

UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN



THE THREE HUNDRED AND FOURTH (304TH) INAUGURAL LECTURE

“THE SIX BLIND MEN AND THE NIGERIAN ELEPHANT”

By

PROFESSOR AKITI GLORY ALAMU
B.A. (Hons) Ekpoma; M. A. (Ibadan); Ph.D. (Ilorin)

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIONS,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA**

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The Vice-Chancellor

Professor Wahab Olasupo Egbewole, SAN
LL.B (Hons) (Ife); B.L (Lagos); LL.M (Ife); Ph.D. (Ilorin),
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PROFESSOR AKITI GLORY ALAMU
B.A. (Hons) Ekpoma; M. A. (Ibadan); Ph.D. (Ilorin)

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Your Royal Highnesses and Chiefs,
Distinguished Students of the Department of Religions,
Greatest Unilorites,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Preamble

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I give all glory, honour and adoration to God, for this golden privilege accorded me to stand in front of this great audience to deliver the 304th Inaugural Lecture of the “*Better by Far*” University of Ilorin. The Psalmist said in II Sam 7: 18-22:

Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that you have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight O Lord God, and You have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come, is this the manner of man, O Lord God? For your word's sake, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them. Therefore, You are great, O Lord God. For there is none like You, nor is, there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

As a matter of fact, I sincerely appreciate this Inscrutable, Unassailable, Unstoppable, Incomparable, Unquestionable and Unsearchable God, to whom I am eternally grateful.

Today is a momentous occasion for me with deep sense of relevance. I stand here to deliver the 304th Inaugural Lecture as a Professor of Comparative and Sociology of Religion and a substantive Head of Department as well. This is Inaugural Lecture from the Department of Religions, a special and peculiar Department that houses tripodic programmes, which are Christian Studies, Comparative Religious Studies and Islamic Studies. The Inaugural Lecturer of today happens to be the first PhD graduand of Comparative Religious Studies and the second Professor to present his Inaugural Lecture in Comparative Religious Studies, being the 10th from the Department of Religions as presently constituted. Meanwhile, Professor Oyeronke Olademo presented her Inaugural Lecture on 23th June 2014 titled “*The Paradox of Love: Women and Religion in Society*”, being the first in Comparative Religious Studies Unit, 20th in the Faculty of Arts, the 8th from the old Department of Religions, and the 5th from the Department of Religions, as presently constituted. Professor Pius Oyeniran Abioje presented the 9th Inaugural Lecture series in the Department titled “*Christian Prophets and Other Prophets in Nigeria*” in 2017.

My Background

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, posterity will not be fair to me, if I fail to bring to the fore the people whose sacrifices, values and dedication laid foundation of all I have attained so far. I was born to the family of Late Mr. and Mrs. Sunday Usikhifo Alamu in the early seventies in Ivbiodohen, Okpuje, Owan-West Local Government Area, Edo State. My mother, Mrs. Jane Aizewanre Alamu, died on the 20th April, 2010. She witnessed my Ph.D. graduation in 2009, but did not live to enjoy her unputdownable efforts over me in particular and the entire children in general. She sacrificed her comfort for my education. It is interesting to note that she taught me hard work, resilience, determination and

perseverance in life. A lover of education, *par excellence*. As for my father, he passed on the 19th August, 2015, leaving me with memories of his unwavering belief in my potentials. His level of literacy helped me in navigating my formative educational years. I consistently learnt from them the power of belief, resilience and industry, which have greatly changed the trajectory of my life. In addition, their encouragements taught me dedication, determination, and the value of striving for excellence. Although, they are not here to witness my Inaugural Lecture, yet their legacies live on in every step I take in the perilous journey of life. May their souls, through the mercies of God, rest in peace (Amen).

As I deliver this inaugural lecture today, I share a story of hope, a story that reminds me of studying Religions in my alma mater. My friend, cousin, brother and my course mate, Benson Ohihon Igboin, now a Professor of Philosophy of Religion in the Department of Religion and African Culture, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Akoko, Ondo State and myself were seen by our contemporaries as studying the least course in the University. No doubt, we were derided and repelled by some of them. Interestingly enough, Igboin was seen as following his father's footstep because his father was a Catechist in St Philips Anglican Church, Ivbiodohen, while I was also following my late uncle's footstep who was an *Alagba* in Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim. However, we were undeterred by these unbridled and unchecked remarks, Instead, we were optimistically hopeful, resilient, persistent, and industrious. Today, we have got to the peak of our careers with the help of God. My friend has been inaugurated since July 2023, while I am being inaugurated today.

Vice-Chancellor Sir, after my documentation in September, 2001, my office mate, His Royal Highness, Abdulazeez Shola Agboola, the Oba of Agbekuland and a devout Muslim, gave me every reason to trust him. Sincerely, I find solace in him, having worked closely with him for 23 years. Despite his coronation in 2006, he remains humble, submissive and teachable. As a staff in the Department which accommodates

three programmes, he married three wives to demonstrate his calling and in accordance with the philosophy of the founding fathers. It is against this background that the thematic understanding of the outcome of the six blind men and the Nigerian elephant must be situated within the profound relativity of knowledge of every world's living religion.

Introduction

The Vice-Chancellor Sir, Comparative Religion is a relatively new subject or discipline that gained currency in the 19th century, when evolutionary theory pioneered by Charles Darwin was applied to the study of religion (Alamu, 2024). It is a discipline started on the 19th February, 1870, when Frederick Max Muller delivered his monumental speech on the science of religion. In the words of Sharpe (1987), the subject or discipline became current in the late nineteenth century as a synonym for the German expression *Religionswissenschaft* (the science of religion) and French expression *La science du religion*. Dopamu (2000), one of the doyens of Comparative Religion posited that Comparative Religion as associated with the brainwork of Frederick Max Muller, a German philologist, was influenced by the theory of evolution which emerged in the late nineteenth century. This theory, according to Dopamu (2000), was applied to the materials available on the world's different religious beliefs and practices to build up an obvious picture of the history of religion on evolutionary pedestals. Max Muller did not only establish the credentials as well as of comparative study of religion, but also provided valuable material on which to base it; hence he published several books to consolidate it. The most essential of these therefore, is the fifty-volume series on *Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910), which exposed and opened the eyes of the West to the religions of the East (Umejesi, 1995).

Alamu (2012, 2024) expresses the fact that before now, some western scholars and students alike had always misinterpreted Eastern religious traditions. All these outlandish errors and assumptions prompted Frederick Max Muller to produce the fifty-volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East* which exposed Western scholars and students to the veracity and

validity of the religions of the East. Gbenda (2006) adds that other pioneer scholars in the same field of study after Max Muller included E.B. Tylor, James G. Frazer, Andrew Lang, J. F. Laftau, W. Wudt, among others. With the recognition of Comparative Study of Religion today, so many religions in the world are easily known as the world gets smaller and closer by virtue of information and communication technology. Thus, these many religions include African Religion, Hinduism, Judaism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism (Alamu, 2021; Alamu, 2024).

The impacts of these various faiths are more felt globally. Therefore, University of Punjab was the first to establish Department of Comparative Religion in 1924. Later on, Professor A.C. Bouquet became pioneer lecturer in the Department of History and Comparative Study of Religions in the University of Cambridge in 1952. Late Professor Innocent Ogonna Umejiesi of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma obtained his Ph.D. in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. On his arrival in Nigeria, he began to spread the gospel of Comparative Study of Religions to Southern parts of Nigeria since 1990s. Late Ade Peter Dopamu (Professor of Comparative and African Religion) became a leading figure in this direction by establishing Comparative Religious Studies Unit in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin in 1981. So far, University of Ilorin is the only University in Nigeria running Comparative Religions. The Inaugural Lecturer of today was privileged to drink from the academic well of these two Nigerian Comparative Religious Juggernauts. Comparative Study of Religions has made interested scholars and students to know much about the historical antecedence of the world's contemporary religions (Alamu, 2024).

Alamu (2024) posits that Comparative Religions is the study of a phenomenon of religion that lends credence to descriptive, historical, systematic and hermeneutical approach to the study and understanding of religious beliefs. Comparative Religion is also described as “Comparative Study of Religions”.

Kasiera (1990) defines Comparative Religion as “the study of the inter-relation of the various religious traditions and of the way in which religious themes and ideas are fused in these traditions”. The above reveals that the essence of Comparative Religions is to understand the various religions and to as well identify their similarities and differences. In the submissions of Tiwari (1983) “Comparative Religion is a comparative study of the important features of the different religions of the world in a perfectly scientific spirit. Dopamu (2000) in his *Esu: The Invisible Foe of Man*, states that:

Comparative Religion as a study is not restricted to comparisons between religions, but it involves comparisons between concepts, themes, elements, topics or phenomena of different religions. A real comparative study of the religions of the world must take into account the fact that similar themes and concepts abound in world religions just as they differ in many respects.

