

**RESCUING GOD FROM HIS
ABDUCTORS**

**AN INAUGURAL LECTURE,
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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

RESCUING GOD FROM HIS ABDUCTORS

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at the University of Ibadan*

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By

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Preamble

Today marks another time in my life, as I have the opportunity to thank God publicly (apart from the church setting) for His goodness in my life and for making the day another one of testimony regarding my academic foray that started accidentally on February 14, 1972 and which right now has got to a remarkable climax with the presentation of an inaugural lecture. This is the fifth inaugural lecture in the history of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, and the first in the field of Religious Ethics and Sociology of Religion. Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to pay glowing tributes to earlier presenters, three of whom I want to address as the living ancestors, using the words of Mbiti, and the fourth as our mentor in the department. The first in the category was Professor James Welch, whose lecture, presented on November 17, 1950, was titled "Religious Studies in an African University". Professor Bolaji Idowu, the second one, presented his on February, 1976 with the title "The Obituary of God". The third was Professor Samuel Oyinloye Abogunrin, who, on July 16, 1998, presented his inaugural lecture, titled "In Search of Original Jesus". The fourth inaugural lecture was presented by Professor Deji Ayegboyin on Thursday 9, November 2017, titled "Taxonomy and Revolution in African Christianity: The Nigerian Experience."

Before, I continue this presentation, I want to appreciate the Dean, Faculty of Arts and the current management of the University of Ibadan for allowing this lecture to come to the limelight particularly as the University is just getting out of much workload associated with the just suspended protracted

industrial strike embarked upon by the non-academic staff of the University. This is a landmark development in the history of management in this noble University.

The choice of today's topic is motivated by my age-old worry about what I consider some unpleasant behaviour noticed among religious practitioners and religious organisations in Nigeria, a few of which I have addressed in my numerous publications and also expressed in the media at one time or the other. My worry was so much that I jotted 57 topics, hoping that one of them could make a topic for an inaugural lecture. I want to confess today that this opportunity the University afforded me to present this lecture will, in a way, bring some relief to me regarding the moral trauma that accumulates each time I reflect on every activity taking place around me, including my church, my wife's and friends' churches, fellowships, and mosques.

In other words, most of the religious activities cited and addressed in this lecture are products of my personal experience and academic inquisitiveness. My worry arose from the subject matter in my areas of specialisation in Religious Studies—Sociology of Religion and Religious Ethics. Sociology of Religion employs empirical tools to interrogate the interface between religion and society on the one hand, and society and religion on the other hand. Religious Ethics critically evaluates moral values, goals, purpose, moral claims and aspirations underlying religious activities, beliefs and practices, and judges them to be good or bad, depending on their conformity or non-conformity as well as adherence or otherwise to universally accepted moral standards. In the process, it asks these pertinent questions: What is the action in question? Who performed the action? Why was the action performed? When was the action performed? How was the action performed? How did it affect the performer of the action? How did it affect the person(s) to whom the action is directed? And how did such action affect the society where the action took place?

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I want to state that it is against the background of the subject matter of the two fields that today we are trying to identify and rescue God from His abductors.

Sir, it is also an opportunity to disabuse the mind of many people who think and say that the Department of Religious Studies is mainly an avenue for the production of pastors and imams. I want to tell this august audience categorically that Religious Studies is about an intellectual, rational, scholarly and logical study of religion, as against the dogmatic approach to it by religious practitioners (Ayantayo 2010: 143). Apart from treating all religious traditions equally while studying them, it also utilises relevant research tools from other academic fields, such as philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and theology. The study of religion academically, arises out of a broad curiosity of scholars to know the nature of religion and religious traditions and their impact on the life of man from cradle to grave. For this reason, a religious study goes with a combination of methodological skills, including direct observation, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding. This is why we have the following areas of specialisation in our department: African Indigenous Religion, Christian Theology, Church History and Doctrine, Comparative Religious Studies, History of Religion, Islamic Studies, New Religious Movements, New Testament Studies, Old Testament Studies, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Dialogue, Religious Ethics, Religious Interaction, Religious Languages, Sociology of Religion and World Religions. With this information, it is obvious that the Department of Religious Studies is not redundant and does not serve as a subsidiary to any department. Rather, it has a lot to contribute to human and capital development. Therefore, our Department is ready to collaborate with cognate departments to realise the vision and the mission of the University of Ibadan in terms of research, innovation and strategic partnership.

The Concept of Abduction

Thesaurus online dictionary defines abduction as the action of forcibly taking someone away against his/her will (<http://www.thesaurus.com>). The term has legal and many other dimensions which are not important for us to expatiate

on now. In other words, we are using the term in the context of this lecture as the action of forcibly taking someone away against his/her will. The word *abduction* is used figuratively in this lecture to refer to the action of believers and others forcibly taking God away against His will. With this premise, we have some issues to interrogate as matters arising from this definition. Therefore, this lecture shall discuss the following: categories of abductors, what goes with abduction, factors that precipitated the abduction business and its sustainability, consequences of the abduction, justification or otherwise for abduction, and toolkits for rescuing God from His abductors.

Categories of Abductors

There are four principal categories identified in this discussion namely: religious functionaries and religious followers, Western researchers, contemporary academics, and religious fundamentalists/radicalists.

(i) *Religious Functionaries and Religious Followers*

The first category of God's abductors is religious leaders comprising principal and subsidiary religious functionaries such as priests, priestesses, Reverends, Imams, Sheikhs, Amirs, Pastors, Prophets and many other sectarian leaders with their priesthood titles as well as their followers across the three major religions in Nigeria (Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam). They abduct God through a process known as a truth claim, which is a proposition or statement that a particular person or belief system holds to be true. The term is usually a subject of discussion relating to doctrinal statements of religion even though it is also discussed in philosophy—in discussions such as logic, metaphysics, and epistemology. On the basis of this, Christians argue that Christianity is the only religion and not Islam or Traditional Religion. Muslims counter the claim by boasting that Islam is the true religion. The two of them lay claim to some passages of their scriptures and religious traditions to prove their arguments. Christians refer to the following passages of the Bible:

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

John 3:36: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

John 10:9: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

On the contrary, Muslims often quote the following portions of the Qur'an:

Surah 3:19: "Truly the religion with Allah is Islam."

Surah 3:85: "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it will never be accepted of him and in the hereafter he will be one of the losers."

Surah 48:28: "He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth."

What came out of this claim is what Mala labels as particularity thrust, which is the belief held by different religious practitioners that there is no good thing in other religions different from the one a person practices. In history,

this religious mentality has had sinister effects on intra-religious and interreligious relations in Nigeria. It, among other things, created a major impediment to genuine dialogue, as I argued in “Ethics of Interreligious Dialogue” (Ayantayo 2010).

Also arising from the above is the use of abusive words by Christians and Muslims to disparage each other’s religion. For example, some Muslims label Christianity as a polytheistic religion because of the Christians’ belief in Trinity—God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In quick reaction, some Christians interpret the Muslims’ usage of the word “Servants/Slave of Allah” to mean that Muslims are truly slaves in the real sense of the word, while Christians are the children of God, as described in the Bible.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is remarkable to note that I devoted one of my publications to explaining the rationale for the use of the two phrases by Christians and Muslims. I concluded that the insinuations by both of them were borne out of ignorance, which I described as the bane of interreligious conflict in Nigeria (Ayantayo 2008). I make bold to say that the 2008 publication is widely cited extensively by those who conduct research in religious conflicts in Nigeria.

The use of offensive language in writing and speaking to describe others’ religions is contemptuous and annoying. The use of derogatory terms is a product of ill-feeling and negative attitude against the religions of other people. This is in tandem with the fear of Iwara when he 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 individual's or group's personality, intelligence, social status, educational attainment, job qualification, identity and social survival (Iwara 2005: 74).

The use of derogatory words had, in the history of religious relation in Nigeria, provoked interreligious conflicts in the name of defending one religion at one time or the other. Our argument has been that religion is such a sacred thing to religious practitioners that a religious person is always ready to defend his/her religion and possibly die for it if the need arises.

(ii) Western Researchers

The second set of God's abductors are the Western scholars like Taylor, James and Levy-Bruhl (Parrinder 1977: 7-13) who labelled African Traditional Religion (ATR) as paganism (worshipping of false gods or false idols); savagism (religion of uncivilised and unpolished people, which is characterised by cruelty, brutality, and ferocity); fetishism (a form of belief and religious practice in which supernatural attributes are imputed to material, inanimate objects, known as fetishes, that is worshipping of fetish things that has to do with a belief in the magical power of fetishes); heathenism (a religious system or rites of a heathen nation); idolatry (worshipping of idols, images or anything which is not God); and primitivism, animism and polytheism (the doctrine of, or belief in, a plurality of gods (Parrinder 1977). Further studies of ATR showed that none of the labels is applicable to it because the religion is equally monotheistic like Christianity and Islam, as I strongly argued in my publication entitled "Ethical Issues in the Academic Bias in the Study of Nigeria Indigenous Traditional Religions and its Ethical Implications for Interreligious Conflicts in Nigeria" (Ayantayo 2011). Therefore, the position of the Western scholars regarding ATR is nothing but an expression of bias, which is characterised by prejudice, subjectivity and preconceived ideas which Parrinder describes as derogatory terms.

(iii) Contemporary Academics

This comprises a few teachers of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) and Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK), in primary schools, secondary schools and lecturers of Religious Studies in tertiary institutions, respectively, who confine the right to teaching about the knowledge of religions (whose centrality is belief in God) to certain individuals of specific religious persuasions. For instance, there is insinuation among Christian teachers/lecturers that a Christian teacher is not qualified to teach IRK or that Muslim teachers are not qualified to teach CRK. In the University, some people believe that a Christian lecturer who, although has obtained a degree in Religious Studies, is not qualified to teach Islam or that a Muslim lecturer who has a degree in Religious Studies is not qualified to teach Christianity for the fear of them displaying prejudice against the religion which is different from the one they practise. Besides, this category of intellectuals also discourages Muslim students from learning Christian Religious Knowledge and Christian students from learning Islamic Religious Knowledge at primary and secondary schools. Hence, the door of allowance for the two sets of students to learn from different religions in their immediate environment is shut and, consequently, each of them is confined to the knowledge of an already abducted God.

