muslims should not because of what is perceived as problematic in the Christian scriptures fail to recognize the truth and the facts enshrined in them. This truth the Qur'an affirms and these facts, it upholds. These are the truths conveyed by direct revelation as in the instances of God talking directly to man issuing specific instructions or making certain proclamations. An example is God's instruction to Adam in the Garden which is recorded in *Surah 2:35* and which reads:

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا

O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as you will but approach not this tree or ye run into harm and transgression.

This passage reechoes what is contained in Genesis 2:15. Similarly, striking is the similarity in the message revealed to Moses at Sinai when he was yet to meet with Pharaoh. *Surah 20:12* reads in this regard :

إِنِّي أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَاخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

Verily I am thy Lord, therefore in my presence put off your shoes for thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa.

This passage also compares with what we read in Exodus 3:5. There is also the proclamation in Luke 1:28 which reads :

Hail O favoured one, the Lord is with you Do not Be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son and you shall call his name 'Jesus.'

This compares with what is contained in *Surah 3:45* which reads:

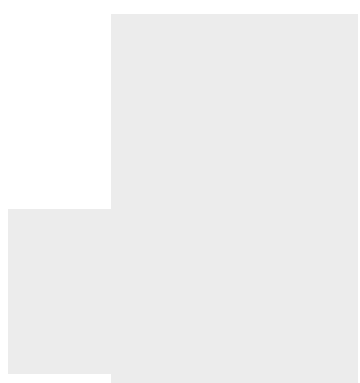
إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَأِكَةُ يُمَرِّمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ
بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عَسَى أَنْ يَمُرَّ بِهِ
جَهَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَنْ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ

Behold the angels said O Mary, God gives thee glad tiding of a word from Him, his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary held in honour in this world and in the hereafter and of (the company) of those nearest to God.

It is in recognition of the common truth in the two traditions that the Qur'an in *Surah 2:62* declares:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّبِيَّةَ
مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ
عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures) and the Christians and the Sabian, any who Believe in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.



Commenting on this passage Abul A'la Maudud³⁹ explains that the verse was revealed to correct the Jews' erroneous notion that salvation was their sole monopoly because of their delusion that they have special relation with God. This verse rejects the notion and affirms that Salvation does not depend upon feeling of racial superiority but upon one's right beliefs and righteous conduct.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING ON MUSLIM—CHRISTIAN RELATION IN NIGERIA

It is a well known fact that Muslim-Christian conflicts resulting in violent, riots have intermittently disrupted the socio-political life of Nigeria, sometimes threatening the nation's stability as a corporate entity. The problem started with the 1979 controversy over the status of the *shari'ah* in our Constitution. Since that time the relationship between the Muslims and Christians of this country has been characterised by mutual-suspicion, rivalry, acrimony, rancour, discord and hostility. This was the mood that ushered in the 1986 debate over the desirability of Nigeria's participation in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (O.I.C.) which further aggravated the strained relationship. Since 1986 to date, a year hardly passed without one inter-religious crisis occurring in it. The major ones include:

- (i) the 1986 Ilorin public disturbances arising from the palm Sunday procession;
- (ii) the March 6, 1987 Kafanchan Riot;
- (iii) the 1990 Kano Riot;
- (iv) the 1991 Tafawa Balewa Disturbances;
- (v) the February 1992 Zango Kataf Riot;
- (vi) the 1995 Bauchi Riot;
- (vii) the 1999 Ilorin Religious Crisis;
- (viii) the February and May 2000 Kaduna riots over *shari'ah*.