Reviewing Dopamu’s submission, it is significant to remark that what makes his definition peculiar is the fact that issues such as concepts, themes, doctrines, topics, phenomena and elements are evident in it. He believes strongly and uncompromisingly that there are certain things which religions share in common with respect to beliefs, practices and values (Alamu, 2024). Consequently, **Alamu** (2012) and **Alamu** (2024) assert remarkably that Comparative Religion is the systematic and scientific study of all living religions with the aim of comparing their concepts, themes, doctrines, liturgies, traditions among others and to explore areas of common interest or convergence and points of departure.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, in view of the foregoing, it is an aberration for a student or a scholar of comparative religion to be biased or one-sided in treating or dealing with all living religions. It is not out of place for a student or a scholar of comparative religion to adorn himself/herself with the garb of scientific objectivity, sympathy, charity, open-mindedness, tolerance, unbiasedness and fairness (Tiwari, 1983). This stance is similar to Idowu’s (1989) five highway codes of charity,

sociableness, participation, open-mindedness and experiential sympathy. Besides, true emphasis is placed on the fact that whoever is evaluating religions must ensure mastery of them, because knowledge leads to understanding, and understanding leads to tolerance of people with different viewpoints. In the final analysis, **Alamu** (2012) posits that it is the responsibility of students or scholars of comparative religion as a discipline to equip themselves with the basics and adequate knowledge of other faiths in order to respect and as well acknowledge others “for he who knows one knows none” (Sharpe, 1984).

Research Quandary

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, in my twenty-four years of scholarly research, religion has been contemptuously and disparagingly interpreted and misrepresented to mean otherwise. Instead of religion to develop mankind, contribute immensely to the progress of the society and foster an enabling and enduring peace, it has been made to mar the beautiful earth, threaten global peace and as a scapegoat in the several violence we have so far witnessed in the Nigerian society and the world generally. In other words, human factor has got religion implicated in the various conflagrations (**Alamu**, 2010). In a plain language, Tasie (2001) has described Nigerian kind of religion as a bad one. We practise a “bad Christianity and a bad Islam”. Awolalu (2005) unequivocally buttresses further that “we tend to forget even the ideas or the tenets of the religion we profess, and so, we foolishly commit sins and wrong God when our passions drive us mad. No religion allows you to kill your fellow human beings or destroy his means of livelihood, just because he does not approach God in the way you do”. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, we are all blind people trying to touch the elephant. May God restore our sight. Dopamu (2001) supports the fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and faiths, but of all these diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive, volatile and touchy and as well as one that has often led to hatred and division. Put differently, he avers stoutly that religion has not failed mankind; rather, human factor has turned religion into two-edged sword-division and cohesion (**Alamu**, 2012). No

doubt, religion in contemporary Nigeria has truly become a hydra-edge sword that heals, divides, inspires, paralyses, builds and destroys.

As a foreground to show more discontents on religious rhetoric, some religious extremists hijack the language of religion to pursue agenda of power, control and division, and in so doing, their religious rhetoric becomes one of the most significant barriers to national progress, coupled with unpatriotic and fanatical tendencies, to stoke the various conflagrations when the need arises. This is the reason why religion in Nigeria is detached from ethics. Apart from the foregoing, Dopamu (1984) again asserts that what we know as religious particularity has often armed itself with sharp poisonous teeth biting hard here and there, among the adherents of, in particular, these two religions—Islam and Christianity (**Alamu**, 2012). Thus, in Nigeria, religion today, has been politicised and politics has been religionised.

The incursion of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria has suddenly and badly promoted the height of insecurity and religious war as Idowu (1996) rightly posits:

Ours is a tired, distracted, and distressed world... the world is in chaos, confusion and violence walk the streets, the scepters of war are haunting mankind, there are wars going on incessantly in several parts of the world and these have become the order of the day...the nations of Africa are in constant fear of what the next hour might bring (p. 231).

Gleaning through the wide-ranging projection of the adverse nature of religion, especially in contemporary Nigeria, **Alamu** (2024) bemoans these vices as coming of age with their corresponding implications in society. Indeed, some practitioners of Islamic and Christian religions have also aggravated the quest for peace as a result of their religious particularity. Each religion violates peace by internal divisions or disagreements over non-essentials, so also religion quarrels with religion in consequence of perverted particularity (Idowu, 1996). In sum, religious particularity is the belief that one specific religion possesses the

ultimate truth distinct from others (Alamu, 2024). The vestibule of religion has been weaponised that some religious conservatives, zealots and bigots freely use to maim “in the name of religion” (Quadri, 2013, p.24).

Ayantayo (2025) unpacks additional factors that facilitate religious crises in Nigeria to include bias, insensitivity to religious beliefs, cultural imperialism, vulgar language, exploiting adherents’ vulnerability, trivialising volatility of religious remarks, stereotyping and over-generalising. In today’s world, some religions and their practitioners have re-written the ideals of the old ones by attributing blindness, ignorance, stupidity, misinformation and blanket rejection of the archetype of the Holy writs. Wilson *et.al* (2025) assert that we also struggle with egocentric bias of which we convince ourselves of the accuracy of our own personal perspective-that we rate ourselves as impeccable, and therefore struggle to acknowledge or antagonise any perspectives or data that may alter our understanding of the universe. This damning behaviour for us is holding back progress for overall growth. Our inability to internalise religious motifs through religious text and context is blindfolding. This intense blindness of six men and the Nigerian elephant *sui generi* constitutes the bulwark of this lecture.

More so, my research efforts on ‘religion as a scapegoat in the ethno-political violence in Nigeria’ have also revealed that religions in Nigeria have the propensity of intensifying existing tensions and making conflict more difficult to resolve. Such conflicts have not only caused immense human and material losses, but have also threatened national unity, social cohesion and sustainable development. In addition, some religious leaders-Imams, *Alfas*, Bishops, Pastors and Traditional Priests have played negative roles of generating inflammatory rhetoric which, quite often, have exacerbated tensions. Through the medium, religious laws are imposed and foisted on the people by force and sometimes by violence and bloodshed (Alamu, 2012). The foregoing has, at a glance, brought out the contour of religious blindness that has retarded and impinged harmonious co-existence and new development. From all indications, it is

clear that problem here is not God or Religion, but how we apply His teachings. Religion is not meant to be a weapon in our hands or a tool to harm our neighbours and divide our nation. Rather, it is intended to be a bridge—a bridge to the divine, to our better selves, and most significantly a bridge to peaceful co-existence (Nwosu, 2025).

The Panoramic Overview of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant

In my encounter as a student of comparative religion or “La Science du religion” or *religionswissenschaft* in Germany, I was exposed systematically to the fact that knowledge is partial and relative. In his lecture titled “Introducing Asian Religions”, Umejesi (1995) dwells on ‘Jainism’, one of the Asian religions which teach harmlessness and non-violence. Jainism, one of the reformatory religions from Hinduism becomes famous and prominent as a result of its time-honoured parable of the six blind indostans and the elephant. Umejesi (1995) further buttresses that this parable finds theological expression in the doctrine of relativity of knowledge and truth, in the Old Indian tale. According to the tale, six blind Indostans were eager to know what the elephant, one of the biggest animals in the universe looked like. They were presented with the elephant, but they could only feel it by placing their hands at various parts of the elephant.

The first felt the broad and sturdy side of the elephant and screamed that the elephant was just like a wall. The second blind man, who held the tusk, said that elephant was like a spear. The third man handled the trunk of the elephant and shouted that the elephant resembled a snake. The fourth blind man that held a limb said it was a like tree. Thus, the fifth blind Indostan that felt its lobe averred that it was like a fan, while the sixth one said its swinging tail looked like a rope. In the light of foregoing, the six blind Indostans went home arguing among themselves on the shape of the elephant, each stuck to what he felt about the elephant, depending on what part of the animal he had touched. The inference to be drawn from this time-honoured story, as the Jains maintain, is that errors prey on all human perceptions, for

each of the blind Indostans was correct in describing the part of the elephant he had touched, none of them had the correct picture of the whole elephant. This parable speaks of immense tolerance and hospitality at the expense of claims to Truth, Absolutism and Exclusivism. Thus, this religion encourages tolerance, non-violence, harmlessness and avoids blood-bath. To this end, Umejesi (2010) comments that knowledge is only relative and partial, nothing is absolutely true or false. To him, this approach is subjective, which is not valid to philosophers. Thus, a branch of philosophy called epistemology is averse to this subjective experience, rather it posits that error preys because ignorance is promoted.

This time-honoured parable from India has been adopted by many religions and published in various stories for adults and children in order to promote harmonious co-existence, understanding, accommodation and tolerance. The pristine nature of this story was presented in a poetic satire, which takes shape in this paradigm by Griffiths (2026):

*So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance,
Of what each other mean,
And prate about the Elephant,
Not one of them has seen!*

Many literary interpreters may say that this inquisition is fascinating and touching as allegory of the presence of God. Others will say that it is showing people how stupid mankind can be. Some say it is anti-scholastic, while others will describe it just a tale copied by *Rumi* from *Sanai*. In view of the above, this poem satirises human perception and the epistemological limitations. It reflexes the time period in its focus on religious and philosophical debates, where different viewpoints often led to conflict and misunderstanding. The poem highlights the significance of considering multiple perspectives and seeking a comprehensive understanding rather than relying solely on partial or incomplete information. It also critiques the tendency

of individuals to cling to their own beliefs and dismiss conflicting views, a flaw that persists in modern society.

