



A Critical Examination of Soteriological Paradigms in Christianity and Islam: The Nigerian Experience

PETER O. O. OTTUH

Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract. One of the core doctrines that are common to most religions of the world is soteriology (doctrine of salvation). It is an established fact that Christianity and Islam are fundamentally and significantly distinct from one another in several forms. These known distinctions have direct divergent effects against one another. This is true of the principle of Non-contradiction which posits that the contrary of anything is incapable of been true at the same time in its actual sense of it. Therefore, the dogmatic and theological distinctions present in direct contrast with Christianity and Islam cannot be both true in the actual sense of it. Hence, the focus of this research is limited to the comparative analysis and evaluation of the fundamental doctrine of salvation from the Christian and Islamic paradigms. Employing the phenomenological and evaluative approaches with support of several secondary sources, the study practically reflected on the Nigeria situation to draw some inferences to authenticate its findings. Findings revealed among others, that there is synthetic unity between Christian and Islamic soteriology; there is pluralism in the notion of soteriology; and that the discrepancies arising from the Christian and Muslim views on soteriology have caused breach of good relationship between the two

religious groups in Nigeria. The paper concluded that even though the concept of salvation is a very thorny issue in Christian-Muslim relations, Christians and Muslims need to agree on the pluralism of salvation.

Keywords: Soteriology; Paradigms; Christianity; Islam

1. Introduction

Most religions of the world are significantly concerned with the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) and they designate this doctrine by various concepts. World religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism for instance, see themselves each as a path to the Supreme God. Even within the Christian religion, there are pluralities of opinions regarding soteriology. For example, some fundamentalists are of the view that only those who are 'born again' and members of their religious sects are qualified to be saved. While others within the Christian group believe that only one hundred and forty-four thousand people will be saved on the last day (Ayandele, 1978). In this sense, soteriology is a theological theme that has stimulated both intra-religious and inter-religious controversies. Although there are

three major religions in Nigeria namely: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR), the latter is not aggressive and controversial like the others. The reason is that African Traditional Religion does not absolutely claim religious truth as well as lay monopolistic claim to salvation of God. African Traditional Religion teaches that any human being can be saved provided such a person lives a good moral life while on earth, regardless of the person's religious affiliation.

It should be noted, that among all the religions in the world, only Christianity and Islam claim to have absolute superiority and exclusive right of attaining God's salvation. In making the claim to the monopoly of religious truth and salvation, they even exclude each other. This observation agrees with that of Ayandele (1978) who rightly observed that:

Christians have been more guilty [guiltier] than Islam and African [Traditional] Religion (AFREL) by being the most articulated in denigrating the others, adopting a negative and therefore unrewarding attitudes towards the other religious communities, religions they little understand unto the present day (p.588).

The implication of such claims of superiority to and monopoly of salvation, more often than not, had led to fanaticism, intolerance, exclusivism, hot debate, ill-feeling, open confrontation and fatal strain in Christian-Muslim relations around the globe and Nigeria in particular.

It is therefore, the objective of this paper to critically examine the Christian and Muslim paradigms regarding the religious doctrine of salvation. It is also the utmost aim of this paper to use its findings to promote understanding of the concept in order to reduce religious particularism and

exclusivism; and foster a better workable cordial and healthier relationship between the adherents of Christianity and Islam in the present Nigerian society.

2. General Concept of Soteriology

Soteriology in the academic discipline of theology and religious studies is conceived by scholars in that field as a vital subject in various religions and it is often studied comparatively. This implies the contrasting divergent ideas regarding the meaning of salvation and the way it is acquired. However, the concept of Soteriology is a controversial one among religious groups. Etymologically, the term, Soteriology is derived from two Greek words: soteria meaning salvation and logos meaning words (Brown, 1969). The Greek soteria which has been translated as salvation also connote such words as deliverance; preservation; and safety (Brown, 1969). Technically speaking, soteriology is a theological study of salvation of humankind in relation to the Divine. The Advance Learners' Dictionary of Current English defines salvation as "the act of saving, the state of having been saved, from sin and its consequences" (Hornby, 2007 p.767). This implies that before a person can be delivered or saved, it is assumed that such person is in bondage, either in the hands of enemies or at the mercy of someone or something that is stronger than him/her. Most major religions provide paths that deliver individuals from the bondage of sin, immorality, ignorance, and other types of impurity or disharmony and lead them toward a state of purity of soul, spiritual knowledge, wisdom, godliness, enlightenment, or even eternal life (salvation).