Besides this, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, we observe that a non-Adventist lecturer of Religious Studies in the University of Ibadan as an example, cannot be allowed to teach in the Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University Ilishan, Remo, Ogun State for the fear of him teaching with prejudice. This is why the University always turns down sabbatical applications from other universities. But, the paradox in this is that many of the students who graduated from Babcock University came to our noble Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, for postgraduate studies after which they returned and taught their students what we had taught them objectively. On a number of times, Professors in

the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan were invited as External Assessors for promotion cases in the Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University. In my paper with a title: "Imperativeness of Professional Ethics in Religious Studies Scholarship in Nigeria" (Ayantayo 2009), I debunked the teaching qualification as unnecessary because, as Pye notes, the study of religions does not serve the interests of any religion, it should be distinguished, for example, from missiology and apologetics or a theology of religion (Pye 2004: 22).

(iv) Religious Fundamentalists and Radicalists

These are the ones who have fixed minds about the teachings of their religions and are not ready to shift ground by accepting religious pluralism. They have closed minds and always remain absolute about their religious truth claims. In most cases, this group of religious practitioners is ready to defend their faith including using arms and ammunitions and eliminating the lives and destroying properties of people belonging to faiths different from theirs.

What Abduction Entails

In most cases, the abduction of God goes thus:

- (1) Taking God forcibly outside His space (world) and beyond His will which, manifests in why He created people male and female, black and white, short and long, placed them in different geographical locations and assigned them different responsibilities within the contexts of their different geographical enclaves.
- (2) Building of fortified walls with limited gateways around Him thereby confining Him to the new space He is taken to.
- (3) Restricting anybody from getting to Him in the new place except through the self-claimed channels or individuals, particularly the religious functionaries.

- (4) Determination by the abductors of the level of interaction and relationship the brethren (for Christianity) and *Ummah* (for Islam) could have with Him.
- (5) Paying of ransom in form of levies, determined offerings, and paying of spiritual charges relating to the possession and use of sacred objects such as mantle, water, oil and candles among others before the brethren or *Ummah* could enjoy or receive blessings from Him.
- (6) Giving of different interpretations to the person of God, His attributes, to whom He belongs or does not belong.
- (7) Making the abducted God, like any abductee a subject of manipulation in the hands of religious practitioners by virtue of their truth claims.
- (8) Negotiating with the abductors who have turned themselves to 'mini gods' before the believers could have access to Him. I paid attention to this issue in one of my publications entitled 'Deification theory resurrecting in New Religious Movements in Nigeria'.
- (9) Reconstructing a new identity in which the followers of an abducted God form a resistance to another group who also abducted God in its own right.

Factors that Precipitated the Abduction Business and its Sustainability

As demonstrated in my research, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, one major factor that makes the abduction of God possible and why it is sustained is what I defined as religious ignorance. Religious ignorance in the context of our discussion refers to lack of knowledge or information about particular religious beliefs and practices. It could be lack of sufficient knowledge or information about the religion we practise by another person belonging to a religious faith different from ours. The meeting point of 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 the majority of them either rely on their pastors, Imams or Sunday school teachers for the little they know about the religion, as most of them hardly create time to read the Bible or the Qur'an on their own. The overdependence on the religious leaders probably heightens the degree of religious ignorance among Nigerian religious practitioners. Besides, a few of them are religious converts who are probably yet to have firm roots in the new religion. Even the old converts, especially the first generation who got converted from African traditional religions to either Islam or Christianity, also still know little about the religions because some of them were blackmailed to become Christians or Muslims, not that they willingly changed their religions. This is evident in some of the words used by Christian and Islamic missionaries when they had contact with the traditional religious practitioners. For example, the traditional religious practitioners were called names such as *ajebo* (sacrifice eater) and *elebo* (sacrifice maker).

Ironically, it is interesting to note that most of the first generation of Christian converts, especially those in Abeokuta, the town through which Christianity got to Yorubaland, are practising Christianity today because Christianity got to their land before Islam, while most of the Muslims today especially in places like Iwo in Osun State are Muslims today because Islam got to their land before Christianity. In other words, most Christians today, especially the first-generation ones, could have been Muslims if Islam had been the first of the foreign religions to get to their land, while the early adherents of Islam could have been Christians today if Christianity had got to their land before Islam.

Two issues emerging from the foregoing illustrations are: One, an average Christian or Muslim hardly knows up to 50% of the content and intent of Christianity or Islam, respectively, especially on some doctrinal issues and the sacred languages of his/her religion. During a casual

discussion with some Muslims regarding the level of their understanding of Arabic, the language with which they say their prayers, they confessed to me that they only memorised it, not that they actually knew the context and the content of the Arabic words used in their liturgical activities. The same could be said of some Christians who use some Latin words in their liturgical activities. Alluding to this experience in religious circles, Stephen Prothero gives a pertinent illustration of his personal experience resulting from his interaction with his students:

In a religious quiz I give my Boston University students every year, I am told that Paul bound Isaac and Abraham was blinded on the road to Damascus. Catholic students are unable to name even one of the seven sacraments of their faith. Protestant students think 'God helps those who help themselves' is a Bible quote story. And Hindu students cannot tell me even one Hindu scripture (Prothero 2007: 2).

The above shows the magnitude of ignorance among religious practitioners on issues related to their religions. Two, the same sets of people who are ignorant about many things regarding their religions are the ones who pass erroneous comments about religions that are different from theirs. This ignorance is manifested in misquoting the scriptures; quoting scriptures and interpreting them out of context, intent and content; quoting the scriptures contemptuously and giving stereotypical interpretations of the scriptures, among others.

Out of the two ways by which Nigerian Christians and Muslims manifest religious ignorance has to do with the commenting on religions of others. The expression of ignorance in this regard is often interpreted as a calculated attempt to denigrate, malign, belittle and undermine the religions of other people; hence the degree of bickering, wrangling, internal strife and backbiting often accompanying the act. The ignorance expressed in the listed forms do

generate interreligious conflicts, especially when they pertain to doctrinal issues such as God and godhead, salvation, eschatology, angelology, worship, prayer and fellowship, the use of religious language such as Arabic, Greek and Hebrew, and also the Christians' practice of speaking in tongues, among others.

Perhaps it is in the light of this that, Unity Movement for Reforming Society in Lahore/Pakistan made this special prayer towards peace and religious tolerance in Lahore/Pakistan:

Merciful God, You made all of the people of the world in your own image and placed before us the pathway of salvation through different Preachers who claimed to have been Your Saints and Prophets. But, the contradictions in their teachings and interpretations of them have resulted in creating divisions, hatreds and bloodshed in the world community. Millions of innocent men, women and children have so far been brutally killed by the militants of several religions who have been committing horrifying crimes against humanity, and millions more would be butchered by them in the future, if You do not help us find ways to reunite peacefully (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/wicrade.htm>).

Consequences of Abduction

The abduction of God has resulted in too many things in the Nigerian public spaces, a few of which are considered below:

(i) Emergence of Insider and Outsider Phenomena

The term *insiders* is used to describe an individual or group of individuals belonging to a religious group, assembly, denomination, cluster, association, union or society like the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church and the Nasrul Lahi-l-Fatih Society (NASFAT). For example, anyone outside the four groups mentioned above but belongs to religious groups such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ

Apostolic Church, Sufi Movement and Quareeb are regarded as outsiders. However, the people so regarded as outsiders see themselves as insiders in their own religious enclaves and consider the first group as outsiders because they do not belong to their group. The terms *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 Christians in other Christian denominations, like the Baptist Church, Christ Apostolic Church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, as outsiders.

Beyond this level, the terms *insider* and *outsider* are 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 Maharaji, Hare Krishna, Eckankar, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism and Judaism. For illustration at the interreligious level, Christians consider Muslims as outsiders, while Muslims also consider Christians as outsiders. For this reason, members of the 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* and *congregation* are used for Christians; while the word *Ummah* is used in Islam to describe Muslims. Practitioners of ATR (insiders) are called *Awo* meaning *initiates/devotees*; while non-members (outsiders) are known as *Ogberi*, that is, *novices*. Christians (insiders) could be called *brethren*, *believers* or *born-again*; while non-Christians are regarded as *unbelievers* (outsiders). In the same vein, Muslims (insiders) are regarded as *Ummah*, while non-Muslims (outsiders) are regarded as *unbelievers-Kafir*.

In the public space, the terms manifest in the emphasis several institutions place on religious identity in which individual religious practitioner is differentiated on the basis of what denomination, parish, unit, association, camp, sect, order, province, or circuits an individual or a group of

individuals belongs to. Hence, we are left with dichotomies such as “we” versus “they” and “us” versus “them”. Often, this demarcation leads to division, differentiation and sometimes, alienation, in the Nigerian religious space. The issue also surfaces as required biographical information to be provided by Nigerian citizens while filling application forms of public significance. This is applicable to forms related to job-seeking, admission exercise, recruitment into public service and general documentation on issues connected to Nigerian nationalities. It is an issue recurring in population census and demographic documentation. The phenomenon also is a factor in determining who occupies the Nigerian political spaces at the ward, local government, state, and national levels. As demonstrated in a paper titled “Religious Factors in the Nigerian Public Sphere: Its Burdens and Prospects” (Ayantayo 2009), I mentioned that religious affiliation in Nigeria is a factor determining who occupies a political space. It is no wonder we hear or read about the terms “Catholic vote”, “Muslim vote”, “Baptist vote” or “Pentecostal vote” at election periods in Nigeria. Such religious interest, according to Johnstone, gives very explicit recognition to the correlation that exists between religious affiliation and commitment, on the one hand, and religious affiliation and voting behaviour, on the other hand (Johnstone 2001). In Nigeria, religious differentiation in the political circle is spearheaded by religious bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs such that the choice of a candidate is with reference to Christian/Muslim or Muslim/Christian ticket. This is common where there are 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, as shown below:

- (1) Nnamdi Azikiwe/Tafawa Balewa (Christian/Muslim), (1960-1966).
- (2) Shehu Shagari/Alex Ekwueme (Muslim/Christian), 1979-1983.
- (3) Buhari/Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim) (1983-85).

- (4) Babangida/Ebitu Ukiwe, Aikhomu (Muslim/Christian), 1985-1993.
- (5) Shonekan/Abacha (Christian/Muslim), 26 August 1993 – 17 November 1993.
- (6) Abacha/Diya (Muslim/Christian), 1997-1998.
- (7) Abudusalam/Akhigbe (Muslim/Christian) 1998-1999.
- (8) Obasanjo/Atiku (Christian/Muslim), 1999-2007.
- (9) Yar'Adua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian) (2007-2011).
- (10) Jonathan/Sambo (Christian/Muslim), (2011-2015).
- (11) Buhari/Osinbajo (Muslim/Christian) (2015-to date).