The crisis on each occasion has been devastating and the losses enormous, most of the time involving loss of hundreds of lives and destruction of properties worth millions of Naira. It must be admitted that the crises have always had religious as well as ethno-political undertones notwithstanding the trivial nature of their immediate causes in some cases.⁴⁰ The reports of the Commissions of Inquiry including those of Justice Bola Babalakin, Justice R.H. Codjoe and Justice Donli set up at different times by the Federal Government to look into the cases of these disturbances reveal that the tension which erupted from these crises merely ignited the bomb of ethno political rivalry between the major and minor ethnic groups. The eruption of violence on each occasion was the manifestation of the collective anger of minorities that has been incubating since the colonial

period against the domination of the Hausa Fulani hegemony. This is particularly true of the Zangon Kataf and Bauchi crises of 1992 and 1995, respectively.⁴¹ Plausible as this argument may be, the religious undertones of these crises cannot be underestimated. The fact that each group sets to solicit and win the sympathy of their brothers in faith makes it difficult to detach religious fundamentalism from the crisis. It should be realized that even when some of the disturbances started as ethnic conflicts, they spread to other towns in the wake of rumours of their religious connotation.

Besides, it must be noted that some of the riots were actually ignited by religious intolerance as exemplified in the recent Kaduna crisis over the proposed introduction of *shari'ah* in the state. It is also important to note the role of the proselytisers who being over-conscious of particularity in religion adopt provocative methods of evangelisation. Rather than preach the beauty of their religion, they condemn the other faith. This was the kind of provocative attitude that led to the 1987 Kafanchan Riot as well as the Ilorin disturbances of 1986 and 1999. Though Muslims are taught to believe that Islam is the only true religion, just as Christians are taught to acknowledge Christianity as the only way to salvation,⁴² this does not mean that they have to resort to condemnation of one another realizing the fact that only God knows who the true believer is. God the Almighty is our common object of worship. He remains what He is in spite of whatever conception of Him we may have.

BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

To narrow the gulf between Islam and Christianity and promote harmonious Muslim-Christian Relation there is the need to foster understanding between the two belief systems. This can be achieved in different ways.

(i) **Emphasis on Common Teachings of Islam and Christianity**

One method is by propagating and disseminating areas of common teachings of the two religions among their adherents. One of such areas deals with the scriptural accounts of Jesus, a personality which, as already noted, accounts for the dominant gulf between Islam and Christianity. This aspect has attracted M. Darrol Bryant⁴³ to write his article, 'Can there be Muslim-Christian Dialogue concerning Jesus/Isa?' We are saying Yes, there can be, and that is reaffirming our position in a previous study,⁴⁴ which provoked Bryant to write the said article. There are at least four aspects of scriptural accounts of Jesus in which the Quranic and Biblical teachings are harmonious. The first deals with the account of his miraculous birth. *Surah* 3:45-47 of the Qur'an says:

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ
 بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا
 فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ قَالَتْ رَبِّ
 أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسَّسْنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ
 اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

Behold the angels said 'O Mary God gives thee glad tidings of a word from him. His name will be Christ Jesus, the Son of Mary held in honour in this world and in the hereafter and of (the Company of) those nearest to God : She said 'O My Lord how shall I have a son when no man has touched Me?' He said, 'Even so, God creates what He wills. When He has decreed a plan He says to it 'be' and it is.⁴⁵

Thus Quranic passage agrees to a large extent with the information contained in Lk 1:26; Lk. 2:7 and Mtt.1:18-25. The accounts in the two scriptures agree that the conception of Jesus by his mother took place immediately after the angelic announcement without any sexual relation with a man. The exclamation 'How can this be for I am still a virgin recorded in Lk.1:34 reechoes in *Surah* 3:47 and *Surah* 19:20. The authenticity of the virgin in both narratives cannot be undermined simply because the records are missing in the other New Testament books apart from Luke and Matthew as E.T. Tinsley would want us to believe. As proof of her chastity Mary is presented in *Surah* 3:35-36 as a holy woman dedicated to God in conception and at birth. She was to grow in purity and beauty in the care of Zacharia. The second area of concord relates to the Quranic and Biblical views on Jesus' employment of miracles to propagate his mission. The two scriptures inform us that Jesus was given the power to heal the sick, bring life to the dead, restore the sight to the blind and heal the leper.⁴⁶ According to *Surah* 5:113 he was able to do these because he was strengthened by God with Holy Spirit. These miracles as far as the Qur'an is concerned were meant to convince the Jews that Jesus' mission was divinely inspired. Thirdly, despite the Quranic denial of Jesus' crucifixion on the Cross, the scripture agrees with the Bible that he was taken into heaven as evident in *Surah* 4:158 which reads:

بَل رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

Nay God raised him up unto Himself and God is exalted in power, wise.⁴⁷

Fourth is the common belief of the two scriptures in the second coming of Jesus. This view derives from *Surah* 4:159 which reads :

وَأَنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا لِيُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ قَبْلَ مَوْتِهِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا

And there is none of the people of the book but must Believe in him before his death, and on the day of Judgement. He will be a witness against them.