Most religions typically believe that human beings have a higher nature that exists in

tension with a lower nature; hence these religions provide ways to redeem human beings from such lower state. In doing this, some religions emphasize the separation of the spiritual part of the self from worldly attachments, while others emphasize living harmoniously in relation to nature, self, and divinity. Even within a single religious tradition there may be different versions of this process.

Salvation is the notion of being saved as described in various religions. In Christianity, individuals are thought of as being saved from eternal punishment through Christ's death on the cross. In Buddhism, especially in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, people can be saved (attainment of moksha) from the endless cycle of rebirth (samsara) through bodhisattva (one who is destined for, or whose essence is, enlightenment) or through Amida Buddha (faith and love in Buddha). In Hinduism, especially in the bhakti tradition, devotion to a god can bring salvation from the endless cycle of rebirth and is open to those who have realized their true nature as Brahman (Supreme Being) (Microsoft® Encarta® 2009, 2008).

There are two related ways through which religions develop their ideas about salvation. First, a saved individual may imply a person who has been liberated from the physical world of Matter and afterward assume a state of eternal bliss with God or have attained the upper most state of consciousness (Paden, 2007). Second, a saved person may imply anyone with the embodiment of pureness or holiness who still physically exists in the world. Although, monasticism is evident in some religious groups like Buddhism and classical Christianity, yet it is not evident in other religions such as Islam and Judaism, and some other forms of Protestantism. On the

other hand, varying importance is accorded by various religions to religious virtues like compassion, love, wisdom, self-control, gentleness, and faithfulness. All these virtues are believed to be prelude to salvation in the afterlife.

3. Predestination and Salvation: An Overview

According to the Encarta Dictionary, predestination is an advance decision by God about events. It is the religious doctrine which posits that God or a deity, or fate has established in advance everything that is going to happen and that nothing can change it. In other words, predestination is a supposedly divine act of foreordaining the fate of people or things beforehand. Theologically, the Christian's teaching that postulate that some humans are predetermined for eternal destiny by God is termed predestination. In this sense, the idea of predestination is not the same as the denial of human free will. Predestination is of two kinds namely: single and dual predestination.

Single predestination is predicated on the human experience of God's presence including His grace and love; and the understanding He does all these out of His free grace (Graves, 2011). Mono-predestination simply implies that this eternal gift of God which is rooted in His eternal decree from the beginning of the earth is freely willed by God Himself without being merited by any human being. Biblically, this point of view can be found in Romans chapter 8 and chapter one of Ephesians. Paul's letter to the Romans reads:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. ... And those whom he predestined

he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30) (RSV). The above Bible passages simply indicate the notion of single predestination, which means predestination to life from God's eternal decree.

On the other hand, dual predestination draws its meaning from mono- predestination. Dual predestination implies that while some persons are decreed eternally to enjoy God's presence, others are eternally alienated from His presence through His eternal decree. This also implies that whereas, salvation is predestined for some persons, it also follows that at the same time, some persons are predestined to damnation and destruction by His eternal decree. St. Augustine was the first Christian proponent of dual predestination in the fifth century. John Calvin, a French reformer was also a known proponent of dual predestination. According to Calvin (n.d):

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others (p.5).

The above claim, in the post Augustinian period was refuted by Catholic theologians who insisted that God only predestined some persons to eternal bliss and not eternal damnation. These Catholic theologians also insisted that suffering from eternal damnation is as a result of their personal free will or moral choices. This view is contrary to that of Arminianism founded in the seventeenth century by Arminius, a Dutch Protestant theologian (Price, 2008). Arminianism as a movement deemphasizes Calvin's dualistic predestination by condemning the injustice of God. Among those who reject single or dual

predestination are the Liberal Protestant theologians including Karl Barth, who claimed that the will of God is manifested in the personhood of Jesus Christ. For this reason, they argue that all humans are elected through Jesus Christ. Conceiving the concept of predestination in this perspective implies a Universalist paradigm which means that human beings are promised salvation by the cheer grace of God.

4. Christian Soteriological Paradigm

Salvation in Christianity implies the saving of the human soul from the consequences of sin (moral evil). It is the redemption from sin and its aftermath results (Graves, 2011). From the biblical point of view, sin is the greatest enemy of humankind. Hence, salvation from this point of view is considered as deliverance from sin (Stevenson, 1957; Bowden, 2005). This soteriological concept is one of the fundamental articles of faith in the creed of Christianity. The Christians believe in the idea of the 'Original Sin' (sin inherited from the fall of Adam and Eve) and in the consequent drama of redemption. In fact, the whole concept of salvation in Christian theological discourse has been succinctly summed up by Gaudeul (1977) who says:

The word 'salvation' implies the whole drama of sin, its consequence in terms of man's alienation and disintegration both as an individual and as a social being, and God's intervention to give back to man his full dignity, a salvation that is described as transformation of a new creation, that is at the present in its incipient stages of development and will be completed on the Last Day (p.1 cf. Smith, 2006).