(ii) Contestation for Space

Instead of people living by the virtues of tolerance, cooperation and love that the pulpit preaches, we have so much competition and contestation for space among religious organisations. This has led to denigration of individual religious organisations, unhealthy rivalries, bickering and, in most cases, intra- and interreligious conflicts (Ayantayo 2002). The contestation has also led to the desecration of the public space as evident in indiscriminate siting of Churches and Mosques on every Nigerian streets and residential areas. This act ultimately violates town planning protocols and destroys the aesthetics of the environment through littering of public spaces like banks, post offices and motor parks with religious bill boards and posters. This singular fact, as I argued in a paper entitled, "A Biblical-Ethical Evaluation of the Attitudes of Contemporary Churches to the Environment in Nigeria: An Issue in Sustainable Development Discourse" (Ayantayo 2009), raises the issue of social and moral irresponsibility on the part of the religious organisations that teach the duty towards environmental sustainability. Abuse of the environment is also evident in the use of drum-sized loud speakers, during morning, afternoon and evening religious services taking place in the public spaces. This often results in air pollution and social noise, which negatively affects the

neighbourhood of the culpable religious centres, including the infants and the sick on admission in hospitals who ordinarily might be expected to be on bed rest. On the menace of noise pollution in Nigeria, Soni-Ehi observes that:

Residents of big cities are increasingly going through partial deafness. Their sensitive eardrums are daily being bombarded by a continuous barrage of environmental noise overflowing from ear shattering drum-size speakers of markets, mosques and churches (Soni-Ehi 1984: 2006).

Contestation for space also led to excessive publicity among Nigerian religious organisations about how to locate their religious enclaves at the expense of the others and aggressive evangelism and *Dawah* for membership drive which often result in physical clashes as recorded in the history of religious relations in Nigeria (Ayantayo 2005: 55).

(iii) Indiscriminate Timing of Religious Programmes

Although all religions teach the essence of time and time management, many religious centres scheduled their religious programmes wrongly. For example, some of them have daily vigil, weekly programmes by 10:00 am, 12:00 noon, 2:00 pm, 4:00 pm, and 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm. Some prayer mountains have programmes throughout the day, week, and month for their members (including civil servants who are members). Some programmes are associated with season of the day such as hour, week and month. Notable among them are: 72 hours (that is, three days) before the Lord, 21 mornings, 21 afternoons and 21 nights with God; and first Monday, first Tuesday, first Wednesday, first Thursday, first Friday and first Saturday of the month with God. In most cases, the church programmes, like prayer, fasting and vigil, are designed to meet the needs of different categories or classes of people in the church such as civil servants, artisans, politicians, first born male or girl child, widows, widowers, those that are waiting upon the Lord for the fruit of the

womb, the unemployed and underemployed graduates, contractors, those that are seeking travel visas, students that are about to write promotion examinations, and so on and so forth. The snag in this system is that the timing has adverse effects on the work ethics of their religious followers, especially those who are civil servants (Ayantayo 2012: 53-68). We are worried that the productive times of the day are spent in religious centres with little or no evidence to justify it, as unemployment and underemployment is still high in Nigeria. The timing is predicated on keeping members of religious organisations busy so that they will not be lured to other faith and her abducted God.

(iv) Social Exclusion

Social exclusion, which can be described as 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, is one of the consequences of the insider-outsider phenomenon. Only Christianity and Islam are considered as major religions in Nigeria, with little attention paid to the others. On many occasions, practitioners of other faiths are excluded in social and public matters. In public places, much attention is given to Islam and Christianity and little or none to African Traditional Religion as if it does not exist or it is not important. In other words, African Traditional Religion is often treated as a subsidiary. In some places where Islam and African 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 communities where Christianity and African Traditional Religion are much more prominent. The practice of inclusion and exclusion always brings setback to interreligious dialogue because, from the moral point of view, the act itself is suggestive of discrimination, inequality, intolerance and bigotry.

(v) ***Commercialisation of Religion***

Having abducted God and restricted believers in that God from looking elsewhere, the religious leaders engage in some activities that look like ransom taking. This is what we label as commercialisation of religion. For instance, many religious activities and programmes are designed with a motive to make economic gain which is the situation Obiora dubs, "commercialisation of religion". He amplifies it as follows:

the commercialisation of Christianity has led to corruption, immorality, and other forms of indiscipline in our Churches today. The church, which was supposed to be a house of God, has become a den of robbers, a place for mischief makers, cheats and immoral activities (Obiora 1998: 73).

This unpleasant development which is contrary to what the pulpit teaches is also evident in the sales of sacred and cultic religious objects at high prices in a situation that takes economic advantage of ailing, spiritually and economically deprived, frustrated and depressed religious worshippers who approach the religious centres as alternative places to meet their ultimate needs which actually took them to the religious centres. Such objects include anointed water, mantle, oil, hand band, candle, incense oil, Zemzem water and Jerusalem water, among others.

(vi) ***Lust for Materialism***

To keep religious believers stable with the abducted God, they are enticed by material things, thus leading to lust for materialism, which is the tendency to value material things like wealth, money, cars, high profit in business and too much bodily comfort and place too little or no value on moral, spiritual and intellectual things (Paul 1979: 670). By implication, the quest for materialism, which dominates the life of religious and non-religious practitioners, is in opposition to moral values such as asceticism, simplicity and moderation pertaining to lifestyle. It is observed that an

average religious practitioner, places strong emphasis on monetary acquisition, commercialisation of every aspect of life and less value on morality. All these come in the garment of “Get Rich Quick Syndrome” (GRQS) and a new prosperity theology which was strongly condemned in one of my publications entitled, “Prosperity Gospel and Social Morality: A Critique” (Ayantayo 2009). Rather than placing high premium on the state of morality of a person, the attention is now shifted to the wealth or material possession of individuals. In the light of this development, Steiner remarks that the “philosophy of materialism drives some businessmen to be oriented exclusively to monetary rewards” (Steiner 1975: 213).

(vii) *Spiritual Pride*

There is so much display of pride rather than humility among religious leaders and followers as many of them have hijacked the Church or Mosque jointly established by them and their followers. For example, there is a paradigm shift from collective ownership of a Church or Mosque to private ownership. This development is one of the manifestations of Pentecostal Christianity and Islam in which religious centres belong to individuals and their families, while members are made mere followers even though these religious centres were jointly brought into existence with the so-called founders. It is a pity that today we read about the financial worth of religious founders and not financial worth of the Church they lead. This incident is what I described as the *Passworded Ministries* and which one of my publications (forthcoming) strongly condemned in objective, rational and logical terms. Worst still, 70% of the airtime of the “*Passworded Ministries*” are devoted to boasting about miracles they have performed at one time or the other. Today, most of the religious leaders in Islam and Christianity badly declare of the bigness of their religious centres, auditoriums, and congregation, coupled with availability of air conditioners which have little or no significant relationship with the actual spiritual strength of such congregations.

(viii) Title Consciousness

Many religious leaders and followers are title-conscious. They wish to be addressed with both religious and non-religious titles such as *Alhaji* and *Alhaja* which, I got to know, refer to the names Saudi people call those on a pilgrimage to Mecca and it means "traveler". If this is true, one wonders why people always want to be called by these titles when they return home. To us, this is part of the craze for titles among religious practitioners who the pulpit taught that good deeds earn someone good names not the ones the society ascribed to a person. Some Christian religious leaders want titles such as Evangelist, Prophet and Pastor combined. It is also surprising that most of the religious leaders are not contented with spiritual titles; they still want to hijack what obtains in the world like J.P., Chief, Doctor, etc. This is a thing to be worried about because it is contrary to what the pulpit teaches about names and titles.

(ix) First Ladyship

We discover that the philosophy of first ladyship which was ushered in by the Babangida regime (1985 – 1993) has crept into religious centres. Curious observations have shown that many of the wives of religious leaders are called the first ladies of the Churches. For example, some of them are addressed as Mummy G.O., Mummy Bishop, and Mummy and Mother-in-Israel, to mention but a few. We see them in joint photographs taken with their husbands and published in newspapers, magazines, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media platforms or posted on billboards, posters and calendars. While one sees this as having the potential to enhance women's spiritual involvement and empowerment, we should not overlook the way the concept has been abused in Christendom. Its consequence is competition for recognition between the wives and their husbands, as some of them usually launch parallel programmes with that of the Church. In this situation, most religious leaders could hardly manifest their religious calling without consultation with their wives (an action which is considered a violation of ministerial ethics). Worst still, with the pastors and their wives at the

forefront, the children are left in the hands of housemaids. This probably explains why many pastors' children have poor moral orientation occasioned by inadequate parental upbringing.

(x) *False Teaching*

Unlike in the past, we can hardly find absolute truth in the teachings from most pulpits in Nigeria today, in terms of scriptural interpretation and analysis. Instead, you find a lot of puffing, overgeneralisation, falsification of facts and interpretations of the Bible/Qur'an out of contexts. This development is evident in the new prosperity theology which is characterised by sowing of seed, regular tithing, special levy and offering—as conditions to receive bountiful blessings, avoidance of sickness, success in trade and obtaining of health and financial buoyancy. Quite often, false teaching has become an albatross of poverty creation and economic impoverisation of those who succumb to the theory. What follows this practice is the dwindling economy of the givers while the Church/Mosque smiles to the bank after the offering exercise. We are not saying the practice is not good or that it does not have efficacy, but we find a hole in the method of manipulating people to give. There was a case of a man who stole money from his place of work and gave the same to his church. The theory no doubt has negatively influenced people's attitude to the pursuance of wealth (Ayantayo 2009).

(xi) *Exploitation*

False teachings lead to the exploitation of religious followers. The exploitation by religious leaders manifests in social, political and economic realms of religious followers' lives. Ordinarily, these leaders ought to protect the interest of their followers. On economy, religious followers through the teachings from the pulpits are made to contribute so much money for religious leaders and centres' use via crusades, sermons, offerings and sales of books, audio and video cassettes produced by religious leaders. It is the practice of prosperity gossellers to organise regular crusades or revivals

with tags or labels associated with prosperity. We have an unending list of crusade titles, which we gathered during the course of our investigation. These include: "Success 2001", "Poverty to Prosperity", "Grass to Grace", "New Millennium Breakthrough", "It is my turn to Succeed", "Success is my Portion", "Having more than Enough", "Unlimited Prosperity", and "Key to a Successful Year". A recent addition is the one titled, "I will not leave Lagos Empty-handed Crusade." There are always Biblical quotations to back the caption of the aforementioned crusade tags. In essence, the preachers only tell half-truths and half-lies. Obiora confirms this when he writes that:

Crusade is found to be a forum where well-fed individuals boost their ego, project false assumption, dish out intriguing half-truths, innuendos, understatements, exaggeration, inarticulate promises, insinuations, deliberate generalising or distortion of fact, false testimonies, and imputation for improper motives—all geared towards accumulation of wealth and fatty bank account (Obiora 1998: 73).