The above passage has been interpreted by the Qur'anic exegetes both classical and modern as suggesting that the people of the book alive at the time of his second coming will eventually believe in him before his natural death.⁴⁸ This view is more explicitly stated in the authentic apostolic tradition reported by Abu Hurairah which reads:

I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul, the son of Mary shall descend among you as a just ruler. Then he will Break the cross and kill the swine and put an end to war.⁴⁹

Breaking the cross and killing the swine in the above *hadith* have been interpreted as suggesting that before the end of time all the differences between Islam and Christianity would be removed to give rise to one single Community of believers. The complementary teachings of the Qur'an and Bible in this regard are to my mind an index of the common origin of the two belief systems.

(ii) **Legitimacy of Islamic and Christian Traditions**

Another means of building bridges of understanding among the adherents of the two religions is by recognizing the legitimacy of each other's tradition. The Qur'an leaves no one in doubt that Islam recognizes Christianity as a revealed religion. It is in consequence of this recognition that the Quran mentions Christianity in *Surah* 2:62 as one of the religions whose adherents can hope for salvation if they meet the conditions required for it. It is also on the basis of this recognition that the Qur'an in *Surah* 3:64 encourages Muslims' dialogue with people of the books in-

cluding the Christians. Muslims not only accept the Christian scriptures, though with some theological qualifications, they also accept Jesus as a prophet. However there is no reciprocity on the part of the Christian. While the Qur'an is not acknowledged by the Christian to be a revealed book, they caricatured the status of Muhammad as a prophet of God.⁵⁰ This is what Krister Stendahl, the former Dean of Harvard Divinity School decries when he accuses the Christians of presenting the New Testament as being superior to the Old Testament without granting Islam the logical status of being even newer.⁵¹ This view is shared by Darrol Bryant who asserts and I quote :

..... It is imperative if we are to proceed in dialogue that Christians re-examine and reassess their views of the Qur'an and the Prophet. I can only speak for myself when I say that I have read the Qur'an and I have great respect for its clear witness to God. I also respect the Prophet as a messenger, though not in the same way as Muslims do. But then it would be wrong to expect that out of dialogue I would become Muslim any more than I would expect Muslims to become Christians.⁵²

Many Muslim theologians including Ahmed Deedat and Abdul Ahad Dawud in their researches into the Bible have tried to identify passages of the scripture which could be interpreted as making allusion to Islam or Muhammad. This has been part of an attempt to establish Biblical basis for the legitimacy of Islam. Their search for such passages must have been motivated by *Surah* 61:6 containing Jesus prediction of the coming of Muhammad. While it is not for us to prove or disprove the veracity of the Biblical passages cited as lending credence to the legitimacy of Islam, one is constrained to call attention to the indisputable common root of Islam and Christianity which was Abraham. The divine promise made to the great Patriarch to make great nation out of his offspring does not exclude Ishmael as evident in Genesis 21 verses 13 and 18. The greatness of the Ishmaelites' descendants (the Arabs) alluded to in the passage does not rest on anything other than Islam. It follows therefore that Islam and Christianity as branches of Abrahamic faith are both legitimate and they should recognize one another as such, and leave judgement on the salvation of the adherents of the two traditions to God the Almighty. If we recognize the legitimacy of one another's tradition, it logically follows that we should understand one another's view point. Experience in Nigeria shows that the Muslims' viewpoints have always been misunderstood and an example is the issue of the *shari'ah*.