From Christian view point, salvation is made possible by the atonement of Jesus Christ. Salvation in this context is conceived to include exclusive salvation and universal

reconciliation (Parry, 2004). While some of the differences are as widespread as Christianity itself, the overwhelming majority agrees that salvation is made possible only by the work of God's son, Jesus Christ who died on the cross and resurrected from the dead. Hence, to the Christians, salvation comes as a result of divine initiative to rescue human beings from sin and by this; such persons partake in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Kateregga and Shenk, 1980). However, this kind of conception regarding salvation does not exist in Islam.

The disciples of Jesus Christ started preaching the Gospel of salvation after Christ's resurrection. Specifically, the Christian Church was not born until that Pentecost Sunday in AD 3011 (see Acts 2). At this formative stage, the apostles concerned themselves mainly with teaching of members of the infant church and explaining the resurrection of Jesus to others, all in Jerusalem alone. But due to persecution and the delay of the Parousia (Jesus' second advent) which they erroneously thought would be immediate, the apostles move outward to other parts of the Roman Empire and then to other parts of the world. As the church rapidly expanded, its position on salvation was based on many biblical passages on which the Christians claimed uniqueness for Christ and Christianity as the sole way to God and the sole truth. Some of such biblical passages are:

- (i) "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (Jn. 14:6).
- (ii) "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

- (iii) "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God rest upon him" (Jn. 3:36).

- (iv) "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:16) (Mala, 1985).

Based on the above teachings, any person who does not accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour will enter into eternal hell fire where the wrath of God abides for eternity. In other words, the conversion to faith in Christ is the only answer to salvation.

The Christian position during the period of the church Fathers was more compromising than the period of the Apostles. Although Islam did not emerge until the seventh century A.D., the Christian tradition before then had maintained a negative attitude towards other religions. This general negative attitude was expressed in the famous Christian axiom: "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (Outside the Church, there is no Salvation) (Alatas, 2006 p.68 cf. 1957). It is pertinent to point out here, that this axiom was not in the original dogma of the early Christians. It only came into it during the Patristic period. However, from the axiom emanated various formulations at different stages of the development of the Christian Church. A few examples of such formulation will throw more light on the patristic position.

Origen (185-254), for example, was one of the early Church leaders. He is reported to have declared: "Let no one persuade or deceive himself: outside this house that is outside this church no one will be saved" (cited in Onaiyekan, 1978 p.171). Also, Cyprian (c. 200-258), the Bishop of Carthage, in about 249 A.D. declared the

same doctrine for those who were not in the church. He declared that, “God is not his Father if the church is not his mother” (cited in Onaiyekan, 1978 p.172). He went further to illustrate his point with Noah’s ark that if anyone outside Noah’s ark had been able to escape, then so might a person outside the church (Onaiyekan, 1978). Furthermore, he took a hardline on lapsed Christians and on the baptism of heretics outside the church. He insisted on their re-baptism because according to him: “...there is one baptism... this one baptism is, without any doubt, in the Catholic Church because the church is one and baptism cannot be out of the church” (Stevenson, 1957 p.657). Another Christian writer who wrote on the issue was Fulgentius (468-553), a disciple of St. Augustine. However, his position was sanctioned by the Decree of the Council of Florence which says:

Of this, you can be certain and convinced beyond any doubt: no one remaining outside the Catholic church, not just pagan but also Jew or heretics or schemers can become partakers of eternal life, but they will go into the everlasting fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels unless before the end of life they are joined to the church (cited in Densinger, 1955 p.165).

One can now see clearly the attitude of negative position against the non-Christian religions.

As noted earlier, this uncompromising stance is undoubtedly motivated by the various biblical passages and axioms which the early Christians strictly adhered to. It is relevant to point out here however, that at times, many people tend to go off with one-sided interpretation (or even absolute misinterpretation) of certain sections of their religious texts. This action has, in most cases, let them to take to negative attitude towards other religions. Such people tend to overlook other passages that indicate a

different line of approach in the same scriptures as we shall see latter in this paper.