Young members of religious organisations are made to serve as errand boys/girls and protocol officers for religious leaders. Even married men and women among the church leaders are not spared, as some of them are staff working assiduously to serve the caprices of their religious leaders. All these they do with poor or no remuneration. Religious followers contribute much to the church/mosque buildings and faith-based universities to which they cannot afford to send their children, due to their poverty.

(xii) Sexual Immorality and Ritual Performance

Newspapers are replete with so many rumoured and established cases of sexual immorality among religious leaders which happened in religious centres and even very close to their pulpits. There are also so many cases of rituals made in religious centres. We heard reports of some religious

leaders who buried cows and even human beings alive in their religious centres for the purpose of retaining members who were already won over to stay with the abducted God.

(xiii) Sharp Religious Identities

As each religious functionary is trying to keep the abducted God away from the reach of others, we notice the emergence of sharp religious identities in dressing habits, names, social interactions and relationships among religious practitioners both in private and public places. There are cases of Christians changing their traditional religious-based names to their new faith-based names. An example is a person that changed his name from Jekayinfa (let's praise Ifa—Yoruba god of wisdom) to JekayinOluwa (let's praise God). We also observe that many Muslims hardly have local names, they bear Arabic names.

Change of name has the tendency to create classes within the religious community in which we have “born-again” Christians and nominal Christians. Some of these are the ones who, among other requirements, change their names to new ones. With this, there emerge walls dividing the two classes. Fundamentally, the development brought about change of people's identity, that is, change in the religious identity of past and contemporary Christians in Yoruba religious community. It is in the light of this that Ruth-Marshall describes Pentecostal Christianity as an institution, which brought about a model for the construction of identity (Fratani 1998: 5). In addition, with the use of Hijab by the Muslim women and Habits by Catholic brothers and sisters in public places can make one easily say who belongs to what religion and who does not.

Is the Thesis of God's Abduction Justifiable?

The answer is 'No,' because, according to Charles Kegley, central to any religion in the world is belief in God or gods, the nature and destiny of man, the meaning of history and hope for the future (Dzurgba 1997). If this is true, it becomes very important to shed some light on what religion is or is

not. Philologically, religion is said to have roots in the Latin word *religare*, meaning “to bind together,” which in a way must have been derived from its nature—liturgy, worship and fellowship. We shall dwell on its nature to provide more information about it, particularly from the angle in which religion could be seen from different perspectives, precisely from the direction in which a definer is looking at it. It is no wonder that scholars have defined it from sociological, moral, philosophical, theological, anthropological and psychological perspectives. I suspect that it is in the light of this background that Austin Cline remarkably writes that:

It might be argued that religion is such a complex and diverse cultural phenomenon that reducing it to any single definition will either fail to capture what it really is or merely misrepresent it. Indeed, it's been argued by some that there is no such thing as “religion” per se, just “culture” and the various cultural manifestations which Western scholars tend to label “religion” for no objectively definable reasons. There is some merit to such an argument, but I think that the above format for defining religion manages to address the most serious concerns. This definition recognises the complexity of religion by emphasising the importance of multiple basic characteristics rather than simplifying religion to just one or two. This definition also recognises the diversity of religion by not insisting that all characteristics be met in order to qualify as a “religion” (Cline 2017: 1).

To avoid being carried away unnecessarily by the numerous definitions of religion, we shall adopt Kenny's definition as a working one because of its aptness to our present discussion. Kenny defines religion as “anything that relates man to the ultimate values and such a thing embodies creed, code, cult and communion” (Kenny 1971: 24). We need to expand this further by looking at each of these four variables underlying religion. Creed is used in the context of

any system of principles or beliefs. Code refers to system, principles or rules regulating man-to-man or God-and-man behaviour. Cult refers to a religious group, which points to the fact that religion is a group thing. It is practised not by an individual alone but by a group of individuals. 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. Johnstone concurs with Kenny by specifying that religion is a group phenomenon that is connected with the sacred and supernatural, involves a body of beliefs, entails a set of practices, and involves moral prescription (Johnstone 2001). For the purpose of this audience, it is important to go beyond the abstract understanding of the above variables by explaining the practical manifestations of the four characteristics in the three major religions in Nigeria, which are arranged alphabetically: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam.

Belief in God, divinities, ancestors, spirits, magic and medicines constitute the creed of African Traditional Religion (ATR). The Christian creed is exemplified in the concept of Trinity—God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—which goes with belief in one baptism, resurrection and divine judgment. Belief in Allah, angels, and the Holy Book, prophets, resurrection, judgment and predestination comprise the Islamic creed.

Proverbs, taboos, fables, wise-sayings and the Ifa corpus, among others, constitute the code of conduct in ATR. The codes of conduct in Islam are found in the Qur'an and Hadith, particularly with reference to the Sharia law. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mountain are good examples of codes in Christianity.

Traditional religious adherents in most cases meet in their cultic shrines. The congregations or parishioners or, better put, the Christians stand for the cult in Christianity; the group usually meets mostly in churches, camps, mountains, plains and temples. The *Ulama* or *Jammah* represents the cult or religious group in Islam, whose popular places of meeting are

the mosque and, of recent, camps, with respect to some new Islamic religious movements in Nigeria.

In ATR, communion is manifested in what is called *Iwure* (prayer) and *Sinsin* (worship). Christians also commune with God through prayers, worship, sacrament and many liturgical activities. Muslims do the same principally with the five times daily prayers, among others.

In spite of the above obvious fact about what religion is or is not, adherents of the three religions are always at loggerheads with one another. One would not have worried if each of them manifests in concrete terms the codes of their religions. But, what we noticed is a wide gap between what religious leaders teach and the way that the majority of Christians, Muslims and Traditional religious practitioners in Nigeria behave. This is worrisome because the religious practitioners behave or act piously in their religious centres and become abnormal outside. Some of them donate Church or Mosque buildings and they are so appreciated for the act that can be regarded as pious but they are condemned in the public given the fact that they got their wealth through sharp practices. In other words, many religious practitioners are pious in the Church/Mosque but behave like the devil outside. On Sundays and Fridays, we notice piety in their modes of worship, dressing and comportment in the church/mosque such as sharing what they have with their religious fellows in the Church or Mosque but behave as cheats in their different places of work.

What makes us worry is that good morality that we see in public places is high in advanced countries like the US, China and Finland where religion is not as pronounced as it is in Nigeria. Such advanced societies to a good level provide the essentials of life (clothing, shelter, security and food) for their citizens and grants them hope and assurance here on earth, and not the one awaiting them in heaven. They obey traffic lights while Nigerian religious practitioners disobey traffic lights even on Sunday and Friday. Many Nigerian religious practitioners have companies where workers are employed

but paid salaries that cannot take them home. Most Pentecostal churches preach prosperity and pay church workers' salaries that cannot take them out from the shackles of poverty. The Muslims who believe that Islam is the best religion are not behaving better than the so-called Christians and vice versa. In both the Church and the Mosque, we notice the prevalence of dishonesty, insincerity, lie, irresponsibility, incest, disobedience, disrespect for elders and constituted authority and injustice. Others are favouritism, laziness, idleness, selfishness, promise-breaking, envy, jealousy, rivalry, nepotism, hatred, impatience, and so on. These disheartening cases in religious centres in Nigeria are unending. Thus, we are tempted to conclude that there is a wide and dangerous disconnection between the pulpit and the public space. Given the trend of the disconnection between what the pulpit teaches and what religious practitioners do in the Nigerian public space. For example, Kelechi Ekezie's comment on a WhatsApp platform is apt and it reads:

Finland has the most stable economy in the world today. There are less than twenty churches in Finland. Switzerland has the second most stable economy in the world today. Switzerland has less than thirty churches. Denmark is the third most stable economy in the world today. Denmark has about twenty-three churches in it. These countries are considered largely atheist in nature, yet so blessed.

Come to Owerri town, SE Nigeria from MCC junction to Toronto junction, there are 36 Churches. That stretch of about 5 km harbours 36 churches, more churches than the entire Switzerland. Between Owerri and Mgbidi, I counted 97 churches and gave up. According to Corporate Affairs Commission, Nigeria has over 23,000 registered churches.

We have more churches than schools and hospitals combined. More pastors than doctors

and teachers combined. Everyone is born again. All are *covered* with Holy Spirit. Yes, none of those claims reflects in the expected moral elevation of society. We are still one of the greediest, laziest, corrupt, deceitful, hypocritical and hateful set of beings on the planet today, with all our Christ and Holy Spirit.

Our people need to draw the line between religiosity and spirituality.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, as a proof that nobody has the right to monopolise God or abduct Him and deny people of other faiths access to Him, permit me to ask the following rhetorical questions:

- (1) How many Christians presently were once Muslims or how many Muslims presently were formerly Christians?
- (2) If we have such in our midst, we can ask further that on what ground such people leaved Christianity for Islam or Islam for Christianity.
- (3) How much knowledge does an average Christian or Muslim have of Christianity, Islam and other world religions respectively before arriving at a conviction that his or her religion is the best?
- (4) How much knowledge does an average Christian or Muslim have about Christianity and Islam respectively before condemning each other's religion?
- (5) How many people here present had the opportunity of making a choice at birth among the three major religions in Nigeria: Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam?
- (6) How many here present or reading this lecture note would have preferred to be Muslims or Christians if not because they were born by Muslim or Christian parents?

- (7) How many people here present have ever asked a question about the religious profile of: doctors or nurses who attend to their pregnant wives; petroleum attendants who sell fuel at filling stations; commercial drivers that convey their children to schools or their wives or husbands to their markets or work places; clerical officers who treat their promotion files; or attendants who serve them food at restaurants?

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I have proved in some of my publications that the answers to these questions are no and no. This, once again indicates that nobody has the right to abduct God because apparently many people are practicing religion circumstantially.

Toolkits for Rescuing God from His Abductors

As a way of rescuing God from His abductors, we have the following toolkits for the use of every stakeholder of religions at the private and public levels.

(i) *Accepting the Equality of Religions*

There is need for all and sundry to accept the fact that all religions are equal in terms of the origin of the world, man and the hereafter. Therefore, religious practitioners must come to terms that in spite of the differences in religions, they still have some meeting points which can be advanced to jointly influence the public space positively. For instance, we discover that the two major religions (Christianity and Islam) that are always in contest in Nigeria have some things in common as discussed below:

- (a) Belief in God who is the sole creator and maintainer of the universe. He is called several names.
- (b) Belief in Prophets: Both religions believe in prophets, who have carried the word of the Lord to earth. Both Christians and Muslims believe that Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and Jesus (peace be upon them) were sent by God as messengers of His word.