In retrospect, the story of the six blind men and an elephant originated from the Jains. It has been used to convey truths, fallacies and ignorance. Broadly speaking, the parable implies that one's subjective experience is inherently limited by its failure to account for other truths or a totality of truth. At various epochs, the parable has provided insight into the relativism, opaqueness or inexpressible nature of truth. Wilson, *et al.* (1992, 1997, 2006) show within the parable that the research often focuses on various parts or aspects of the process, but not many times, it will give an overview of the whole process. The starting point is that every researcher tells the truth, based on his/her observations, combining these truths given an impression of the aggregated truth, which is still not the whole truth. The six men could not look inside the elephant, they only touch the outside. Besides, the six blind men could not access the memory of the elephant. In long pipelines, the overall behaviour of the slurry flow does depend on the history, so the memory function is also important. The additional interpretation points to the fact that the blind Indostans discovered their disagreement and suspecting each other not to be telling the obvious came to blow. But a wise man intercepted the parable and described the entire elephant from the various perceptive. The blind men then learnt that they were all partially correct and partially wrong. While one's subjective experience is true, it may not be the totality of the truth.

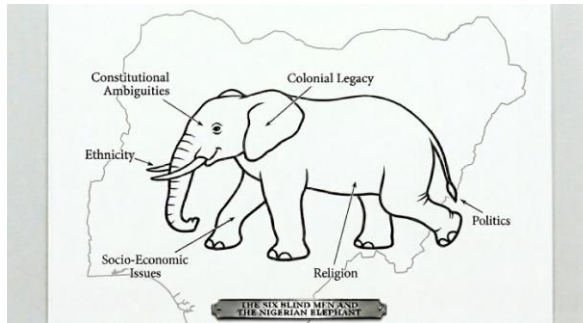
The parable of the six blindmen and the elephant illustrates the principle of many-sidedness of reality and conditional predication, teaching that the truth has multiple perspectives and no simple viewpoint captures the whole truth. Again, it highlights intellectual humility, respect for other views, and the pursuit of a holistic understanding to avoid conflict and gain more complete truth. A simple lesson of the parable points to a partial point of view. On the one hand, a partial knowledge illustrates the tendency to claim absolute truth based on limited subjective experience and philosophical ignorance. By

considering multiple strands, we can gain a more overall understanding of the concepts and their interconnectedness. This approach encourages a more thorough and nuanced comprehension of other principles, akin to the blind men collaborating to understand the full shape of the elephant. In essence, the story of the six blind men and the elephant emphasizes the importance of embracing both partial points of view and philosophical ignorance so as to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The core philosophical concept of this parable depicts reality that is multifaceted and can be viewed from many standpoints. Its emphasis lies on harmony, tolerance and philosophical ignorance. Thus, the story highlights the relevance of respecting differing points of view as each perspective can hold a partial truth within a complex reality, fostering greater tolerance and cooperation. Tersely speaking, Wilson, et al, (1992) explained that the interpretation of six blind men's view on the elephant rested on their perceived ignorance philosophically. In other words, the philosophical reflection of this parable points to ignorance of the entire elephant. This is because, under philosophical discourse, the six blind men showcased agnotology which simply means ignorance. The philosophical exercise of epistemology and agnotology was displayed by the six blind men over the elephant which we shall dwell on shortly.

The Six Blindmen and the Nigerian Elephant

Vice Chancellor sir, as a disciple of Comparative Religion, the six blind men in Nigeria manifest in the major perennial issues which we always interpret with religious eye bird's view. The six blindmen include religion: the Nigerian mentality, colonial legacy: an evil incubator, ethnicity: a toxic disconnect, politics: a Nigerian trademark of cash and carry, constitutional ambiguities: a product of blindness, and socio-economic issues with *Medusa* face. The six blind men and the Nigerian elephant are further illustrated with the aid of this diagram:



Thus, these six blindmen are products of ignorance because every blind man acknowledges the place of partial or relative knowledge without seeing the elephant in its entirety. The study shows that all these six blind men take solace in religion to showcase their ignorance-agnostology.

Robert and Schnebinger (2008) define agnotology as the academic study of culturally constructed ignorance or doubt, which examines how deliberate misinformation, secrecy and manufactured controversies are used by powerful entities to prevent the public from accepting established facts or scientific consensus. Agnotology is also viewed as a weapon and an active creation, which asks “why don’t we know what we don’t know”. Agnotology is “the process of intentionally creating or encouraging doubt or ignorance, lack of knowledge, for example, by spreading false information”. Reihe (2026) describes agnotology as the study of how and why ignorance or misconception exists.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, it will interest you to note that epistemological questions of how we know, and agnotological questions of why we do not know is crucial and critical in this lecture. As a matter of fact, ignorance is not merely the absence of knowledge, but an outcome of cultural and political struggle. The six blind men apart from their ignorance, create doubt, suppress truth, conflicting or inconclusive results, leading to ‘analysis paralyses’ among the structural biases, where difficult or unflattering historical or social realities are omitted from standard. It is worthy of note that these six blindmen exhibit lack

of knowledge in all standards whether relative or partial. And these six blindmen and the Nigerian elephant must be discussed in the light of the foregoing.

Religion: The Nigerian Mentality

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, it is not an understatement to note that out of the twelve world religions, the most prominent and predominant ones in Nigeria are African Religion, Islam and Christianity. Religion, being the first and overall foundation of other institutions in the human society, has been used to mar the society as a weapon of war. As a result of the sensitive, volatile and touchy nature of religion- some adherents of these religions- African Religion, Islam and Christianity especially in the Northern part of the country use them as weapon for destructive, heinous, deadly and daring activities leading to untimely and unprecedented death of innocent lives (**Alamu**, 2024). **Alamu** (2012) and **Alamu** (2024) buttress further that for over five decades in Nigeria, some religious manipulators, bigots, fundamentalists and fanatics have turned religion into a machinery or instrument of war, desperation and violence thereby turning the beautiful world into a blood-letting and life-taking environment, soaked with human blood.

Religious violence in Nigeria started in the 1970s, precisely with Maitatsine disturbance in 1977, which metamorphosed to El-zak-zaky phenomenon that also led to the several reprisal attacks in the South-West and in the East. *Boko Haram*, which many Islamic scholars have eventually considered as being perpetuated by non-Muslims, is an endless unprecedented dimension of religious violence in Nigeria. It, therefore, becomes expedient to cursorily look at the remote causes of religious crises in contemporary Nigerian society. They include but not limited to religious exclusivity, particularity, fanaticism, fundamentalism and Manipulations. Religious exclusivity becomes evident in its superiority and absolutism among Christians and Muslims. Apparently, “Christianity and Islam claim to have absolute superiority and exclusive right of attaining God’s salvation. In making claims of

the monopoly of religious truth and salvation, they even exclude each other” (Kukah, 1993). However, Ayandele (1978) rightly notes that:

Christians and Muslims have been more guilty than African Religious adherents by being the most articulated in denigrating the others, adopting a negative and therefore, an unrewarding attitude towards the other religious communities, religions they little understand till today.

Obviously speaking, the exclusive remark of salvation finds theological expression in their popular parlance “*extra ecclesian nulla salus*” = outside the church no salvation, while the Muslims on the other hand frown at ‘Shirk’ i.e. associating partners with Allah is an unforgivable sin in Islam.

Religious Particularity, according to Olukunle (1980) means “...the belief that one’s religion is the only religion that is ordained by God and acceptable to God to the total exclusion of others” Dopamu (1984, p.79) opines that:

the sting of differences and controversy is felt in the two scriptural religions of Islam and Christianity. What is known as particularity has often armed itself with sharp, poisonous teeth, biting hard here and there among the adherents of these two religions. It has also led to division, hatred and prejudice. In some quarters, it has gone beyond the sphere of religious antagonism; it has spread like an epidemic into social, economic and political realm (p.67).

Osasona (1998) and Ali (1968) simultaneously argue that the claim for particularity of a religion is for selfish interest of those promoting religious crisis and, not for the defence of God.

Looking at the submissions of Olukunle (1980), Dopamu (1984), Osasona (1998) and Ali (1968) on religious particularity, the fact remains that it is the belief that a specific religious faith, teaching and truth claim is uniquely authentic or the only exclusive way to spiritual salvation. It also emphasizes the

distinct tradition and specific nature of a faith, discarding generalised or global concepts of religious truth. This religious particularity promotes open hostility, mutual suspicion, mistrust or fear of surprise attack (**Alamu**, 2021). Both Ali (1968) and Osasona (1998) heckled a thought-provoking question: of what parameter or calculus is used to gauge or measure the best religion? Conversely, the post-modern theological views on religious particularity have carved out a framework that respects the uniqueness of each tradition, arguing that traditions should hold their distinct truth claims without trying to merge all faiths into a single universal category. To this end, religious particularity focuses on the specific unrepeatable characteristics of a single tradition.