5. Islamic Soteriological Paradigm

The notion of soteriology in Islam is anchored on human repentance from moral evils in order for him/her to enjoy a state of bliss in the afterlife. In this sense, such notion is compatible with the view that every human being is accountable to his/her deeds. Muslims do not subscribe to the belief of ‘Original sin’ like the Christians do (McIntyre, 1992; Smith, 2006; Lewis, and Churchill, 2009). Muslims see God (Allah) as just and fair, hence their idea of salvation also subscribes to the doctrine of predestination.

However, there is a tradition in Islam that says many human beings will suffer eternally in hell fire after death and that only few persons will enjoy eternity in paradise (McIntyre, 1992). This notion implies the doctrine of predestination. Unlike Christianity, there is nothing like the phenomenon of redemption in Islam, this is because in Islam, there is no state of fallen nature or original sin. The transformation believed to be attained by a converted person in sharing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is also alien to Islam (Accad, 2003). Islam considers that human being has nothing to be saved from. Rather, human being only needs divine instruction and direction because each person is believed to be born in a state of original justice.

In another sense, there is a certain notion of salvation in Islam that is not a divine initiative to rescue a person from him/herself and from his/her sins, but as a human endeavour to escape from God’s anger and punishment which threaten all evil doers. Such escape is only possible through faith-filled worship of One God and the

confession of His uniqueness. In order to avoid God's anger and punishment, Muslims believe that a person must strive hard to please God through worthy living including the strict observance of the five prescribed rituals of Islam. These five pillars of Islamic faith are:

- Faith profession (Al-Shahadah);
- Five daily prayers (Al-Salat);
- Fast in the month of Ramadan (also called Al-Sawm);
- Compulsory contribution of poor due (Al-Zakat); and
- Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca (Al-Hajj) (Anees, 2006).

It is believed among Muslims that the strict compliance to the above Islamic rituals one will be vindicated on the Day of Judgment.

6. An Evaluation: Towards a Reconciliation of the Two Paradigms

The uncompromising attitude of the Christians to non-Christian religions continued when Islam emerged in the seventh century. While Prophet Muhammad initially saw Islam as complementary to Christianity, to the Christians, the difference between Christianity and Islam was the difference between light and darkness (Parry, 2004 cf. Boar, 1969). This gulf of difference was motivated by the Christians' conviction that the conversion to faith in Jesus Christ was the only answer to salvation. The sum totals of all these are that the popular view, and of course the only view, among the early Christians was that salvation was only for the Christians and nobody else. However, the question of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians during the medieval period was not exactly the same as in the early period of Christianity.

During the medieval period, the question whether non-Christians, including Muslims, would receive salvation or not gradually developed a trend towards tolerance and positive evaluation. Some Christian theologians and scholars started to realize the narrowness of this view of the Christians during the formative period of Christianity. St. Augustine was one of those who propounded doctrines of the church in the middle ages. In his book, *Vera Religione* (On True Religion), written in his early life, argued that the true religion was the Christian one, to know and to follow it was the only way to salvation (Augustine, 1969; Brueggemann, 2002). However, in his later book, *Retractignes*, written in his old age, he found his earlier view about salvation very parochial as he had been misinterpreted. This is because; he realized that the worship of God had been in existence even long before Christianity. Since then, many scholars and theologians started to condemn officially any exaggerated interpretation of the principle contained in the axiom, "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus." For instance, Cyprian earlier referred to in this paper, was repudiated for denying the heretics of the validity of the baptism administered outside the Catholic Church. Also, Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in his famous Papal Bull, "Unam Sanctam" said, "We declare, affirm, define and pronounce that every creature be subject to the Roman Pontif" (Halley, 1965 p.321; cf. Akin, 2001). Even though he was not repudiated for this pronouncement his uncompromising position was not upheld by later Popes and the idea was allowed to die a natural death. Hence, the negative attitude of the Christian theologians started to assume a positive trend. In fact, the most balanced view of medieval Christian theology was that of Thomas Aquinas (c.1274) (cited in Levering, 2011). In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas was of the view that apart from Christians there is also salvation for non-

Christians, if the Christian message was not heard or understood. Such positive position taken by some theologians and scholars served as the foundation on which the modern views on salvation were built. But this does not mean that the position was popular. Hence, there are two categories of theologians among the medieval Christians, namely, those who still held the intransigent position and those who held the positive and liberal views on salvation of non-Christians.