- (c) Each of them has a scripture, the Bible for the Christianity and the Qur'an for Islam; and the two books share much in common and are considered sacred texts.
- (d) The two religions believe in Jesus' miraculous birth from the Virgin Mary (Qur'an 19:16-26, Isaiah 7:14). Where they differ is the divinity of Jesus Christ as God's son.
- (e) The two religions also believe in the existence of Satan with its devilish act.
- (f) Both also believe in the last day.
- (g) The two also believe in Paradise/Heaven and Hell.
- (h) They also teach ethics, what is called the Golden Rule, which is cardinal in the interface between the pulpit and the public space. For instance, Matthew 7:12 teaches that "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" and *Sunnah* in Islam teaches that "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." Interestingly, the maxim is not limited to the two religions; it also features in other world religions as exemplified below (Crawford 1989: 296):

"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.

"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."

"This is the sum of all true righteousness – treat others, as thou wouldst thyself be treated." (Hinduism).

“A man is good only when he is willing not to do to another what is not good for himself” (Zoroastrianism, Mareus Busch-*Major Religions of the World*).

“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 – *Udanayarga* 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-yingp’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 if it were himself” (that was this broken) (Yoruba proverb).

Perhaps it is in the light of the equality of religion that Nigerian constitution gives allowance to what is known as freedom of religion. Specifically, Section 38/1 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that: Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice

and observance. By so doing there should not be compulsion in religion, hence the need for religious leaders to be careful of their proselytisation enterprise.

(ii) *Understanding the Cultural Background of Religions*

It is imperative that religious practitioners come to terms with the fact that religion is a product of culture of where it came from, as Islam and Christianity came from the Eastern World and Traditional Religion from the African continent. Our argument is grounded on Iwe's definition of culture as a way of life that reflects people's distinctive genius and spirit, their fundamental character or ethos, their value orientation, worldview, institutions and achievements in the various fields of human endeavour—legal and literary, artistic and scientific, religious, philosophical and technological (Iwe 1985). From this it is obvious that religion is a product of culture and for this reason we have argued further that religion is a systematic reflection and interpretation of what people see around them and which ultimately translates to religious conviction and 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 everyday are likely to conclude that God is a God of water. In the same vein, somebody in the forest area is likely to feel that God is a God of forest who sustains the forest during the dry season. Jesus talks about mustard seed as a tiny seed. I believe Christ would have used tobacco seed to buttress His point if he was a Nigerian. The cutting of condemned criminals' hands according to Islamic law was only meaningful in a seemingly homogeneous society of the then time, when the act could result in stigmatisation. Today, the injunction cannot hold water in modern heterogeneous society where one can lose one's hand to industrial injuries. Besides, prayer points are laced in African culture and evidence abounds that all the principal beliefs of African Tradition Religion manifest consciously in the practical liturgy of many Muslims and Christian religious organisations.

Another important thing to note at this juncture is the fact that religion is man-made. It is based on man's projections. For instance, nobody has ever seen God, yet religious people believe that He exists. Nevertheless, what people see around them such as the sun, water and the moon, among others, informed their religious convictions about the existence of God, who is regarded as the architect of these things. This goes with the impression that religion is also experiential. People conceived the idea of religion and become a member of a religious organisation 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 have God as its innermost core and without it no religion would be worthy of the name (Dzurgba 1987). To us, religious experience informs religious expression. Religious expression in most cases is the outward manifestation of religious practices. This goes with the fact that religious scriptures and traditions were inspired but also they have human hands in terms of their documentation and interpretation. For this reason, religious scriptures and traditions should be understood in terms of their context, content, original intents, history and application vis-à-vis the challenge of modern time.

(iii) Identifying and Accepting Religious Pluralism

This has to do with accepting that there are many other religions in the society aside from the one being practised by an individual or a group of individuals. In other words, it is a situation in which a Christian will come to an understanding that, apart from Christianity (his religion), there are still others such as Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism and African Traditional Religion.

In the case of Christianity, we read about Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18, and the Wisemen (Matthew 2:1-13) as

examples of people who believed in God even though they were not part of the covenant people. "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him'" (Acts 10:34-35). Jesus, speaking to a Samaritan woman said: You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know (John 4:22). These passages can be interpreted to mean that Christianity is aware of the existence of other religions which it does not condemn but rather suggests tolerance of them. It is important to note also that Jesus Christ talked much about Judaism from which Christianity evolved. In fact, Jesus was a Jew and practised Judaism. Up till today, Judaism still exists alongside her sister religion—Christianity—in the East. Perhaps it is the recognition of this fact that the doctrine of inclusivism is held by Roman Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists, who assert that while Christianity is the one true faith, other faiths are at least partially true, and therefore are valid ways of reaching salvation until the Gospels can be preached to them (<http://www.philosopherkings.co.uk/Inclusivism.html>).

The Qur'an, like the Bible, is also not silent about religious inclusivism, especially when we consider the following Qur'anic passages:

"Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." (Surah: 2:62).

Say (O Muhammad "We believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Ibrahim (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qfif (Jacob) and *Al-Asbat* [the offspring of the twelve sons of Ya'qfif (Jacob)] and what was given to Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and the Prophets from their Lord." We make no distinction between one another among them and

to Him (Allah) we have submitted (in Islam) (Surah: 3:84).

Among the people of the Book there are some who have *iman* in Allah and in what has been sent down to you and what was sent down to them, and who are humble before Allah. They do not sell Allah's Signs for a paltry price. Such people will have their reward with their Lord. And Allah is swift at reckoning (Surah: 3:199).

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair admonition, and argue with them in the kindest way. Your Lord knows best who is misguided from His way. And He knows best who are guided (Surah: 16:125).

Only argue with the People of the Book in the kindest way - except in the case of those of them who do wrong - saying, 'We have *iman* in what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to you. Our God and your God are one and we submit to Him' (Surah: 29:46).

...They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Scripture is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And whatever good they do - never will it be removed from them. And Allah is knowing of the righteous (Surah: 3: 113-115).

Corroborating the Islamic position on religious pluralism, Ali Asani asserts that:

...the people of the book is the umbrella term in the Qur'an to refer to communities or people who

have received revelation in the form of the scripture. It is commonly used to refer to the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The pluralistic nature of this term is evident in the use of the noun Book in the singular rather than the plural to emphasise that the Jews, Christians and Muslims follow one book not various conflicting scriptures. The Old and New Testaments and The Qur'an are seen as being plural, earthly manifestations of the one heavenly scripture in which God has inscribed the divine word (Ali 2015).

What we are putting across at this juncture is that inclusivism may also imply that all beliefs are equally valid within a believer's particular context. This is a reality that every believer needs to accept particularly going by the diversity in life in terms of religion, tribe, culture and race. Thus, in the words of Matt Costella,

Religious pluralism is a response to the religious diversity inherent in 21st century Western culture entailing the belief that one's own beliefs about God are sufficient but not universally applicable. In other words, it is the belief that "God is greater than any one view of God." Therefore, salvation, divine revelation, etc. are manifest and applicable to all people in diverse ways. It rejects any claim of exclusivity in regard to salvation (Costella 2017).

(iv) Promotion of Objective Religious Education/Studies

There is an urgent need to promote religious education in public and private spaces in Nigeria. By religious education, we mean holistic education of the mind, intelligence, intellect, position and attitude of religious practitioners regarding their understanding and, expected attitude and disposition to religions different from the ones they practise.

It is our view that the Departments of Religious Studies in Nigerian universities should take the lead in this effort geared towards promotion of religious understanding. This should be done theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the courses could appropriate the following issues: basic tenets of the world religions, comparative religion, religious rights and freedom, religious secularism, and respect and mutual respect in religions. In doing so, the teachers need to appropriate Bruce Lincoln's view that reverence is a religious and not a scholarly virtue (Lincoln 2000: 118). Because of the sensitivity of this matter, it is our suggestion that a scholar of Religious Studies living in a pluralistic religious world should equip him/herself with at least four factual statements and somewhat teaching principles outlined by Michael Pye as follows:

- (a) The study of religions (Religionswissenschaft- that is scientific study of religion) is not concerned with the search for religious truth, but rather with the description and scientific investigation of religious phenomenon from a "meta-level" that is from the standpoint of independent reflection. This does not imply a claim to be superior to religious truth in any way.
- (b) It cannot be the task of the study of religions, therefore, to substantiate or disprove truths, which may be contained in religious doctrine.
- (c) One's own personal religious experience is not a prerequisite for working on the study of religions and neither is there any obligation to maintain an anti-religious attitude (as in the traditions critical of religion deriving from Feuerbach, Durkheim and others).
- (d) Since the study of religions does not serve the interests of any religion, it should be distinguished, for example, from missiology and apologetics or a theology of religion (Pye 2004: 22).

On account of the above, we recommend that the teaching of religious studies should be differentiated from sermonising, and should not be done with bias and prejudice for or against the religion the lecturer practises or does not practise. Therefore, Religious Studies lecturers should not superimpose their faith directly or indirectly on students or academic audience but rather must impact the truths and not half-truths or distorted information concerning what they teach the students; and every comment made on religion should be done within the spirit of respect and reverence for the religion(s) in question. In addition, teaching should be an avenue for motivating students to learn in a manner that is relevant, meaningful, and memorable so as to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is also important that Religious Studies is made a compulsory subject/course for all students in Nigeria from the primary school to the university.

(v) Accepting the Limitations of Religious Scriptures and Traditions

There is a need for religious practitioners to understand that their religious scriptures and traditions have some limitations in terms of their intents, contents and contexts especially when they are considered in the light of contemporary social, environmental, political and technological issues. Several researches have indicated that despite the fact that religious scriptures are inspired, they were documented by man. Besides, the scriptures have historical backgrounds as they technically manifest the environments from which they evolved. Mostly, the targeted readers and audience of the scriptures were people of homogeneous community. Now that we are living in heterogeneous communities, most of the teachings of the scriptures do not envisage the moral and social problems of today. For example, the 'cutting' of hands which was to serve as a deterrent to potential criminals was only meaningful in homogeneous society where 'cutting' of hands went with stigmatisation unlike today where many things can lead to cutting off of someone's hand particularly those handling industrial machines. The tradition that male and female should not sit together was only meaningful in

homogeneous society unlike now that both genders have to sit together in public places including in the aircraft. Also, to our mind, the Biblical 'turning the other cheek' which stands for pacifism may not hold much water in the world of terrorism that calls for self defense. Again, the Biblical injunction stating that "the Lord is my Shepherd" and the Christian tradition of hospitality are no longer absolutely valid as there is need for one to be security conscious.