Religious Fanaticism is a process where adherents of Islam and Christianity, by virtue of their rigidity, try to destroy other religions as a result of their own cultural and historical background. This religious situation is also described by Mala (1985) as a “naughty child of a difficult mother”, which has often led to hatred, anarchy, lawlessness and senseless killings in the defence of God. As a matter of fact, Islam and Christianity that have the same Semitic or Abrahamic origin, attack each other on doctrinal issues as if the belief of one neutralizes the other. As observed elsewhere (2021), these religions are guilty of superiority claim, which ironically has produced many contradictions that have shaken the foundation and confidence of the Nigerian nation (**Alamu**, 2021).

Religious Fundamentalism as a concept evolved in the 20th century which relates to strict adherence to doctrine, and it subsequently gained currency in the religious milieu. Charles Ryerson (2000) describes fundamentalism as ‘a bastard child’, while Igboin (2010) tries to unearth the undercurrent of a bastard child in the context of Ryerson. Naturally, a bastard child is always demanding to know his father. He creates trouble out of peace, problem out of solution, disorder from order, sadness from happiness, and fear from security in search of his father. He is emotive and easily provoked.

Religious Manipulation is also called religious extremists. Religious manipulators twist religious holy writ to suit their purpose. In other words, they manipulate religions and their followers to pursue their agendas and ambitions, of which religion is not the foundation of such agitation. These religious manipulators use religion as convenient legitimization for political agendas, based on non-religious interest as opposed to movement genuinely inspired by religion (Alamu, 2021). Furthermore, all the religious leaders and instructors should stop inculcating wrong doctrines and by inciting unassuming members, followers or congregations to see other religious groups as infidels, unbelievers and enemies. Usman (1987) supports the above by stating that systematic manipulation of religion has reached its climax in its opposition to the unity of the people in Nigeria. Many of those who are stakeholders are fanatical. Olaniyi (2001) sees these many religious stakeholders as dishonest people who call for peace on the pages of newspapers and other media, but plant seeds of discord in their places of worship, inciting their followers to defend their faiths with their blood, while hiding and leaving their unsuspecting followers to die. Moreover, some of these religious vendors should avoid using insults and vitriolic statement to describe any religion. At times, these vulgar and vitriolic statements can be spiteful and derogatory, thus resulting in mayhem because of the volatility of religion in Nigeria.

Some of these religious extremists in Nigeria have the penchant for misinterpreting the sacred books and inculcating wrong ideological teachings of the sacred texts. Thus, these religious fanatics are involved in this unending war of monopoly of truth claims, my God is Superior, particularity and contestation of space (Alamu, 2024). However, studies have shown that these religions in Nigeria have the concept of peace in their motifs. For instance, African Religion possesses communality and we-feeling, as parts of her doctrines. Even, Islam means *Daru al-Salam*- the abode of peace, while Christianity entails love and *Shalom*-peace (Alamu, 2024). The paradoxical question is: why the religious war or intolerance

among them? Meyer (2006) asserts that religion exacerbates the tendency to divide people into friends and enemies, good and evil, us and them. He further says that people enjoy killing in the name of God, while Meterman's (2003) piece captions violence in God's name. It will be worthwhile to state that religion in this paradoxical age aids intolerance in contemporary Nigeria. Besides Boko Haram, herdsman phenomenon and kidnapping; banditry and ritual killings have also increased the already skewed and subtle situations on ground (Alamu, 2021). Nevertheless, Alamu has catalogued or stockpiled the various religious crises that have greeted and still greet Nigeria so far.

To this end, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, the aftermaths of these crises have defaced the nation with the blood of the innocent and unassuming followers. For them, these are not still enough by all standards. These evils wearing religious garbs give eloquent testimonies to the litany of woes experienced in contemporary Nigeria. Therefore, this inaugural lecture titled 'The six blind men and the Nigerian Elephant' was conceived to puncture the religious balloon of falsehood with the pin of today's reality.

Colonial Legacy: An Evil Incubator

The creation of the Nigerian state was birthed by amalgamation of the North and the South protectorates in 1914. However, this 1914 amalgamation did not unify the country. The fact about the forced fusion remains that the colonialists fractured our social and spiritual unity, and sacrificed them at the altar of divide-and-rule tactics. The Willinks Commission established by the British Colonial administration in September 1957 was to investigate the fears of domination expressed by the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria ahead of the country's independence. Its terms of reference were to investigate minorities in the Northern, Eastern, and Western regions with the fear that they would be politically, socially and economically marginalized by the major ethnic groups. Despite the recommendations of the Chairman, Sir Henry Willink, on the enshrinement of bill of rights, Federal Police, Niger Delta

Development Board and Special courts, the Northern Region, faulted it because they were not ready to subject themselves to any court other than that based on Sharia law (Rahim, 2013).

Lack of vision, foresight and blindness made the Willinks Commission of 1957 to abysmally fail. The foregoing submission has shown that with the exhibition of ignorance and blindness, their impacts are still felt till date because Nigeria is a major epicentre where there is geographical overlap between the Islamic majority North, and the Christian majority South, which often creates volatile zones of intense religious, political and sectarian tension. My research engagements on colonial studies thus far show that no government has attempted to take the bull by the horn and take off time to inquire about the primordial failure of these colonial legacies. Hence, colonial powers failed to interact with indigenous traditions.

Even in the post-colonial period, the colonial legacies still have *domino* effects on the masses, but the fact remains that religion gets implicated in the whole scenario. This level of blindness made Kukah (1993) to remark that colonialists did not help in sharpening the boundaries of prejudices, which have now come to dominate our landscape. According to him, “In Nigeria, for example, British Colonialism was enamored with the Fulani whom they believed were imbued with leadership qualities. This thinking later took root in the midst of the Fulani and made them unresponsive to the quest of the other citizens for a place in the power ladder in Nigeria” (Kukah, 1993). Consequently, the boundaries of prejudices have given impetus to Northern hegemony by asserting its ethnic superiority over ethnic minority of the South. **Alamu** (2021) argues that the supremacy of the North for power, dominance and control led to the balkanisation of true freedom or regional system of government in our nationhood.

Ethnicity: A Toxic Disconnect

Ethnicity can be approached as a socially used cultural symbol of complementarity of “we are what they are not” (Salamone, 1991). Ethnicity, according to Nnoli (1978) may be

regarded as a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups. Francis cited by Olayode (1991) remarks that ethnicity has cultural affinities that manifest in shared linguistic, religious, racial or other faces, which enable one community to differentiate itself from others. The aphorism of WAZOBIA in the three Major ethnic groups viz: Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo nationalities have dominated other heterogenous groups of over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. This imbalance in the structure of Nigeria in the area of ethnic majority of the North over the Southern group, especially on the basis of population and religion, negates the federal character, and this has led to the monopolisation of political power, usurpation of privileges and subordination of one group by the others. Quadri (2013) avers that “ethnicity is (the) factor responsible for some of the so-called religious crises in Nigeria”. The winner-takes-all attitude of the Hausa/Fulani hegemony is an off short of ethno-religiosity which makes Kukah (1993) to opine that “the Northern Muslims elites have not developed a moral basis for adequate power sharing with their Christian co-religionists”. Kukah (2003) clearly states that ethnicity and religion become as baits for the triumph of mediocrity have therefore ended up reinforcing prejudice and driving Nigerians to their various ethnic, religious and regional laagers where siege mentality thrives.

Recent studies on “*Religion and Ethnicity as Baits for the Triumph of Mediocrity in Nigeria: Reconnecting the Disconnect through Federalism*” 2021, and “*Towards Curbing the Pristine Musketeers in the Nigerian Political Space*” (2024) have shown that this ethnic inequality transgresses against federal character commission and its formation. This lopsidedness on the part of ethnicity opens up rooms for mediocres, irrational leadership, kakistocratic government and fabricated integrity. It is ripe to address this blindness that has been causing religious intolerance and crises.

Politics: The Nigerian Trademark of ‘Cash and Carry’

Politics, in all sense of the word, talks about political formation, power, allocation of scarce resources and among

others. In the annals of Nigerian political history, formations of political parties, electoral offices and political leaderships are drawn alongside religious affiliations. Since independence in 1960 to date, sixteen political leaders have ruled the Nigerian nation of which ten of the sixteen are predominantly Northerners. This had further buttressed the dominance of Northern political hegemony. Ovwasa and Idowu (2010) opine that in the political arena, there have been a Northern domination and monopoly of political power at the expense of the other regions. In other words, the North has ruled Nigeria for a collective period of 51 years out of Nigeria's 65 years of post-independent period.

It is trite to note that the geography of politics in Nigeria permeates the geography of religion. In Nigeria, it is obvious that formation of political parties is built on ethnicity, which has strong leaning on religion. From the era of Action Group (AG), Northern People Congress (NPC) and National Congress for the Nigerians and Cameroons (NCNC) in the 1960s to the period of People Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Congress (APC) and Action Congress (AC) (**Alamu**, 2011), it has been ethnic based with religious colouration. **Alamu** (2011) remarks that in the annals of Nigerian politics, there is the consciousness of religious consideration in the choice of a leader or leaders. The political contestants are either Christians or Muslims. Today, these religious cleavages have deepened so much that they serve as a check and balance in the choice of a candidate and running mate. Today's politics in Nigeria is politics of the highest bidder, apart from wearing religious gown.