(iii) Divine Law (Shari'ah) in Islam and Christianity

Since *shari'ah* is not the focus of this lecture we shall only make some clarifications as to why *shari'ah* should not be a source of contro-

versy. *Shari'ah* technically means the path established by the Almighty Allah for the Muslim to follow if he desires to succeed in every aspect of his life whether mundane or spiritual.⁵³ A Muslim must mandatorily live his life in accordance with the provisions of the *shari'ah* because *shari'ah* is Islam and Islam is *shari'ah*. *Surah* 45:18 of the Qur'an declares in this regard :

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِّ عَمَلٍ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ
 أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Then We have put thee on the right way of the *shari'ah* so follow it and follow not the desires of those who know not.

This is an explicit injunction of Allah instructing Muslims to seek guidance from the *Shar'ah*. In chapter 5:44-47 the Qur'an states in detail the implications of rejecting the Law:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ يُحْكَمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ
 الَّذِينَ آسَلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّشَّابُونَ وَالْأَجْبَا
 رُيْمَا أَسْخَفُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ
 شُهَدَاءَ فَلَا تَخْشَوُا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْنَ وَلَا
 تَشْتَرُوا بِإِيتَانِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ
 بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ وَكَيْفَ نَعْلَمُهُمْ
 فِيهَا أَنْ النَّفْسَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ وَالْعَبْرَةَ بِالْأَنْفِ
 بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأَذْنَ بِالْأَذْنِ وَاللِّسَانَ بِاللِّسَانِ وَالْجُرُوحَ
 فِصَاصًا فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارٌ لَهُ وَمَنْ
 لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ
 وَقَفَيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثُرِهِمْ بَعِيسَىٰ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ
 التَّوْرَةِ وَآيَاتِنَا الْإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ
 يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ وَلِيَحْكُمُوا
 أَهْلَ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ
 اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ
 بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّبًا
 عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ

An abridged translation of the passage reads:

It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses) therein was guidance and light. By its standard have We judged the Jews... If any do fail to judge by what God has revealed They are (no better than) unbelievers.

We ordained therein for them Life for life, eye for eye.... But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by what God has revealed they are no better than wrong doers. And in their footsteps we sent Jesus the son of Mary confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel, therein was guidance and light and confirmation of the law. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by what God has revealed they are no better than those who rebel. And to thee (Muhammad [S.A.W.]) We sent thee the scripture in truth, confirming the scriptures that come before it and guarding it in safety, so judge between them by what God has revealed....

From this Qur'anic quotation we can see clearly that the divine instruction to seek guidance from the *Shari'ah* is emphatically expressed and it is only expected of a devout Muslim and indeed any believer in a revealed book to take heed of it if he wants to see the pleasure of God.

Shari'ah is not new in Nigeria as already noted, what is new is expansion of the scope of its application to include the criminal aspect. It must be noted that this has always been the wish of the Muslim North long before Independence. During the colonial rule, they expressed their desire for the full application of the Law by resenting the native court ordinances of 1933, 1948 and 1951, including the British repugnancy clauses. It was the same expression of that desire which led to the boycott of the Constituent Assembly in 1979 by the Muslim members led by late M.K.O. Abiola. This desire is borne out of the conviction that Islam permits no half measure in the application of *shari'ah* in view of the Qur'anic injunction to believers to embrace Islam wholeheartedly.⁵⁴ The contentious issue has to do with constitutionality of the action of the states of the Federation that have adopted full implementation of the *shari'ah*. To my mind their action is constitutional in view of the provision in Section 277 of the 1999 Constitution which says:

The *Shari'ah* Court of Appeal of a State shall in addition to such other jurisdiction as may be conferred upon it by the Law of the State exercise such appellate and supervisory jurisdiction in civil proceeding involving questions of Islamic personal law. This clause no doubt grants right to widen the jurisdiction of this court

by its ability to confer any other jurisdiction on the *shari'ah* court if it deems it necessary.⁵⁵

Besides, Section 4:7 confers on the House of Assembly the power to make laws for the peace, order and good governance as regards:

1. any matter not included in the legislative list set out in part I of the second schedule to this constitution;
2. any matter included in the concurrent legislative list set out in the first column of part II of second schedule..
3. any other matter with respect to which it is empowered to make laws in accordance with provision of the constitution.