(vi) Adopting Parts of Human Body Thesis

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, as a sociologist of religion, I have established in a few of my publications that an individual standing or sitting at a place at one time or the other has many parts that can be likened to parts of human body. For example, he/she has eyes, nose, head, legs, hands and mouth among others. In social setting, the thesis manifests in forms of multiple role responsibilities associated with an individual as a being who lives interdependently. In relating this to our discussion, an individual person for example, who is known and recognised as a religious leader in the Church or Mosque also has different identities in his/her house where he/she is called a husband or wife by his/her husband/wife or wives, father or mother by his/her children, a son or daughter by his/her father or mother, a brother by his relations and so on and so forth. The implication of this is that religion should be taken as a private matter and its toga should be limited to religious centres and not public places. Therefore, wearing of religious garment in public arena outside religious domain is a complete aberration and should be discouraged.

(vii) Monetisation of Religion in Public Places

The undue use of the environment cost-free by religious organisations calls for a rethink. I suggest that religious organisations should pay taxes, and siting of their centres should be at a cost. Placing of bill boards and posters on the streets and walls should be at cost no matter how small. On this, government agencies dealing with the environment should checkmate the undue use of the environment by religious centres in accordance with the law.

Manifestations of God's Release from His Abductors

If the above recommendations make sense to all of us sitting here now or reading this lecture, it means God will be released from the den of His abductors and by so doing my dream of many years as a scholar of Religious ethics and Sociology of Religion and who has been thirsty and hungry for a right living (as reflected in my academic and general publications) shall come to reality and I will be happy for it. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have a dream, borrowing the words of Martin Luther, that when God is rescued from His abductors:

- (1) The wolf and the lamb (Religious practitioners in Nigeria) will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain – Isaiah 65: 25.
- (2) Nigerians will not be discriminated against in public places on the basis of their avowed religious identity or profession.
- (3) The spate of killings in the name of religions will be replaced with care for the lives of people in other faiths in the atmosphere of freedom and justice.
- (4) As it was in the past, recommendation letters coming from religious centres to foreign embassies will be accepted without questioning their credibility in contents and intent.
- (5) All religious practitioners not minding their identities will be able to join hands in building a new Nigeria where peace and justice shall reign and serve their fatherland with love and strength and faith.
- (6) Though religion, tribe and tongue may differ, Nigerians will stand in brotherhood/sisterhood and proudly serve the country and humanity diligently without fear or favour.
- (7) Quarrels and fights will cease among religious practitioners – As for such (of the unbelievers) as do not fight against you on account of (your) faith, and

neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably (Quran 60: 8).

Conclusion

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, permit me to conclude this lecture with the words of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith which states 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 was 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 (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/peacetree.htm>).

Therefore, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, the need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. With this maxim put in place in both private and public lives of Nigerians, I believe that God will be rescued from His abductors and He will be God of all and not of one.

My Contribution to Scholarship

For the purpose of emphasis, I would like to say that I have contributed my quota to the overall development of man and society through a number of my academic and non-academic publications, open lectures, commissioned papers and lectures as an academic and resource person in the educational, media and religious institutions from the ambit of Religious Ethics, Research in Religious Studies and Sociology of Religion (with bias for Religious Peace and Conflict Studies) which

are two out of the eleven areas of specialisation in Religious Studies in my department.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I want to draw your attention to the fact that a large number of my publications have established the fact that religion qua religion is a misconstrued academic discipline which, by its origin and history, is susceptible to multidisciplinary definitions. In addition, because of this fundamental factor, religion has been a catalyst for discrimination, differentiation, intra- and interreligious conflict, environmental pollution, poverty creation, destruction of lives and property, bad attitudes to life and several abuses with both religious followers and leaders emerging as perpetrators. All the issues mentioned above are the major findings of my research about the interface between religion and society, precisely on issues such as Christianity and the morality of environmental pollution, matters arising from unhealthy religious relations in Nigeria, a sociological examination of interreligious conflicts in Africa, religious communication in Nigeria as a challenge to environmental management, ignorance as the bane of interreligious crisis in Nigeria, the religious factor in the Nigerian public sphere and its burdens and prospects. Others include the phenomenon of change of name and identity in Yoruba religious community, rethinking the religious and moral questions in the Niger Delta discourse, the use of God's/gods' names in sales promotion in Ibadan markets, underscoring the challenges of choosing between violence and passivism in contemporary Nigeria, and understanding the socio-religious background of the ethnic man as a possible tool for advancing ethnic harmony and workable federal character in Nigeria.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, as someone who applied objectivity as a principle to research, I was also able to show that religion, particularly in Nigeria, has advanced social order, cooperation and developmental projects, and engendered political development and sustainability, poverty alleviation, cordial interpersonal relationship, business ethics, good leadership, gender balance, women emancipation, and

productive religious dialogue. Others also include national and moral integration, promotion of work ethics, resolution of industrial conflicts and morally laced business practices.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, another set of my publications in the area of Sociology of Religion condemned the inaction of religious organisations in Nigeria and negative religious activities such as contestation for space, unhealthy rivalries, religious conflicts, fraud, cheating of church members and taking undue advantage of church followers, environmental pollution, religious manipulations, poverty creation through ill-timing of religious programmes, wrong religious orientation, interreligious conflicts, corruption, inordinate ambition, greed and avarice, worshipping of money and covetousness, among others.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, my contribution to research methods in religious studies is noble as copies of two of my publications entitled "Fundamentals of Religious Ethics" (Ayantayo 2009) and "Rudiments of Research and Research in Religious Studies" (Ayantayo 2015) are recommended for students in the Department of Religious Studies in Nigerian, Ghanaian universities and a few universities in West Africa. The same could be said of my other publications like, "The Ethics of Remembering, Memorising and Documentation of Ifa Divination System among the Yoruba People of Nigeria" (Ayantayo 2006), "Imperativeness of Professional Ethics in Religious Studies Scholarship in Nigeria" (Ayantayo 2009), "Ethical issues in the academic bias in the Study of Nigeria Indigenous Traditional Religions and Its Ethical Implications for Interreligious Conflicts in Nigeria" (Ayantayo 2011), and "Ethical Issues in Peace and Conflict Research" (Ayantayo 2014) are well used and cited regularly by researchers in Religious Studies, and Peace and Conflict Studies. In the publications, I demonstrated the need for objectivity in research in religious studies and also advanced an argument that the teaching of and research in Religious Studies should not be directed towards proselytisation or defense of religions. Rather it should be geared towards exploring the relevance of religion in enhancing the totality of human development.

My contribution to general studies in the University of Ibadan is worthy of note. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is worthy of note that I co-authored a chapter in GES 102: African Culture and Civilisation, a book which focuses on Religion and African Culture. Within and outside the University, I have also affected the mind of many people positively by a number of public speaking on the issues of morality and the need for moral consciousness everywhere we find ourselves. Sir, without flattering myself, I have got many responses in form of text messages and phone calls from those who read or had contacts with some of my general books which are a must read for everyone who wants to live a moral problem-free life. Notable among them are: Child Rights in Literary Genres and Religious Scriptures (Ayantayo 2011), Moral Tonic for Teenagers (Ayantayo 2012), Proverbial Capsules for Right Living (Ayantayo 2013), 21 Habits that Damage Life and Relationship (Ayantayo 2014), Etiquette for Personal and Public Life (Ayantayo 2015), and Character Speaks (Ayantayo 2017).

Arising from my publications, I was selected among those who drew the curriculum for Peace and Conflict Studies programmes of the University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin and University of Legon, Ghana. On this I pay glowing tributes to Professor Olawale Albert (the pioneer Director, Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies), my mentor and a very outstanding academic. He was the one who initiated me into Peace and Conflict Studies in 2006, having seen and been convinced of my academic prowess during conferences the two of us attended in Ghana and Cameroon.

My Contribution to the University Administration

I have served in various capacities on general and special University assignments. I was a departmental and Faculty representative on the Board of Institute of African Studies, Member of University Senate (2011-2013, 2014 to date). I also served as Sub-Dean (General), Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan (2013 to 2005). During this period, I personally lobbied the Faculty Finance Committee, to release

money for tarring the Faculty of Arts car park because the then Dean, Professor Adeigbo who is now of blessed memory, was very ascetic. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I want to draw your attention to the fact that as Sub-Dean, I planted the canopy trees presently at the Faculty of Arts annex and I was also the one who brought normalcy to the parking arrangement of the annex.

Remarkably, I served as the acting Head of Department of Religious Studies (2011-2013). One of the many good things I did was the design of our Department's logo in 2011, which was unanimously approved by academic members of staff of my department. Sir, this was the first of its kind since the inception of our noble department in 1948. The logo indicates major religions the department studies which include but are not limited to: African Indigenous Religion, Asian Indigenous Religion, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and New Religious Movements. Not only the above, my tenure facilitated the employment of 5 academic staff at a stretch which is also another giant stride in the Department. As a substantive Head, I have also prepared a Departmental Newsletter awaiting publication, which is going to be the first of its kind in the Department. I also facilitated financial grants from Pastor Adeboye, Global General Overseer; of the Redeemed Christian Church of God with which a Toyota Camry ('big daddy') car was purchased. This was another milestone and the first of its kind. On all these, I want to say thank you to the members of academic and non-academic staff of my Department as well as the University administration for their support.

Mentorship

My philosophy since the time I was promoted to the Senior Lecturer grade in 2003 and later to Professor 2009 (announced in 2014) is that younger colleagues should be mentored both in publication, conference attendance and leadership, knowing fully well that tomorrow belongs to them. To God be the glory, I have mentored quite a number of Ph.D students that I supervised, two of whom are now my

colleagues as members of academic staff in whom I am well pleased. Others are doing well as heads, provost and rectors of institutions and presidents of church conferences and assembly pastors both in Nigeria and abroad.

National and International Engagements

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is remarkable that I served as External Examiner for undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as professorial assessor to University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos; Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo; Babcock University, Ilishan Remo; University of Benin, Benin; and Benue State University, Makurdi.

By virtue of my outstanding academic performance in the field of Ethics, I was invited along with a few colleagues in Nigerian universities and other professionals by the Independent Policy Group, Abuja in 2003 into a committee that formulated Ethical Values for the Development of Nigeria. The project was sponsored by George Soros, UNDP, Ford Foundation and Africare. At one time or the other, I had participated in National assignments. For instance, in 2014, 2015, and 2016 I served as one of the Returning Officer for governorship elections in Osun, Oyo and Ondo states respectively.