Furthermore, my research effort has discovered that the God we created in our image and likeness dictates the Nigerian political space. In recent times, we hear remarks such as "God will choose good leaders for us, "Let us pray for good leaders", and so on. This singular reason compels **Alamu** (2023) to ask the following questions; "Does God conduct elections or vote during elections?" "Is Nigeria a theocratic or democratic nation in the 21st Century political space"?

Nevertheless, religion, in all sense, is seen as playing an advisory role to any constituted government. It is also used for political mobilisation, it aids contestants in prayer and it conscientises electorates on the acts of political awareness and participation (**Alamu**, 2003). Consequently, religions now turn into a strong political weapon in the Nigerian politics. Be that as it may, religious leaning is not healthy for the nation polity. This is a reckless high-stake game of power which is likely to end in disaster and misrule. Corroborating the foregoing arguments of **Alamu** (2003), Kukah (2003) condemns the fact that employing religion in Nigerian politics is ridiculous. He further enunciates that those political mobilisers have become arrogant in exploring and exploiting religion to their own advantage, which is a minus to the entire nation. We could also recall crises and debates on the choice of Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket in 2023 general elections. This was another religious connotation of this political decision. This is the blindness and religious volatility that has defined the direction of the Nigerian politics.

Constitutional Ambiguities: A Product of Blindness

Constitution in a simple language is a legal tool or machinery put in place to regulate the conducts of humankind. In retrospect, the received law which comprised English common law, doctrines of equity and statutes of general application came into force on January 1st 1900. Meanwhile, these laws and statutes were developed by the Lord Chancellor in the English court of chancery to mitigate the harshness and rigidity that were in the common law (**Alamu**; 2021).

The English law has been applied by both English Judges and Nigerian Judges. Despite the Nigerian Independence from the English colonisers, the English law is still applied in the Nigerian courts. However, Nwabueze (1963) reacts to the common law thus; “the common law our courts have been enjoined to apply is not the common law of England, but the legal system and habits of legal thoughts that Englishmen have evolved... the stark reality of the situation is that our courts apply the common law of England (1963). In line with this

thought, Park (1963) argues that “time was ripe, indeed long overdue; to force Nigerian law from development of English law, regarding the formula of England as a retrograde step, for it effectively prevents the development of a uniquely Nigerian common law”.

In the light of the foregoing, the secular status of the common law in a pluralistic or multi-religious nation like Nigeria, its interpretation and application are more intricate and complex. The interpretation becomes fluid because it was a product of the traditions as preserved by the Christian church. The Northerners see it as somehow incompatible with their background, since there has not been modification and interpolation since its inception (**Alamu**, 2021). This seriously informed why the English common law is much relatively implemented in the South, but in the North, there is high systematised and sophisticated Muslim law of crime that emanated from the “Maliki Law” that later culminated in Sharia law (**Alamu**, 2021).

Against this background, Isokun (1998) argues that the English legal system over the years has been modified along the line of penal code, which was initially meant to incorporate ‘local legislation and regulation’, essentially of Islamic values and principles of justice. Today, English Common Law, and local legislation of Islamic values and principles tamper with the secular nature of the Constitution as amended which prohibits the adoption of a state religion, both at the federal and state levels. “The government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt or support any religion as state religion”. In furtherance to this, Section 38 of 1999 Constitution as amended guarantees the citizens the rights to practise their religions and freedom to change their religion or belief.

No doubt, the incorporation of local legislations and regulations brings about challenges of having various kinds and standards of values for a people that aspire to be one of a natural values, goals and aspirations. The ambiguities in the Nigerian Constitution have been aiding religious violence based on its interpretation. This overlap and bipolarity in the Nigerian

Constitution has in no small measure assisted ethno-political imbalance. No doubt, this disparity propelled Goodluck Jonathan in 2014 to call for a confab, so that all these grey areas in the Nigerian Constitution could be addressed. Following the confab, with its terms of reference, no iota of its findings has been discussed or implemented. Its non-implementation portrays ignorance, unseriousness and insincerity, which are products of blindness. With this religious tension on the nature of secular state. Gaiya (2004) explains that, "there is the competition by Muslims to assert that Nigeria is not what the constitution defines. Christians, on the other hand, understand the constitutional provision for what it stands for, and they seem to be comfortable with it for the sake of peaceful co-existence". However, El-Zak-Zaky's Islamic sect rejects the ideals of a secular state in the Nigerian constitution, which compels the Muslims to see the constitution as committing the sins of omission and to the Christians as sins of commission.

Socio-economic Issues with Medusa Face

It is interesting if not sad to note that the nation is in perpetual search for security because it has lost its security at the altar of political expediency. Security in the Nigerian state has become a major concern in recent times. Cases of abduction, terrorism, banditry, senseless killings and burgeoning restlessness have been unabatedly rampant. Thus, the Nigerian citizens despite the security apparatus to ensure safety and protection of lives and property are incessantly living in perpetual fear and worry. No doubt, Boko Haram and Fulani herders are not left out these moral evils in Nigeria (Alamu, 2021). The security situation of Nigeria is in a mess. Corruption in Nigeria is like a carnival without rule. The moral situation has broken down totally. With regard to economic situation in Nigeria, it is clear that inflation is either bumper or hyper. Again, this insecurity has adversely affected economic opportunities in Nigeria. Proportional numbers of investors in Nigeria are now in dilemma, because no one can invest in an unsafe or insecure environment as this will expose their investments to the threat of

monumental waste. In Nigeria, people can no longer sleep with their two eyes closed and they can no longer travel as a result of the fear of kidnapping or banditry. In fact, poverty in Nigeria has a *medusa* face and which has prompted some experts to paint Nigeria as poverty-stricken nation.

With regard to the Nigerian economy, there is nothing heart-warming because of the economic instability, hyper-inflation and policy somersault. These signs of decay, from politics to religion and from economy to morality, are a grand conspiracy of the combined forces of decay and degeneration in Nigeria (Alamu, 2021). In the case of Nigerian economy, there is stark inflation precipitated and aggravated by poverty, unemployment and instability. However, the Nigerian economy is further bastardised by some corrupt-minded leaders in the society.

Ehusani (2002) is apposite when he writes that the ‘elect’ of the system has squandered the resources of the nation. According to him, “our past (and present) has seen a monumental waste in resources and steady flight of human development... and an entrenchment of economic hardship now taken for granted and taken as normal”. The above quote reveals that even the blind and deaf can see and hear the ominous quietude of unbearable angst in the land. Sahllins (1974) gives an overview of the state of the poor; that one third to one-half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night...This is the era of unprecedented hunger. The economic and moral laxity in Nigeria is captured by Nnimo (1990) thus; “Nigeria is a movie; a saga in abandoned babies, abandoned economy, abandoned you and me”. Therefore, Ejiogu (2000) opines that “we do not need a diviner to tell us that national development cannot be achieved in a country that extorts, or at best resigns itself to the act of immorality, the likes of which have just been identified. No investment for development can work in a place where the policy-makers and the implementers are not morally committed”. The reason for lack of commitment is ignorance and blindness on the part of handlers of socio-economic matters in contemporary Nigeria. These socio-economic handlers make

religions as their trademarks rather than recruiting economic experts to handle these challenges.

The Nigerian Elephant

The Nigerian elephant is the contact zone, a powerful giant that the six blindmen touched, placing their hands on its different parts. The six blindmen mistook the elephant for a 'wall', 'fan', 'rope', 'tree', 'spear' and 'snake'. Metaphorically, the 'wiseman', who listened to the argument, is possibly God, the Almighty Creator, the wisdom of God, higher authority with moral foresight and compass.

Pragmatic Approach towards Resolving the Dilemma of the Six Nigerian Blindmen

Mr. Vice-chancellor, having shed some light on the magnitude of blindness demonstrated by the six men in the area of religion, colonial legacy, ethnicity, politics, constitutional ambiguities and socio-economy in Nigeria, there is the need for the elephant as contact zone to treat this ignorance, either relative or partial, by proffering workable and enduring solutions.

The Nigerian elephant seems to occupy a central place in challenging unhealthy tensions and competitions, power tussles, colonial legacy and their corresponding effects. The concept of contact zone according to Louis (2026) refers to social spaces where disparate cultures, religion, highly asymmetrical relations of power assume a shared homogenous culture. Contact zones are spaces of encounter between people and groups that were once separated by social, historical, religious and geographical barriers. According to Louise (2026), the scholar who coined this term, contact zones are spaces where temporal, spatial, geographic, economic, political and bodily interactions usually occur in conditions of radical inequality and conflict. The people and groups who meet at a contact zone typically hold asymmetrical positions of power in the hierarchical order of society. Nigeria as an epicentre, the geographic overlap between the Islamic majority North and the Christian majority South creates localised zones of intense religious exchange and social

integration. In the academic study of religions on harmony and interactions, contact zone emphasises that these encounters are not always agonistic. Many modern studies look at intimate cohabitation between missionary faiths and indigenous beliefs as well as their worldviews. Exploring this concept provides insight into how human communities share ideas and negotiate their identities in a globalized world. A religious contact zone depicts a geographical or cultural space where differing religions groups, traditions or worldviews meet, interact, and establish ongoing relations. These spaces act as crucibles for conflict, co-existence and the evolution of entirely new beliefs. Reihe (2026) avers that this term was coined in post-colonial discourse to signify the synergy between culture and religion. Within this context, these encounters are rarely equal. However, they often involve avowed power relations, such as colonial powers, interacting with indigenous traditions or a majority religion such as Islam and Christianity interacting well with each other and with a minority group. In other words, the hybridisation of integrating indigenous traditional rituals with imported Abrahamic religious practices are crucial to this Nigerian elephant. This process of transculturation of different religious groups promotes intersection, exchange practices, vocabularies, or rituals leading to mutual transformation.