More importantly, if it is realized that in a true federalism different interests of the federating units ought to be protected, the action of the states that have opted for full implementation of *shari'ah* would not have raised hues and cries. Federalism, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, means a system of government in which a group of states are united with one government which decides foreign affairs, defense, etc., but in which each state can have its own government to decide its own affairs. In the light of this, we should not see anything wrong in the action of the nine states that have adopted full implementation of the *shari'ah*.

One reason why *shari'ah* is seriously opposed is the fear that it may be used to oppress non-Muslims. Where a case involves a Muslim and a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim has the right to request that the case be tried at a court of his choice. Perhaps opposition against the *shari'ah* would not have been so vehement if it is realized that the provisions of the Law are in many respects in consonance with the Biblical provisions. For instance Islam prescribes stoning to death for adultery in conformity with the provision in Deut.22:22-24. In the same vein a murderer shall be put to death as prescribed in Q4:92 and Num.35:30; drunkenness is a punishable offence as evident in Deut.21:20-21 and Zec. 5:3 just as it is forbidden by the Qur'an in *Surah* 5:93; while usury (interest on loan) is outlawed in Qur'an 2:275 and Lev. 25:35. It may be argued that these are Old Testament laws which may not apply to the Christians, but we should equally remember that in Matthew 5:17 Jesus informs us that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. The essence of bringing such Biblical passages to light is to show that some of the *shari'ah* tenets are what Muslims and Christians have in common and therefore should not be a source of conflict.

(iv) Common Attitude to Cautious Proselytization

Furthermore, the bridge of understanding can be built by pursuing proselytization with caution. Islam and Christianity, as missionary

faiths, encourage religious propagation with a view to winning converts. The Qur'an in *Surah* 16:125 specifically enjoins the Muslims to invite others to Islam with wisdom and good admonition. Wisdom demands that one should keep in view the intelligence, capability and circumstances of the audience and convey the message in accordance with the requirement of the occasion.⁵⁶ Excellent admonition implies that one should not be content with convincing the audience with argument above but should also appeal to their feeling. This shows that application of force in propagation is repugnant to Islam. *Reinforced by 2:256. Similarly, the Biblical passage which enjoins the Christians to evangelise derives from Mark 16:15 where Jesus' directive to his disciples reads:

"Go into the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.
He who believes and is baptized will be saved but he who does not believe will be condemned."

This Biblical quotation illustrates the concept of particularity that is inherent in all religions, i.e. the insistence that one has to accept the message as a particular religion before he can have salvation or eternal bliss. It is a doctrine well entrenched also in the Qur'an. *Surah* 3:19 insists that the religion before God is Islam and verse 85 of the same *Surah* says 'If any one desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted from him.' Verse 102 wraps it up and says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ ؕ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

O ye who believe fear God as he should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam.

A comparable message in the Bible is contained in John 14:6 where Jesus is reported to have said:

I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father but by me, if you had known me, you would have known my father also....

Such Qur'anic and Biblical passages as those cited above have motivated the Muslim and Christian proselytizers to embark on their "soul-saving" mission. In Nigeria, evangelism or religious propagation is promoted on a very large scale; it is engaged in with vigour, it is pursued with aggression. If we must compare the Muslims' and Christians' efforts in this regard the Christians' certainly have an upper hand. Not many countries of the world can compete with our country in this venture. Nigeria is a place where religious preaching is not confined to the centres designated for worship. Preaching is done in the public transport, it is

done in the market places, it is done even on the high ways. Public offices are not an exception. Here you find stickers with religious inscriptions mounted on the office walls revealing the faith of the public officer. These are samples of what you read:

- Be wise Accept Jesus now.
- I worship Allah, the Lord and owner of Paradise.
- Jesus, the sweetest name I know.....
- Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best disposer of affairs
- Jesus is the way the truth and the life.
- No power can prosper except with Allah's permission.
- I am covered with the blood of Jesus.
- I am protected with the power of Almighty Allah.
- It is great to be a Muslim, rather than be alive for nothing.
- With Jesus I am Okay.
- The Lord has set an open door before me and no one can close it.
- Muslims believe in Christ not in Christianity.
- I am born again, what about you?
- Be born as many times as you can but die not except you are a Muslim.
- The blood of Jesus is my weapon
- If your God is crucified, try the Ever—living Allah.
- If you are a servant of God I am His beloved son.
- Yours may be three or more but my God is one the Creator of Heaven.
- Jesus is my Saviour for he has died for my sin.
- My God will never die even for a minute.