Also in 2015, I was the Returning Officer for Presidential Election in Oyo State. In 2017, I was a member of NUC accreditation panel that visited Calvary Seminary, PortHacourt, Rivers State. Through my attendance of international conferences, I was able to contribute immensely from religious, ethical and sociological perspectives to global debates pertaining to leadership, followership, children, women, ethnicity, racism, environment, sustainable development, peace and conflict, global warming, church, mosques, shrine, chieftaincy, justices, communication, cultural heritage and law. This was done through presentation of lead papers, conference papers and seminars at international fora in Ghana, Cameroon, Nairobi, Botswana, South Africa, USA, and Germany, to mention but a few.

Acknowledgements

Let me start with my Creator, God, whom I will appreciate now and forever because He has been good to me from infancy to the present moment and I trust He will forever be with me from now until death. He has done well for me by taking me from obscurity to limelight. May the name of my God be adored, eulogised and admonished for ever and ever.

As a personal policy, I always want to show my gratitude to everybody whose path crosses mine at every point in time; through interaction, they have helped me in one way or the other. However, writing acknowledgements that will meet my policy is difficult for someone like me who has many friends including 'omo girl', 'omo boy', 'omo man', 'omo woman', small boy, small girl, medium-size girl and medium-size boy. However, I will try my best but with sincere apologies to anyone whose name I have omitted.

Since charity begins from home, I want to express my gratitude to my late father Chief Ayantayo Owolabi, who died forty years ago, and my mother, Princess Oyetundun Felicia Agbeke Ayantayo (Iya Oba). It is remarkable that my father graciously succumbed to the pressure of sending me to school on February 14, 1972—a decision that was not popular in my village at that particular time in history. On this note, I appreciate Mr. Ighodalo Owolabi of blessed memory who did the 'pressure job' without which I would have probably joined the league of farmers in my village. In the same vein, I appreciate the support I received from my siblings and their families the likes of Late Ayantayo Ayanbuola, Mrs. Ayangbenle Popoola, Mrs. Ayanrinke Adewumi, Mrs. Modupeoluwa Titiloye, Mrs. Ayangbensola Onaadepo, Mrs. Ayanladun Emiloje Awoyinka, Late Mr. Ayantayo Ayanwoye, Mrs. Modupeola Fadipe, Mrs. Ayanbolanle Ibuoye, Mr. Ayantayo Ayandapo Taiwo and Mr. Ayantayo Ayanyemi Sunday (Snr). Remarkably, I pay tribute to late Oba Professor Ololade Folayan, the Akesin of Ora Igbomina; he was the architect of my intellectual life for taking me to the University of Ife after my secondary school education. He

sponsored my University education. I am very grateful to Dr. and Mrs. Tunde Folayan, Olori Esther and Tolani Folayan and other Folayans.

Individuals who offered me one help or the other during my academic foray from the primary school level to the university level also deserve my gratitude. For this reason, I am very grateful to Late Ibitoye (Baba Idi Isin) who in 1974 taught me how to plant maize in his school farm. Mr. Oloyede Bolawaye, my primary 4 class teacher who taught me to be thrifty and Mr. Ige, who introduced me to context questions in Christian Religious Knowledge and which informed my love for the Bible and also led to my choice of Religious Studies as an academic career. In Obafemi Awolowo University, I remain grateful to my lecturers, notable among who are Professors Olupona, Adelowo, Igenzoza, Manus, Nkoka, Layiwola, Onibere and Babalola. I also appreciate the support I received from the present academic staff of the university during my sabbatical appointment in 2017, particularly Professors Ogungbile, Opeloye, Owwoeye and Adeniyi, as well as Drs. Gbadegesin, Bateye, Makinde, Olanisebe, Olaniyi, Adelakun and Oladosu. My 'thank you' also goes to my past, present, senior, junior colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, who comprise Late Professors Abogunrin, Akao, Kenny, Akintunde, Late Bishop Adewale, Late Associate Professor Babs Mala, and Late Dr. Gideon Oshitelu. Others include Professors Nabofa, Dzurgba (my lecturer, supervisor and facilitator of my employment as a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies), Ayegboyin, Fatokun, Dada, Associate Professor Adekunbi Labeodan, Chief Olajide, Drs. Olukunle, Obijole, Familusi, Mepaiyeda, Berekiyah, Okanlawon, Adebo, Olaleye, Sewakpo, Oke and Ms Gbadamosi. I am also grateful to Mrs. Olubunmi Oladipo, Mrs. Onche Virginia, Mrs. Abiola Ojo, Elder Akindele, Mr. Ekundayo Adetoyinbo and Mr. Trevor Asana.

I am indebted to all Professors, other academic staff, the past and present Heads of Departments in the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan. I want to single out Professor Tayo Adesina, who facilitated a paper 'The Yoruba Traditional

Economy in Ethical Perspective' published in *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History* in 2000, Professor Remi-Raji, former Dean of Arts, who facilitated my promotion into professorship in 2014 (backdated to 2009), Professor Dasyuva, current Dean of Arts, who offered productive advice regarding this inaugural lecture, Dr. Sunday of English Department, Professors Lamidi, Adeleke, Adejumo, Onayemi, Oladosu, Ayeleru, Oyeleye, Kehinde, Oyesile, Offor, and Oyewo (my bosom brother and friend), Drs. Bankale, Monica, Adebowale, Olasoje, and numerous others.

Some colleagues, and bosses outside the Faculty of Arts also deserve appreciation particularly Professors Aremu (Director, Distance Learning Centre) and Aderinto (DVC Academic - who stood by me when my professorial promotion had delays). Professor Olawale Albert (whom I humbly call Afenifere), the present Director, Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies is acknowledged, being a quintessential senior colleague who introduced me into Peace and Conflicts Studies in 2004 (an area I was able to do some research exploitation), and has continued to mentor me in this direction even when I am already a Professor. Still at the University of Ibadan, I am very grateful to our indefatigable Vice-Chancellor, Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnership), Registrar, Librarian, Provost of the College of Medicine, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dean of the Postgraduate School, Deans of other Faculties and of Students and Directors of Institutes. It is their making that we have this inaugural lecture delivered today.

Mentioning names of my friends and colleagues in several universities in Nigeria is not out of point. Therefore, I remember my bosom friends, colleagues and senior colleagues such as Professors Diji Aina, pioneer VC, Adeleke University, Ede and presently VC, Caleb University (we have been together since the time we meet at Oduduwa College in 1983), Omotoye and Olademo (UNILORIN), Oguntoyinbo-Atere (Adeleke University, Ede), Afolorunso Dairo (RUN, Ede), Alana (AAU), Asaju (VC, ACU),

Danfulani (UNIJOS), Isirame (Ekpoma), Latona (LASU), Obong (UNICAL), Oduwole (OOU), Ojo (MacPherson), Ojo (VC, Bowen), Ajibade (OAU), Aluko (ACU), Uchegbue (UNICAL), Wotogbe (UNIPOINT), and Quadri (ILORIN).

At the Church level, I am thankful to those who have influenced my spiritual life consciously or otherwise. A few of them are Pastor Oni, my Sunday School teacher who taught us the monumental topic "Managing God's Goods in 2000"—which, among other things, shows that everything belongs to God and that having anything at our disposal presupposes that we are obliged to manage it for God. In this regard, I pay tribute to the writer of the particular Sunday school pamphlet—Pastor Olagunju, the present President, Christ Apostolic Church Worldwide. I also acknowledge all the church associations I belong to, such as Sunday school, Church Warden, and Ibukun and Aanu Oluwa societies. My interaction with them added some values to my spiritual life. On this account, I want to thank Pastors Abisoye, Erinwusi, Faloye, Oloyede, Olowe, Ali and the Evangelists. The Chaplaincy of the Chapel of Resurrection, University of Ibadan, deserves my commendation as they opened their offices in the process of writing this lecture and mentioning the names of Very Revd Oyelade (Chaplain) and Venerable Oladele Victor (Assistant Chaplain 1) is apt.

My neighbours also need to be valued in this context particularly the Aho-Agbeja Landlord and Tenant Association and Aho-Agbeja Christian Fellowship. A few individuals in the neighbourhood are appreciated for their goodness to me: the likes of Mr. Oladele, Deacon and Deaconess Adetoki, Mr. and Mrs. Oladejo Ajayi, Mr. Yemi and Mrs. Molara Ajayi, Grandma Gbemisola, Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed, Mr. and Mrs. Salimon, Evangelist Adeyemi, Ade Royal, Mrs. Fagbeja, Mr. Yomi and Mrs. Prisca Balogun, Mr. and Mrs. Muili, Daddy and Mummy Mariam, Mr. Okanlawon, Mummy Fasuru, Daddy Odedoyin, Pastor and Mrs. Daniel, Mrs. Olusegun, Elder and Mrs. Uponi, Alhaji Oyebode and, finally, my chairman, Dr. Busari among others whose names escaped my mind.

The next groups of people to be appreciated are my past and present Ph.D students that I supervised both in the University of Ibadan and some theological seminaries in Nigeria. They are many but I can quickly remember those of them who are my colleagues now by virtue of being lecturers in different institutions across the country. They are Drs Familusi (UI), Essien (UNIYO), Okeke (ISU), Omojuwa (UNILAG), Oke (FCE, Abeokuta), Oke (UI), Oti (RCBC), George (CALEB University), Aghawenu (BTS, Eku), Bolaji (BTS, Oyo), Ishola, (NBTS, Ogbomoso), Maton (TCNN, Bukuru) and Asha (BTS, Agbowo). Others are into church activities. These include Panpe, Oladejo, Iwhighwu, Oladiran, Ademuyiwa, Olajide, Oyeniya, Adamu, Akano, Babalola, Olaleye, Ajao, Asaolu, Oladapo, Olaniyan, Dare and Durojaye. These people celebrated the goodness of God in my life when I marked my 50th birthday in 2015. On this note, I want to thank the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), Ibadan for airing a 30 minutes programme in respect of the birthday.