Under intercultural theology, Reihe (2026) asserts that making use of communication theories, hermeneutics and aesthetic intercultural theology generates new terminologies and theoretical tools to explore these interactions. Its scope ranges from issues like dialogue and syncretism to fundamentalism and ethnicity. Perspectives of culture, religion, race, class, gender and inclusion alike are involved in the necessary multi-axial approach. Contact zone creates a space where a choice of multiple voices is responding to the challenges of cultural, religious pluralism and diversity by rethinking theology in the 21st century (Reihe, 2026). It will be quick to add that interactions, adaptation, absorption and intersection in a contact zone are not on equal footing. Rather, they involve dynamics of dominance, subordination and resistance. We must not overlook

the fact that under contact zone, the marginalized or conquered subjects selectively adapt, absorb, and subvert the culture of the dominant group.

The six blind men are meant to know by the wiseman that they were correct on their own, as a result of the limited subjectivity. As they are convinced that each perception is the correct one, so also they know that there are many ways that lead to contact zone. This is to show also that there are many ways that lead to truth, but truth is one. In the same vein, there are many ways that lead to salvation. In Hinduism alone, for instance, five ways lead to salvation: “the way of knowledge; the way of works, the way of devotion, the way of concentration and election by grace (**Alamu**, 2024). Therefore, there is no monopoly in the way of salvation. My submission finds theological expression in the words of Osasona (1998) when he argues that there is “plurality in the way of salvation”. This submission has been corroborated by some modern scholars such as Dopamu (2009), Umejiesi and Igboin (2010) who have settled for parallelism.

Vice-Chancellor Sir, a student or a scholar of comparative study of religion must not make a blanket judgement on any religion, nor join others to condemn any religion. Arising from this, we subscribe to the notion that “variety is the spices of life”. It is against this backdrop that Dopamu is accustomed to say “God loves variety and hates monotony” (**Alamu**, 2010; **Alamu**, 2012). At this point, it is difficult, based on the parable of the six blind Indostans and the Elephant, to domesticate God to any religion of the world. Dopamu (2006) corroborates this when he resists a pursuit of multi-religious agenda where the theologians are discovering a God who resists domestication into any single theory of how the world works. God is everywhere, and religions at different epochal times, revealed the mind of God differently for humanity to serve and worship Him. God is the pivot of worship and focus by humankind. However, He does not belong to any religion. The six blindmen must know that no single religion can claim monopoly of truth. In the same vein, the Glorious Qu’ran

supports God of variety in this regard. In Surah 10:99, it is clearly stated that: “If God had wished the whole world to worship Him in the same way, He would have done so in His infinite wisdom”. But as we have always opined, He has not done so because He hates monotony and loves variety” (**Alamu, 2013; Alamu, 2021**).

As a student of comparative study of religion, theological education of other religious traditions other than your own becomes pivotal here, as it will remove blindness. The purpose of this is to enlighten the mind in order to appreciate other belief-systems. This enlightenment will help to deepen the religious sensitivity and mutual respect for others. This does not negate the assertion of Prophet Muhammed (PBOH), when he advised that whatever it would cause to acquire knowledge should be pursued, because knowledge is sacrosanct. Kunzman (2007) opines that some religious handlers should train their students of the meaning of diverse religious traditions which will have positive social outcomes. This would help students to understand the increasing diversity, and better prepare them to live in a peaceful productive manner with those of differing cultural and religious values. Specifically, religious pedagogical understanding will encourage students or followers to appreciate other faiths. When Christians are enjoined to visit the Mosque and vice-versa, there will be a sense of religious belonging. This will further enhance mutual respect for sensitive religious issues and to accept those of other religions as people with equal inherent values and worth. This religious education should not only be aired in the media, but taken to the doorsteps of the faithfuls (**Alamu, 2012**). This kind of engagement according to Wuthnow (2005) is not only that it can minimise the likelihood of religious conflicts and violence that have been part of Nigerian religious history, but also his position must of necessity take us away from our social and emotional comfort levels in order to arrive at a workable relationship with one another. The aim of this is to illuminate those aspects of each religion’s core teachings that hold the most significant potential for fostering understanding unity, and positive social action in our nation.

Pope John Paul II in 1982 advised both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria when he visited Kaduna to see themselves as living under the sun of the One Merciful God who is the Creator of man. He added that we acclaim God's sovereignty and we depend on man's dignity as God's servant. Balogun (1996) supports the position of Pope John Paul II on why Christians and Muslims should live together harmoniously. According to him, "we are not advocating a fusion of the religions, what we advocate is tolerance, co-operation and understanding of one another's point of view".

Nigerian Muslims and Christians should eschew monopolising their religion as the BEST religion. God cherishes unity, togetherness, oneness, brotherhood and neighbourliness. Supremacy and Sovereignty of God should no longer be monopolised by any religion. God is believed to be the Father and Maker of all, because He transcends all religions. As religious leaning is deemphasised during marriage, naming ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, celebration of festivals, the brotherhood of man should be given priority for the survival of our great country (**Alamu**, 2021). The willingness to explore the above is to see the inherent beauty and wisdom within each tradition, looking for the light they offer than the shadows that sometimes obscure them.

Dopamu (2009) has proposed that since the universality of religion is greatly in the interest of humanity, your religion determines the guidelines that would be used by God to take you to heaven. On the basis of this, we should constantly be reminded of the values of other religions. The religious values of various traditions are themes required for modern and post-modern consciousness (**Alamu**, 2021). Umejiesi and Igboin draw inspiration from the submission of Dopamu on the theory of parallelism as a model for peaceful co-existence on the part of the faithful of these religions. They argue that it is crucial to respect various religions for what they are. Thus, Christian beliefs and practices will lead to the goal-New Jerusalem. Muslims will attain Muslim paradise, and Hindus will strive towards *Nirvana* or *Moskha* (2010). With the understanding of

plurality in the way of salvation, all believers of different religions should stick to their own religion with sense of dedication and devotion without usurping the recognition and respect for others.

Vice-Chancellor Sir, more often than not, political issues get religion implicated to stoke the various conflagrations of violence. Recent studies on *separating the chaff from the wheat: engaging comparative religion for global peace*, have shown that some political anarchists, who feel marginalised or relegated, hide under the toga of religion as a convenient weapon for political propaganda. In fact, Nigerian leaders must be ready to face the truth squarely, however bitter and in whatever manner to challenge the *status quo*. The leadership must begin to give rapt attention to the faint voices of the oppressed poor, the aggrieved politicians, and the deprived minority groups. This is the only way to break the backbone of violence. In all, Nigerians of all classes, ethnic affiliations, and religious persuasions must usher in place of truth, justice and righteousness in the evolution of a peaceful society that we can call ours (Alamu, 2021). The pursuit of a unified and progressive Nigeria cannot be left to chance or goodwill alone. A deliberate and courageous re-engineering of our national frameworks is necessary to reinforce them. Lasting peace demands systems that reward fairness, instill fair laws, and impartial governance; abolish discriminatory social structures and exchange baton of equitable economic opportunities. In my engagements with my community and my faith-based community, I have always reminded them of the relevance of getting involved in politics. The primordial view of politics as a dirty game is far from obvious reality. To this end, the separation of the church from the state is a medieval trademark, which cannot fit in to present-day political reality. Rather, politics should not be left in the hands of morally bankrupt *belliticians* (politicians). Hence, we should all be involved in politics because we are political animals. These are central to creating anticipated conditions in which peace, unity and progress can flourish,

Ayantayo (2025) succinctly notes that in finding a lasting and enduring solution to the incessant religious crises in contemporary Nigeria, handlers and experts of religions should see religion in Nigeria as personal, rather than bringing or promoting it in the public space. In other words, religion should be taken as private matter, and its toga should be restricted to religious centres, not taken to public spaces. Also, the principle of 'live and let live' should be fostered in all religious environments than attacking or trying to subdue one another. There is the 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, political, cosmological and technological issues.

With regard to the constitutional ambiguities of sections 10 and 38 of 1999 as amended, which often cause the sins of omission and commission in the Nigerian religious space, it is urgently important for the ruling government to call on constitutional experts and all ethnic representatives to review grey areas, promote every ethnic interest and attend to the ambiguities in the constitution. Fixing the ambiguities will bring to rest all anxieties and misgivings emanating from these contending, conflicting and contradicting portions (**Alamu**, 2021).