Some of these inscriptions as we can see can be offensive. You can imagine how a Muslim or a Christian visitor to a public office would feel encountering a barrage of religious inscriptions sending him messages unpalatable to his belief. He would likely lose confidence in the possibility of getting his mission accomplished in such an office. If, at the rate Muslims propagate their religion or Christians engage in evangelism in Nigeria, there have been commensurate positive changes in our conduct and behaviour the country would have been a better place. Our style of evangelism or religious propagation particularly creates negative effect on our inter-religious relation. This is due to the use of offensive and provocative language which engenders discord, hatred and animosity between the Muslims and the Christians. But this should not be so considering the fact that the two religions preach peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance and love of others in their basic tenets.

Islam and Christianity have as the foundation of their belief systems peace. The peace passages in the Qur'an and the Bible are over-

whelming. In Mark 9:50 the Christians are enjoined to be at peace with their fellow men. In Roman 14:10, they are asked to pursue what makes for peace, in Matt.5:9 the peace makers are the blessed and they shall be called sons of God. Similarly with regard to Islam, peace is equally significant. The word Islam itself is derived from a root that has peace connotation. Muslims are taught to greet others with an expression of peace which means he must strive to be in peace with others. In *Surah* 4:96 we are taught that when salutation of peace is offered by a non-Muslim he should not be rebuffed saying he is not of us. When a Muslim observes his canonical prayer, he terminates it with the expression *as-Salamu alaikum* indicating that he is at peace with those around him.

The prosyletizers should also reflect on the passages of the scripture promoting religious tolerance and religious freedom. Tolerance has been defined to mean "readiness to allow others to believe or act as they judge best or willingness to accommodate the beliefs and ways of living of others."⁵⁷

Contrary to the erroneous notion of non-Muslims that Islam is a religion of force, many Qur'anic passages affirm the principle of religious tolerance. One of such passages is *Ayah* 256 of *Suratul Baqarah* which reads: Let there be no compulsion in religion for truth stand out clear from error. This verse teaches that Islam is a matter of choice and as such it cannot be thrust upon anyone forcibly. Souqyid Qutb⁸ commenting on this verse argues that a religion whose teachings appeal to reason and intellect does not need to apply forceful means for conversion. This view is explained further in *Surah* 10:99-100 which declares:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ الْمَن فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ
تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ
تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَجْعَلُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

If it has been Allah's will they would have believed, all who are on earth, will you compel mankind against their will to believe. No soul can believe except by the will of Allah.

Surah 9:6 is also worth of consideration to appreciate religious tolerance in Islam. The passage reads:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ
كَلِمَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ ابْلِغْهُ مَا أَمَرَهُ، ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

And if anyone of the idolaters seeks thy protection (O Muhammad) then protect him, so that he may hear the word of God and afterwards convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who lack understanding.

The message conveyed by this passage is that if during a fight an enemy makes a request that he should be given an opportunity to learn about Islam, the Muslims should give him an assured protection and allow him to visit them. They should introduce Islam to him. If after this he does not embrace Islam they should take him safely to his place.⁵⁹ It is in the spirit of religious tolerance that *Surah 6:108* warns the Muslims against attack on the objects of worship of adherents of other faiths. The passage declares :

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ
عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ
مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus we have made alluring to each people its own doing.

Apart from the reason given in the above passage another reason why a Muslim proselytizer should not attack other religions is that such practice will further alienate their adherents from Islam. The popular Makkah chapter *Suratul Kafirun* presents in a nutshell the principle of religious tolerance as taught by Islam as it reads:

قُلْ يَتَّخِذُ الْكٰفِرُونَ
لَا أُعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ
وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عٰبِدُونَ مَا أُعْبُدُ
وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عٰبِدُونَ مَا أُعْبُدُ
لَكُم دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

Say O ye that reject faith, I worship not that which ye worship

nor will ye worship that which I worship, and I will not worship that which you worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me is mine.