Remarkably, I shall remain grateful to members of the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board of Esther Folorunso Ayantayo Foundation (EFA-F) for their unusual support to the course of EFA-F annual programme. They are Dr. Ayantayo Temitayo (BoT Secretary), Mrs. Gloria Ayantayo (Treasurer), Ayantayo Temitope (Financial Secretary), Professor Diji Aina (General Logistics), Dr. O.O. Familusi (Publications), Mrs. Roselyn Subair (Events Planning), Tomi Ayantayo (Finance and Fundraising), Mr. Femi Adefila (Media and Publicity), Dr. Kayode George (Project Implementation), Pastor Ranti Olowe (Spiritual Matters) Dr. Oke, Olusegun Peter (Legal matters), Dr. Mrs. A. Bolaji (Vocational matters) and Folasade Folayan (Administrative Officer), EFA-F office, Ora Igbomina. For the purpose of information, the EFA-F is registered philanthropic, non-religious, non-partisan and non-profit making organisation established in 2010 to sustain the philanthropic ideals of my late wife, Esther Folorunso Ayantayo, who slept in the Lord on August 17, 2010 (www.efafoundation.org.ng). It is wholly committed to

providing financial assistance to widows and orphans, engaging the youth in vocational training and educating children and adults the way of God through periodic guidance and counselling. At this juncture, I want to appreciate the Adefila family and by extension the Olanipekun royal dynasty in Ora for standing by me before, during and after the death of their daughter and my wife who was and is so loved that we pour our minds in the wordings of her cenotaph which in part reads: *...she was a beloved wife, a super mom, a darling daughter, an amiable sister, an excellent counsellor and teacher, a brilliant Ph.D student, humility and transparency personified, an embodiment of human kindness and a servant of God.*

It is in the spirit of the above eulogy that we cannot thank them enough for the support I received constantly from my mothers-in-law, Princess Modupeola Olayoonu Adefila, Princess Taye Ademokun, Princess Kehinde Adeyemo, Otunba Ademola and Yeye Otunba Gbonjubola Adefila, Mr. Femi Adefila (CEO, Rave FM, Oshogbo), Prince Femi Olanipekun, Mrs. Iyabo Adesina, Mr. and Mrs. Ajayi and late Mrs. Irelioluwa Ajayi.

Coming back home (which is the base of all my activities) I want to express my gratitude to my amiable children belonging to first and second generations. In the first generation, we have our pride Dr. Temitayo Ayantayo (Medical), Miss Temitope Ayantayo (M.A. Student, IPSS) and Mr. Temidayo Tolulope Ayantayo (Law Student, U.I.). They supported my early and present academic career along with their quintessential mother—Esther, who was and is our model; an individual in whom the Biblical prophecy that sweetness is the remembrance of the righteous is manifested. Esther was the woman whose name has impacted financially, vocationally and medically into the lives of widows, widowers, orphans, the sick, aged and less-privileged in Ora Igbomina and its environs. In the same vein, I am appreciative of my children belonging to the second generation. They uniquely and miraculously came as triplets, hence I describe them as my divine 50th birthday gift. They are Titilayo, Titilope and Titiniyiñ Ayantayo. While, the first

generation left home for school, the triplets are always there to play and sometimes disturb me in my library. Their disturbance is always helpful because it always comes at a time I ought to have paused and walked around having had my eyes glued to my laptop for over one hour at a stretch against medical advice. With this background, I am using this opportunity to show my gratitude to my dear wife, a lover of humanity, the best cook in the world, the most beautiful woman, current and fashionable, special mother (Iya Ibeta), ever loving wife, a lecturer, sociologist of religion and a good match. I mean the indefatigable Mrs. Gloria Njideka Ayantayo. I pray that God will compensate her for being a good mother of six children. By extension, I appreciate my numerous children who at one time or the other lived and are still living with us. Notable among them are Olaitan Falade, Pastor Adetoyese Folayan, Prince Ademakinwa Folayan, Prince Femi Idowu, Rachael Ayantayo, Blessing Ayantayo, Kizzito Anyaegbu, Olasunkanmi Fadipe, Popoola Seun and Yetunde Bamigboye.

Finally, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I thank all members of the audience here present, not only because of their attendance, but for the reason that (I believe) they will make use of the information in this lecture and join people of equal minds in creating a new Nigerian society. That is, where religious rancor will be avoided, religious practitioners will live by the ethos of the religions they profess and owe dearly, piously and holily on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and so on and so forth. Once again, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I thank you for counting me worthy to present this Inaugural Lecture, the first of its kind in the Faculty of Arts in year 2018.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, please permit me to round off this lecture as we depart from here for other engagements, by leaning on the words of Rumi who echoes the mind of God which I believe is important for God's abductors to note:

I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Muslim.
I am not of the East, nor of the West, not of the land,
nor of the sea,
I am not of Nature's mint, nor of the circling heavens.

I am not of earth, nor of water, nor of air, nor of fire:
 I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust, nor of
 existence, nor of entity.
 I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of
 Saqsin:
 I am not of the Kingdom of Iraq, nor of the country of
 Khorasan.
 I am not of this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise
 nor of Hell;
 I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and nor of
 Rizwan,
 My place is Placeless, my trace is Traceless;
 It is neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the
 Beloved.
 I have put duality away.
 I have seen that the two worlds are one;
 One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call (Rumi
 1898: 125)

With this, I humbly submit that God is for everybody and
 does not belong to anybody. He is the First, He is the Last, He
 is the Outward, and He is the Inward. On this note, I say to
 God be the glory for His faithfulness which stands for ever.

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BIODATA OF PROFESSOR JACOB KEHINDE AYANTAYO

Professor Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo was born on 8th April, 1965 to Chief Ayantayo Owolabi and Mrs. Felicia Oyetundun Agbeke, at Ile Oloyan Compound, Ora-Igbomina, Ifedayo local government, Osun State, Nigeria. He started his primary school education at St. Stephen's Anglican School on February 14, 1972 and finished in 1977. There was delay in the release of Common Entrance examination result in that year and hence, he had a six-month study at Modern School, Ila-Orangun, from where he proceeded to Ora Commercial Grammar School and completed his secondary education in 1982. After this, he was taken to Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife by his cousin (of blessed memory)—Oba Professor Joseph Ololade Folayan, Ilufemiloye Awuluwarae 1—a quintessential biochemist and later the Akesin of Ora (1990-2000).

At Ife, he got admitted into Oduduwa College, Ile-Ife, for Advanced Level studies between 1983 and 1985. This he completed with a fairly good grade that qualified him to get direct admission into the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in 1985. He passed with Second Class honours, Upper division and went for the NYSC service in 1988. Between 1989 and 1990, he went for his Master of Arts degree in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, where he also graduated with a grade that qualified him to proceed for a Ph.D research programme. He immediately enrolled for his Ph.D in Social Ethics in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan and completed the programme in 2000. He topped up the above qualifications with a foundational course in Peace and Conflicts Studies in 2004.

Professor Ayantayo started his career engagements with his first appointment as a class teacher between 18 February, 1991 and 30 July 1993 from where he resigned to take an appointment as a Lecturer III in 1993 at the Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun. He taught in this school for only two years and left for an appointment as Assistant

Lecturer in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan on 21 April, 1995. As a sound scholar, Professor J.K. Ayantayo rose from the grade of Assistant Lecturer to Lecturer II on October 1 1997; Lecturer I, October 1 2000; Senior Lecturer, October 1 2003; and finally a Professor on October 1 2009.

Professor Ayantayo has to his credit 1 monograph, 8 books and 70 articles in learned journals in local and international publication outlets. He has also supervised not less than 25 B.A. Long essays, 50 M.A. dissertations and 35 Ph.D Theses at universities and Theological seminaries. On administrative matters, Professor Ayantayo served as Sub-Dean General, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (2003-2005); Acting Head, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (2011-2013); Head of Department, Religious Studies (2017 till date); and Member of Senate, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (2011-2013 and 2014 to date). He was also the Editor of *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* (2010-2011) and currently General Editor, *Journal of African Society for the Study of Sociology and Ethics of Religions*.

He has served and is still serving as an External Examiner to the Departments of Religious Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye; University of Benin, Benin; Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos; and Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. He was appointed External Assessor on promotion cases in Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti; Babcock University, Ilishan Remo; Caleb University, Ogun State; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Legon, Ghana; Nigeria Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho and the Federal Colleges of Education in Okeene and Ikere.

Professor J.K. Ayantayo is a member of many secular and religious societies. As a Christian, he belongs to Church Warden Unit and Aanu Oluwa Society in the Christ Apostolic Church, Oke-Ife, Agbowo, Ibadan, where he is also a member of advisory committee for the Youth Fellowship. At the academic level, Professor Ayantayo is a member of learned societies such as West African Association of Theological

Institutions (WAATI), Nigerian Association for Christian Studies (NACS), Project for Christian-Muslim Relation in Africa (PROCUMURA), National Association for the Promotion of Studies in Arts and Social Science, Nigerian Association for the Study and Teaching of Religious and the Natural Sciences (NASTRNS) and Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologian (EATWOT). Others in this category include African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR), International Association for the Study of Economics and Religion (IASER), West Africa Network for Peace (WANEP), American Academy of Religion (AAR) and International Society for African Philosophy and Studies. It is important to note that he is the founder and pioneer president of African Society for the Study of Sociology and Ethics of Religions herein referred to as (ASSOSER).

As unrelenting scholar, Professor Ayantayo had at one time or the other attended and presented papers at International Conferences in places like University of Legon, Ghana, All African Conference of Churches, Nairobi; University of Botswana, Botswana, South Africa; California State University, Sacramento, USA; Universitat Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany; and Mount Febe, Cameroon. He has also attended many local conferences in at least 15 states in Nigeria. Not only these, he also participated in a colloquium on issues related to Tsunami Disaster and the Okija Shrine Episode. Professor Ayantayo is also a known name in broadcasting houses in Oyo and Osun States as a discussant on many social issues but with bias for the question of morality and religious organisation in Nigeria.

Outside the University, Professor Ayantayo has contributed to the development of humanity through the establishment of Esther Folorunso Ayantayo Foundation (EFA-F), which is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation, established on 27 August, 2010 to sustain the philanthropic ideals of his late wife (Princess (Mrs.) Esther Folorunso Ayantayo). The foundation envisions to remember the forgotten and better their lot with the aims of providing entrepreneurship skills and financial assistance to

the forgotten—widows, widowers, the physically challenged, orphans, the aged and the sick; organising annual lectures for the public towards inculcating societal values and building a community of people worthy in character; engaging the widows/widowers, children and youth in periodic guidance and counselling towards career and capacity building.

Professor Ayantayo is happily married and the marriage is blessed with three male and three female children belonging to two generations with each having three children. His philosophy of life is that there is no need to nurse pain or celebrate joy, for the two are temporary but the best thing to do is forging ahead towards a better future which will ultimately water down the bad past.

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Direct our noble cause
Guide thou our leaders right
Help our youths the truth to know
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And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace
And justice shall reign

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Help to build a world that is truly free

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Social justice, equal chance
Greatness won with honest toil
Guide our people this to know
Wisdom's best to service turned
Help enshrine the right to learn
For a mind that knows is a mind that's free