The Vice-Chancellor Sir, without any equivocation, Nigeria is a pluralistic environment accommodating heterogeneous cultures, ethnicities and religions. Scholars like Balogun (1996), Dopamu (2009) and Bidmos (2012) see diversity as a way of integrating, tolerating and accommodating other faiths (**Alamu**, 2012). Knitter (1995) however argues that "the awareness of this concept does not lead to a total celebration of diversity, without its problems". Nevertheless, within the purview of Comparative Religion, it is not a sin for multifarious religions to cohabit or co-exist considering their points of convergence. The imperative of Comparative Religion is to respect and exist side-by-side with sympathy and objectivity, void of ignorance and blindness.

Schillebeeckx (1990) is apposite when he argues that multiplicity of religions is not evil or conflict centred; rather a wealth which is welcomed and enjoyed by all. Basye (2012) is of the view that understanding of other faiths as a student or a scholar of Comparative Religion means that such an individual is promoting bridge building and relationships that create harmony and peace on our planet home. This diversity requires a cultivation of a public space where we all encounter one another. Lenski (1965) supports the opinion that religious diversity as “organised religious groups with incompatible beliefs and practices obliged to co-exist within the framework of the same community or the same society. The scale of ignorance and illiteracy needs to fall off the eyes of these religious anarchists in order to allow religious harmony and peaceful co-existence to be utmost paramount. There is no gainsaying the fact that all these religious traditions have their uniqueness, peculiarities as well as the common essence that radiate like a hidden diamond at the heart of every religion (Alamu, 2012). This hidden diamond should add glamour to the area of common interest than a point of departure. Thus, Oliver (2003), a scholar of religion and a *rabbi*, assesses the trend of religion towards peace by exploring the *Talmudic* law of ‘seek peace and pursue it’. He lends his voice to the understanding that the *rabbinic* traditions focus mainly on the importance of mercy and combination of all empathy and altruism. The Jewish *rabbis* acknowledged the interconnectedness or unity of humans and conclude from that fact that peace is God’s original intent for all human beings. Therefore, peace, harmony, tolerance and co-existence are the trademarks of comparative study of religion (Alamu, 2012).

The book titled, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on a Dialogue of Mahmood Ayaib*, edited by Omar (2007) rather takes a critical look at the extent to which spiritual value, mutual respect and acceptance of the legitimacy and authenticity of the religious tradition can go. As an attribute of scientific study of religion, Omar argues that mutual acceptance must not stop at recognising and even, accepting the existence of the other as a fellow human being and a good neighbour. Rather, Muslims and Christians must accept each other as friends and partners from

the same source with the quest for social and political justice, theological harmony, and spiritual progress on the way of God, who is their ultimate goal. This end-product has catered for the Middle East crises in the 1990s, and it can still cater for the religious dimensions of the ongoing war in the Middle-East as it concerns the Jews and Palestinians. In accordance with fairness, justice, harmony and progress, Omar again asserts and I quote him *extenso*:

A final goal is to strive for absolute fairness and objectivity in drawing any comparisons between two traditions. Several guidelines must be strictly observed in this regard. The first is that the ideals of the two traditions should be compared with the ideals with realities. Second, all attempts at scoring points for one tradition over the other by contrasting the good things in it with the bad things in the other must be strictly avoided... Third, the scriptures or traditions of one religion should not be used as criteria to judge the truth or errors of the others.

The foregoing is capable of stimulating fairness honesty, peaceful co-existence at all levels, because, “he who knows one knows none”. The glorious Qur’an attests that there is no compulsion in religion and that man as Allah’s vicegerent on earth is mandated to keep the earth in good shape, maintain it to sustain its beauty and harmony (Qur’an 6:11). The preservation of the earth’s beauty is inherent in the prevention of wars and avoidance of actions capable of causing agony and disorder (Bidmos, 1993). The situation in Nigeria, today, places a huge responsibility of sensitisation on the followers of Islam and Christianity by ways of intervention for the enthronement of orderliness which has remained elusive since the nation’s independence in 1960 (Bidmos, 2012).

God cannot be localised, because He does not belong to any religion. In other words, He transcends all religions. He does not save people based on religion. Some theologians believe that religion is not associated by religious names or religious sects. God is said to have created man *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and He strictly emphasises love for God and love for neighborhood.

This communal kindness goes beyond religion to the level of communitarian ethics. Emphasising this, St. Bartholomew stoutly avers as cited from in social media handling that:

No religion in the world is greater than kindness. No scripture is deeper than compassion. No ritual is holier than love. Your beliefs may guide you; your traditions may shape you, but what truly defines you is how you treat others. Being a good human doesn't require a temple, church, a mosque or a shrine. It requires a heart that chooses empathy over ego, forgiveness over anger, and service over selfishness. Don't just preach your religion, live its essence. Don't just quote verses, embody their meaning. Don't just identify with a label, let your humanity speak louder than words.

This is the core of African humanism. It is also expedient to stress the importance of we-feelings as it finds theological expression in African humanism, which some African scholars have seen as a bridge-builder or *Ubuntu*. As a bridge-builder, the concept of we-feelings lends credence to a network of peaceful co-existence among all the religious followers, laden with the realisation of the much-needed stability, sustainability and peace that revolves around comradeship, togetherness, and consanguinity in the Nigerian society (Alamu, 2012). This will assist interconnectedness among Muslims and Christians. The concept of we-feelings in Africa, perhaps Nigeria, has the pills of human values in every Nigerian person. The Supreme Being is the foundation stone of society. There is no hint that God is partial and He reserves the universe only for the benefit for some individuals irrespective of status, religion, gender, class and nationality; rather, for the overall benefits of God's masterpiece (Alamu, 2015).

In a complex and dynamic society like Nigeria with volatile religious lifestyle, the lesson for peace building becomes apparent. The lesson for peace building from the pristine period is by adopting and internalising the principle of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* means an indigenous peace building concept which embraces the notion of acknowledgement of guilt, showing of remorse, and

repentance by perpetrator of injustice asking for and receiving forgiveness, and paying as well compensation, or reparation as a prelude for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence (Francis, 2009; Dopamu, 2006; **Alamu**, 2024). By *Ubuntu* concept, we can contribute towards creating healthy relationships based on the recognition that within the web of humanity everyone is linked to everyone else. The principle of forgiveness and reconciliation is what the tradition advocated by providing us with strategies for peace building (**Alamu**, 2024).

The notion of *Ubuntu* sheds light on the significance of peace building through the principle of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples. Murithi (2006) remarks that it provides also as a rationale for sacrificing or letting go of the desire to take revenge for past wrongs. Nevertheless, an ongoing reflection and re-appraisal of the notion of *Ubuntu* can serve to re-emphasize the essential unity of humanity and gradually promote attitude and values based on the sharing of resources and a co-operation and collaboration in the resolution of common problems. Thus, *Ubuntu* societies developed mechanisms for resolving disputes and promoting reconciliation and peace building with a view to healing past wrongs and maintaining social cohesion and harmony (**Alamu**, 2012; **Alamu**, 2024). Desmond Tutu, a South African theologian observes that the word *Ubuntu* is derived from a Bantu language of East, Central and Southern Africa which goes beyond a concept to a cultural worldview. According to him:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language. It speaks to every essence of being human. When you want to give high praise to someone, we say... he or she has Ubuntu. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in theirs we being to a bundle of life. We say a person is a person through other people... I am human because I belong, I participate, I share, A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and

good for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are tortured or oppressed or treated as if they were less than who they are (Francis, 2009).

In line with the above quote, the essence of *Ubuntu* is to cultivate a culture of peace, tolerance, peaceful co-existence, mutual development, symbiotic relationships, participation, respect for human rights and inclusivity among peoples and communities.

Abubakr, one of the Caliphs after Prophet Mohammed (PBOH), took hold on values of unity, democratic and constitutional government with emphasis on the equality and inclusiveness of all as demonstrated by the Prophet. He also promised to replicate that to the weak and the powerful and rule with the principles of equity and justice. It is, therefore, instructive to promote the policy of inclusiveness and equality in governance (Rahim, 1983). It is further buttressed by Nwosu (2025) that our starting point may differ; humanity is often unified by fundamental aspirations of the concept of brotherhood (*Ukhuwwah*). As a matter of fact, the *Ukhuwwah* stands as one of Islam's most fundamental social principles. This value is deeply rooted in Quranic teachings that emphasise unity and mutual support among believers as well as the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad (PBOH). In Surah Al-Hujurat, the Quran explicitly states that "The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be hard on you" (Quran 49:10). Also, Prophet Mohammad said that 'None of you truly believes until he loves his brother what he loves for himself' (Sahih al-Bukhari) and "Three things are the best acts, first, to treat people with equity and justice; second, to assist your co-religionist brethren as fellows and aid them financially; and third, to remember God under all conditions" (Bihar-al-Awwar, 74). These hadiths establish brotherhood not merely as a social ideal but as an essential spiritual dimension of faith. This spiritual dimension is grounded in the belief that authentic brotherhood

reflects the strength of one's faith and manifests the compassion encouraged by Islamic teachings.