However, there are fundamentalists who still hold the ancient view of “Outside the Church, no Salvation” (Esposito, 2002b p.77 cf. Olsen, 2000). That notwithstanding, there have emerged many theologians and scholars who continue to argue that the honest seekers of God (Christians and non-Christians) are on the way to salvation. An examination of the views of some of these liberation theologians clearly shows the trend in the modern times. The late J. Danielou, a Cardinal and a French Jesuit theologian held the same view with Rossano that religions are natural expressions of the religious genius of peoples and that every religion has its own good and bad elements. Hence, the good elements in the non-Christian religions, which have been described as ‘seeds’, ‘first germs’, ‘rays of light of Christ’ are terms of an evolutionary plan of salvation (Onaiyekan, 1978). Therefore, the salvation of non-Christians is left as a mystery of God’s mercy and power. A variation of this current view is found among those who suggest that the name ‘Christian’ could be used, in a more qualified sense, of good people outside the church.

Historically, the word ‘Christian’ was first used in Antioch long after Jesus Christ was crucified (Acts 11:26). As Piet (1969) observed, the ‘real’ religion which is now called the Christian religion existed from the ancient time. Hence, he quoted St. Augustine’s “On True Religion” which says

that: “In our days, this religion is the Christian one; not because it did not exist before but because it was given this name afterwards” (Piet, 1969 p.147). Also, the famous church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, rightly asserted that the true religion has been followed, centuries before Christianity by Abraham, Moses and later prophets and that the religion of the patriarchs was identical with that of the Christians.

In similar vein, the Muslims do not believe that Islam started with Prophet Muhammad. They believe that Islam has been founded by Allah (God) Himself and that it was the monotheistic religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others who came before Prophet Muhammad and were referred to as Muslims because they submitted themselves totally to the will of God. Hence, both Christianity and Islam have traced the ‘true religion’ to the same source. The import of this ‘true religion’ is that all the good people outside the Christian church will definitely not be sent to hell-fire. Those in this category are the people Rahner (1966) called “anonymous Christians” (pp.115-134). This is a term which some scholars are now contesting. However, the theological foundation of this assertion can be summarized as follows:

God wants salvation for all men. Christianity which considers itself as absolute is nevertheless historical and reaches individuals and people gradually. Meanwhile, God’s universal will to save cannot be frustrated the non-Christians must somehow find a saving relationship with God through implicit faith in Christ (Rahner, 1966 p.134).

In other words, while Rahner took cognizance of the necessity of the Christian faith in salvation (see Mk. 16:16), he also

realized God's universal salvific will for all humankind (see 1Tim. 2:4).

From the above, it is now clear that the modern trend is that non-Christians including Muslims can also receive salvation without necessarily becoming Christians, if they do not have that opportunity to do so or do not want to do so. However, all these views were personal and no official pronouncement was made, as far as non-Christians are concerned until the Vatican Council II in 1962 and 1965.

The Council made some declarations concerning non-Christians, especially the Muslims. The first one was *Lumen Gentium* - a dogmatic constitution of the church. In this document, the boundaries of the church as "people of God" were extended to include all human beings of good will and sincere hearts. Paragraph 16 of the document is illuminating in this regard. It says:

The plan of salvation also includes those who know the creator, in the first place amongst, whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham and together with us they adore the one merciful God, mankind's judge on the last Day (see Abbot, 1966 p.35).

The second declaration represents both in tone and context, a decisive and even more unique advance in the way the church looks at religion when it says among other things:

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth who has spoken to all men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decree of God. Just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims are eagerly linked their own (The Vatican Council II, n.d p.660).

It goes further to summarize the core aspect of Islam which a Christian can honestly admire:

...they revere Jesus as a prophet, his mother they honour. . . they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For these reasons, they highly esteem in upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms deeds and fasting (see Pope John Paul II, 1982 p.26).

This Catholic evaluation of Islam was the first official declaration of the stand of the church on the possibility of Salvation for non-Christians. Although, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, other Christian denominations have not come out with any categorical statement about this, it is believed that there are liberal Christians in some Christian denominations who are also convinced that not all non-Christians will be victims of eternal hell fire.

So far, we have seen the trends in the debates concerning the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, especially Muslims, at the different stages of development of Christianity. While some conservative theologians and scholars and fundamentalists still hold the intransigent view of "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (No salvation outside the Church), the liberal ones, including the Roman Catholic Church, give allowance for the salvation of non-Christians. But before I state my own position on this based on the foregoing discussions, five categories of people have been identified as people for salvation.