It is amazing that in spite of the foregoing passages affirming the principle of religious tolerance, the picture of Islam painted by the orientalisists is that of a religion which promotes violence. In order to perpetrate their erroneous notion they try to distort some Qur'anic verses on the subject. An example is *Surah 22:39* which reads: *Udhina Lilladhina yuqataluna*. Sale's translation of the passage reads: "Permission is given to those who take up arms against unbelievers because they have been wrong." Picktall's translation of the same verse reads:

"Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged."

Neither of the two translations is right because the translation did not take cognisance of the passive form of the verb *alladhina yuqatalun* which occurs in the passage. What Sale and Picktall have translated is the active form – *alladhina yuqatiluna* which is a distortion of the message contained in the text. The correct translation should be "those against whom war is made permission is given (to fight)." That conveys a different message from "permission is given to those who take up arms against unbelievers." The misconception which many people have about Islam is due to their contact with the orientalisists' obnoxious views of the religion. Such views should be dispensed with in order to promote understanding between the Muslims and the Christians. Christianity as a belief system also teaches its adherents to be accommodating and tolerant in spite of the particularity concept. This we can deduce from Simon Peter's experience with Cornelius narrated in chapter 10 the Acts of Apostles. By the time Simon Peter was made to realize in his vision that he would have to preach the word of God to Cornelius, he was forewarned not to see him as common and unclean even though he was not a Christian. This was why Simon Peter at the commencement of his sermon remarked:

Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality but in every nation any one who fears him and does. What is right is acceptable to him.

This is a wise way to preach. It is friendly as it is comforting, it recognizes the good in the other tradition. Such a method is likely to bring out the desired effect. Evidence of tolerance and accommodation is also demonstrated by Jesus and his disciples by dealing with the woman of Samaria as narrated in John Chapter 4. The third intrinsic value inherent in the two religions is loving other people as we love ourselves. A hadith of the Prophet says in this regard:

لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيهِ مَا
يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ

Meaning: “No one of you is yet a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”⁶⁰ Love in the context of the apostolic tradition is an index of belief and it should be shown to fellow human beings irrespective of their faiths. This is the message in *Surah* 4:36 which declares:

وَأَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَالْوَالِدِينَ
إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ
ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ
وَأَبْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن
سِيَّئَ مَخْتًا لَا فَخْرًا

Serve God and join not any partners with Him, and do good to parents kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the wayfarer and what your right hands possess.

In this Qur’anic passage the word *ihsan* (goodness) is synonymous with love, mercy or kindness which should be shown to the following: The kinsfolk, the weak, the needy, the neighbour and the lower animals under our control. Neighbours as understood in the passage extends beyond the ordinary meaning of the term which refers to people, living in the same vicinity (*al-Jardhul Qurba*), it includes strangers with whom we have dealings in any situation (*al-Jar al Junub*) which Maulana Muhammad translates as alien neighbours. The expression “what your right hands possess” which occurs in the passage refers among other things to the lower animals to which we must also demonstrate love and sympathy even at the point of slaughter. Thus the type of love which Islam teaches the Muslims to have for others is love that is selfless and universal. Love is equally fundamental to Christianity. It is the basic tenet of the Christian faith because Jesus’ message centres on love. Love is one of the themes of sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5:43-48 or sermon on the plain as it is so described by Luke in chapter 6:27-36. The Matthew passage reads :

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be son of your Father who is in heaven for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

The “way of love” is the subject of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Consider what he says about himself:

If I speak in tongues of men and of angels and have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful, it is not arrogant or rude, love does not insist on his own way, it is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.....⁶¹

This is indeed food for thought not only for the proselytizers but for all believers who tend to forget the value of love in their belief system and the role it can play in the unification of human race. It is recognition of this fact that a Muslim Sufi Saint had this to say:

Sometimes I see myself as a Jew, sometimes I see myself as a Christian, in my heart is Islam, love is my religion.⁶²

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, our attempt in this lecture has been to show how Islam and Christianity, present to us veritable areas of similarities that can be used to narrow down the differences between the two belief systems. The similarities cover beliefs and practices, tenets and doctrines, as well as moral and ethnical values. Nigeria with her citizenry made up principally of Muslims and Christians have great opportunity to develop harmonious coexistence in the country in view of the values they have in common. Nigeria as a great Islamo-Christian nation can still be greater if the Muslims and Christians would shun acrimony, hostility, rancour and discord that have characterized their relationship and embrace peace enshrined in their traditions. Islam and Christianity as branches of Abrahamic monotheistic tradition can, in view of their common origin, serve as a means of welding Nigerian Muslims and Christians into one family of universal brotherhood under one universal benevolent God, the creator of all to make the country united, stronger and greater. In order to achieve this feat the government has a key role to play and this is spelt out in the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **It is imperative** that the Federal Government establishes National Centre for the study of Inter-Religious Relations. The centre, when established, should be charged with the responsibility of organizing courses periodically for Muslim and Christian clerics, religious leaders, government functionaries for the promotion of peace and harmonious coexistence. The centre can also organize voluntary Religious Youth Service during long vacation for Secondary School students in which youths of diverse religious backgrounds would be made to execute joint community projects.
2. The government should come up with a Code of Ethics for religious preaching with penalties for violating any of its clauses. The code will regulate how to preach, where to preach and when to preach taking into consideration peculiarities of each religion.
3. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) should review the curriculum of Islamic and Christian Studies to incorporate and emphasise aspects promoting religious and social harmony. Religion should be made compulsory in the curriculum.
- (4) Nigerian Religious Council (NIREC) should be structured to allow States and Local Governments to have similar bodies to attend to Religious problems at their respective levels of government. Membership should be made up of people who are committed to religious harmony.
- (5) Nigerian Constitution should be reviewed to take cognisance of multi-religious nature of our society. It would be hypocritical to regard Nigeria as a secular state in view of the Nigerians' Commitment to and governments' involvement in religious matters.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my father, Imam Idris Gbadebo Opeloye, whose ardent love for Islamic Education influenced his decision to send me to Arabic school. In a town like Ile-Ife at that point in time such a decision could not go unchallenged even by his Muslim peers. But God in appreciation of his good intention vindicated him. I also must thank my mother, for her unflinching support and care throughout my educational pursuit. My most sincere thanks are due to my wife, Sidikat Adesola Abegbe Opeloye, for her love and constant support for me. Her keen interest in my career contributes in no small measure to my success. For more than 20 years, we have been partners, she has been to me a source of peace, comfort and joy, all of which account for the steady progress I have made in my career. I also appreciate the understanding of our chil-

dren. They are children to be proud of because they make our family happy.

To be what I am today in the field of Islamic studies, I owe a lot of gratitude to my teacher and my mentor, Professor Ismail Ayinla Babatunde Balogun from whose fountain of knowledge I benefited immensely at every stage of my university education. He is one scholar who I know has influenced me in many ways and I have no regrets being his disciple. I also acknowledge the role played by my other highly respected teachers especially Professor Isaac Ogunbiyi and Professor Bashir Oderinde in my academic development. May Allah reward them all. I also convey my appreciation to all my colleagues, friends and wellwishers.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to offer an advice to religious particularists as given by Sawami Vivekananda in 1893:

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is thus: it has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church (mosque) in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and destruction of others', I pity him from the bottom of my heart and points out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance:

Help and not fight.

Assimilation and not destruction.

Harmony and peace, and not dissension.⁶³

I thus wish to conclude this lecture by charging everyone here present to resolve to be in peace and harmony with his fellow being irrespective of his faith in the interest of progress and stability of our country, Nigeria. I would, in the same vein, like to charge the entire members of our academic community to be at peace with one another in order to move LASU forward.

Thank you for listening and God bless. God bless LASU. God bless Lagos State. God Bless Nigeria.

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