In the light of the foregoing, the Medina charter, drawn by Prophet Muhammad as a constitution for multi-religious community of Medina, offers a historical model for Nigeria's religious landscape. This document created a framework for peaceful co-existence and conflict resolutions between Muslims and non-Muslims, establishing mutual rights and responsibilities. Thus, Islamic ethics regarding honesty, fairness and compassion apply to interactions with all people, not exclusively fellow Muslims. This fosters an atmosphere of cooperation with Christians and traditional religious community on national issues, while allowing everyone to maintain their distinct religious identities.

Nwosu, **Alamu**, Odeh, and Muhammed (2017) posit that their experience in Ilorin metropolis has continued to enhance the growth of *Ori-Oke* spirituality for both the peoples of the Crescent and the Cross. On this enduring level of inter-religious engagement, our ethnographic research discovered that today's religious rituals find theological expression more on integration of faith, fellowship and interaction as people seek for spiritual well-being. Our investigation condemns parochial or primordial way of religious engagement among different religions of the people, replacing it with an empowering liturgy that invokes radical inclusiveness of people of every race, creed and colour. It counters all resemblance of violence in favour of non-violent doctrine. In *Ori-Oke* practices or regimes in Ilorin, there are no special treatments, no special people or tribe. All are equally accepted; all have a choice placed in the presence of God, who is rightly seen as the source of all lives (**Alamu**, 2020). This is a replica of what ought to be embraced by all regardless of faiths and creeds.

The fundamental problem of limiting human understanding to the text of the scriptures, which has unleashed incessant violence, has veiled human knowledge in several respects since revelation is progressive (**Alamu**, 2009). Whereas, the various interpretations and modifications are the products of

human logic and theologians, the error in human thinking is that he/she believes that knowledge is linear and one-way, “for he who knows one knows none”. Since the scriptures are the light, manuals and guides for believers as well as their faith, they should be studied meticulously and understood intellectually. The argument is that learned cleric without sentiments should teach the scriptures than untutored cleric who in the light of his selfish and myopic view leads his unassuming followers astray (Alamu, 2009).

Alamu (2011) condemns violence in its totality, whether incidental or intended. Violence is injurious and intemperate directly or indirectly. It injures religious and sectional feelings. Therefore, the only means for changing the general tendency towards violence is in humanisation of our human ends. The growth and development of man can occur only by a great increase of participation and responsibility once ambition and moral rationality are brought together to function in a way, which makes life interesting, and thus creates the possibility of productive and non-violent life. This ethic of responsibility needs reduction of destructiveness and violence by making individual life meaningful and indeed human.

Alamu (2005) remarks that God’s oneness is the beauty that humanity can explore differently. There is the dire need for unity to be restored more than anything else. As a matter of fact, there can be no development in human society without unity. The motif of religion is centred on God, humanity and society. On this note, humanity stands out here. It is on the basis of the reality that the society can function and as well worship God. When the society that accommodates those religions realises its wholeness and its ability to function dispassionately as a sign of instrument and foretaste of God’s intention of reconciliation for a desperately divided human race, it shows that the inhabited world is flourishing. This oneness of humanity *ad extra* is oriented towards the whole inhabited earth. It is independent, peaceful and indivisible, and it must begin with us. Though, this may be seen as a vision, incubating in the horizon, when there is

total commitment to the complex, daily working it real, it will become not only a map but also a journey to a destination.

Religious leaders in Nigeria function as intermediaries between God and man. In recognition of their role at the microcosmic level, where domestic sanctuary is called to pass on the faith to our children, caution should be taken to inculcate good morals rather sowing the seed of hatred and division. While at the macrocosmic level, these good morals will translate into friendship, good neighborliness, social intercourse, comradeships, team spirit and respect for others (**Alamu**; 2006). Dzurgba (2000) argues in consonance with the above that religion at the societal level has the propensity of reconciling individuals, reorganising relationship, increasing commitment to duty, honouring obligation and a greater participation in welfare services. To this end, family and religion are catalysts to a successful, prosperous and stable society. This promotes social order such that justice and happiness can prevail among men in their larger grouping (**Alamu**, 2012). This is the true reflection of our beliefs. It should be confessed that our beliefs do not make us better people; our behaviour does. So, be kind to all creatures and this is indeed the message of a true religion.

Community Service

1. Substantive Head of Department, 2023 to date,
2. Acting Head, 2019 -2020
3. Level Adviser 2003-2015
4. Sub-Dean of the Faculty, 2015-2017
5. Departmental Secretary, 2010- 2014
6. Secretary, Promotion Committee 2019-2023
7. Faculty Coordinator, Preliminary Studies 2019-2022
8. Chairman, Faculty Students Disciplinary Committee 2021-2024
9. Faculty Representative to Faculty of Engineering 2019-2021
10. Member of BCOS 2015-2017
11. Secretary, Departmental Biennial Conference Committee, 2018 to date

Conclusion

Vice-Chancellor Sir, arising from the discussions, it is crystal clear that the Six blind men and the Nigerian elephant have taught us the relevance of knowledge that anchors on contact zone. In line with the above, it is certain that as fascinating and allegoric as the topic is, religion should not get implicated in other sectors of the Nigeria's public sphere. Nigerian leaders and religious stakeholders of all shapes and sizes should be enlightened so as to correctly understand and interpret the content of any text, context and hypertext of any writ or books.

A truly religious society like Nigeria should portray all available tools for human flourishing, reason and revelation, science and faith, individual disciplines, collective action, traditional wisdom and contemporary knowledge for social advancement. The path to a better Nigeria does not require us to abandon or compromise our faiths, but it requires us to live it more fully and intelligently, and explain ways artificial wall between the sacred and the profane, practical and spiritual can converge. The power of religion and leadership to motivate civic responsibility presents a tactical opportunity for cultural transformation. It is worthy of note that these convergent ethics extol virtues of the ages such as love, empathy, compassion, justice, communality and responsibility which all require pragmatic expression through intelligent actions.

Therefore, humanity at the centre of religion is always unified by fundamental aspirations for what is good and life-affirming. Therefore, the essence of six blind men and the Nigerian Elephant is to entrench and promote knowledge, understanding, tolerance, harmony. Hence, there is no gainsaying the fact that various faith organisations do not make a better and beautiful person; rather, human behaviour does. To this end, be kind and generous to all creatures which is the essence of true religion.

Recommendations

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, the following recommendations are proposed to give a moral compass to the six blindmen:

1. *Overall Enlightenment:* Across major world religions, enlightenment is the ultimate goal of spiritual practice. It represents how a person sees the self, the world and the divine. This quest for knowledge will epistemologically help individuals to navigate to the top. This compulsory enlightenment is meant for religious leaders and various stakeholders of the nation's governmental functionaries.
2. *Privatisation of Religion:* The privatisation of religion is the sociological process where religious faiths, practices, and morality shift from public sphere into the private realm. Every religious stakeholder and governmental functionary should exclude religion from public offices, schools, and political decision-making.
3. *Dialoguers* attempted inter-religious dialogue in contemporary Nigeria without success. Therefore, stakeholders of true inter-religious dialogue as an indispensable tool for bridge-building, promotion of mutual respect and ultimate enhancement of peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society like Nigeria should raise the temple.
4. *Under Nigerian Inter-Religious Council*, much has not been achieved. Therefore, government should empower NIREC with all constitutional authority and political will to execute its affairs to the fullest.
5. *Multiplicity of Faiths* should learn to follow peace with all men, stay together, celebrate together without crises or conflicts. In Turkey, Pakistan, Istanbul and some Arabian countries, Mosques and Temples co-exist. The work of the interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, founded by Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, who transformed from former adversaries into prominent peace-builders speaks volumes. Today, Imam

Ashafa and Pastor Wuye are not only close friends, but also inseparable partners in peace-building. This peace-building initiatives of the duo is supported by organisations like the Global Peace Foundation and KAICIID. More of this should still be encouraged and fostered by religious leaders, most especially knowing that both Christianity and Islam are of the Abrahamic and Semitic origins.

6. *Comparative Religious Custodians* should play a significant role in the area of cultural diplomacy, as it can promote global peace by uniting faiths and by ensuring reciprocal understanding, acceptance and tolerance amongst disparate religious communities. This can thus break down walls of divisions and barriers.
7. *In recent times*, we hear of “God will choose leaders for us; God will intervene during this election” and “we should pray for good leaders”. Both theologians and democrats should excuse God from the Nigerian political process because He does not intrude in politics.
8. *Security experts* have affirmed that the insecurity we witness on a daily basis courtesy of Boko Haram and herdsmen mayhems, banditry and abduction have many fangs. With the efforts of improved State security apparatuses in synergy with ‘locale’, alongside the use of sophisticated Information Technology, success will be achieved by government and local collaboration.
9. *All the religions* practised in Nigeria should unequivocally subscribe to the golden rule. This golden rule emphasises that we do to others what we want them to do us. Indigenous Religious tradition has its golden rule. In Christianity, (Matt 7:12); and in Islam, it is expressed in the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammed) (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 13; *Sahih Muslim* 45). This expresses the fact that these religions should promote social interaction and corporate existence since there is no individualism in Nigeria.

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