In the first category are some Christians who are truly doing the will of God. According to Jesus himself, it is not everyone that says, "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom of God but only those who do the will of God" (Matt. 7:21). The implication of this

declaration is that not even all the Christians will be saved. In the second category are those who are good in their own religions. These are those who are honestly seeking God. All religions of the world teach love, peace, and justice and good neighbourliness. Hence, at this individual level, God's judgment is based on how well one has lived concerning his/her religious moral virtues, just like the African Traditional Religion's position on salvation. Therefore, if an adherent of any religion in addition to the fundamental love of God and love of ones neighbour (Mk. 12: 30-3 1) excels in good works, such an adherent will receive salvation (see Matt. 22:37-39; also see Qur'an):26-27).

In the third category are those who did not hear the message of Christ at all. As noted above, there were millions of people who lived and died before Christ was born. Even during Jesus' time, many did not know anything about Him and even today, many are dying daily without hearing anything about the message of Christ. Such people could not believe in him or have never heard of Him (Rom. 10:14). Notably, all these categories of people may not be judged with the Christian standard (Rom. 10: 11-13).

The fourth category comprises those who heard but did not understand the message. The message of Christ needs correct interpretation to enhance understanding. This cannot be effectively done without good explanation of the new doctrine to the new hearers. For instance, Jesus' message to Nicodemus was that before a man could enter the kingdom of God, he must be born again. This 'born again' message was so strange to Nicodemus that he became confused until Jesus himself explained the message to him (Jn. 3:1-8). Similarly, if anyone hears the message but does not understand it and yet there is no explanation or guidance from anywhere, such a person

cannot be blamed for not accepting what he did not understand. Perhaps, that was why Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and teach all nations (Matt. 28: 19-20). The last category includes those who are saved by the prerogative of mercy of God. In fact, salvation belongs to God and by His special grace some people may be granted salvation (see Amos 9: 7-8). Candidly, human beings cannot comprehend the mystery and power of God to save since God's ways are different from human ways of reasoning and acting (Isa. 55:18).

However, in spite of the differences in understanding the concept of salvation, both Christianity and Islam still have a common-ground concerning it. Both religions believe in the Judgment Day (or Last Day) of God when the righteous will be rewarded with heaven (Paradise), a place of bliss, while the sinners will be condemned to Hell fire, a place of suffering and gnashing of teeth forever (see Matthew 13:42; Quran 10: 26-27 and Quran 78: 21-25) (Park, 2013). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, one can harmonize the different views of Christianity and Islam about salvation as an escape from hell fire punishment and admittance into heaven (paradise) on the day of final judgment. With this working clarification, which is presumably acceptable to both religions, one should now proceed to conclude that both religions can now appreciate each other. This appreciation of each other's religion will enhance cordial relationship between the adherents of Christianity and Islam.

Undoubtedly, the issue of salvation is a very thorny one in Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria. But the foregoing has clearly shown that salvation is not, and cannot, be a monopoly of any particular religion. Previous attempts to do so have been regarded as fundamentalism and fanaticism which Bala (1985) describes as "a naughty

child of a difficult mother's religion" (p.113). From the Nigerian experience, fanaticism has led to hatred, chaos and loss of human lives including properties. After all, one cannot sincerely love God who is not seen if one cannot love his/her neighbours who can be seen.

There is the need therefore, to agree that there is pluralism in the ways of salvation. As Alli (1968) succinctly puts it that:

God is one; all justice is of one stand. But we see Truth from different perspectives of the scales of phenomenal diversity that is in our eyes. As soon as those scales fall from our eyes, the true Reality will emerge (p.634).

In this sense, the attainment of salvation therefore, is embodied in the natural consequences of a person's approach to life exemplified in self-actualization and purification which are as a result of reward and punishment.

7. Conclusion

From our arguments so far, I have established that some of those who have faith in Christ will be saved; and some non-Christians, including Muslims, will also obtain salvation. However, it must be emphasized that whosoever will be saved, Christian or Muslim, must submit him/herself to the will of God and demonstrate practically love for his/her neighbours, the evidence of which should be good works. The result of understanding and appreciating the above facts will go a long way in installing and promoting good relationship, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and harmony between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. I have earlier advocated and recommended this in my previous work (Ottuh, Ottuh and Aitufe, 2014). What every religious adherent should realize is that God

is the God of all religions and the various religions are the established paths or ways to reach Him. It may not matter the particular way you follow to reach Him, what matters, is practically demonstrating His will. This is the only way all humans can appreciate one another's religion and point of views concerning salvation.

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