# *Religious Exclusivism and Logical Implication of Religious Pluralism: The Nigerian Context*

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**Abstract**

*The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria allows freedom of worship in the three major religions in Nigeria, namely, Christianity, Islam, and the Traditional religions. However, religious exclusivism among adherents of these religions has generated persistent interfaith rivalry, misunderstanding and violent evangelism, threatening social cohesion and national unity. This exclusivism persists despite evidence suggesting convergence among these religions regarding God and salvation. This paper highlights the exclusivist positions of members of these religious groups and the logical implications of religious pluralism. A study was conducted to find out the level of religious relativism among members of these three religions regarding God and salvation. Findings of the study were compared with the literature on the teachings of these religions regarding God and salvation. The findings were evaluated using descriptive statistical methods to highlight religious relativism and the logical implications of religious pluralism. Literature review shows consensus on the worship of the same God, and the possibility of salvation in all three religions. These findings strongly highlight religious exclusivism among Christians and Muslims, with the Traditionalists open to other religions. The Logical implication of religious pluralism requires better understanding, acceptance, and dialogue among members of these religions.*

**Keywords**: Constitution, Logical implication, Nigeria, Religious-exclusivism, Religious-pluralism

## Introduction

There is what can be described as the Nigerian Context: the religious makeup of Nigerians, largely defined by three main religions, Christianity, Islam, and the Traditional Religions (Kii & Amadi, 2025). The Northern part of Nigeria is usually represented as having more Muslims and the Southern part of Nigeria having more Christians, whereas the Traditional religions are usually apportioned a very small fraction to indicate that they exist across the Country (Pew Research Center, 2012). This geographical distribution is a stage for rivalry in each region, as the dominant religion struggles to enforce

dominance over other religions. The current population of Nigeria is 240,304,680 as of Sunday, February 1, 2026, based on Worldometer's elaboration of the latest United Nations data, with 46.3% of the population being Christian, 46% Muslim, 7.4% being Traditional Religious believers, and 0.3% for other religions (Grim et. al. 2017). The data on other believers is often questionable because it is difficult to identify how many are really practising Traditional religions, as some members of this religion are tucked away in the forests and there is no sign that census exercises have ever captured them.

This paper recognises that defining religion and its nature is problematic, and different philosophers have engaged in arguments to justify or not to justify the pluralism of religion. Therefore, the review did not engage the problems of nature and types of religion, whether it is theistic, monotheistic, correct, or almost correct. The context of Nigeria clearly accepts three religions without denying that the essence of these religions covers two fundamental areas: the devotional and the functional roles expected of religion. That is, religions are "first, to seek the face of Olódùmarè [God] and second, to search for a way that will guarantee a safe return to Olódùmarè at the end of one's life on earth. This is precisely why [the Yoruba call their religion] *Àdìmúlà* – that which one holds onto for life/success" (Akin-Otiko, 2015:35).

The Nigerian society is undoubtedly religiously pluralistic; alongside this pluralistic nature are very visible exclusivist positions of the members of these religions. Christians strongly hold that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, quoting Jesus saying: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). Muslims believe that their religion is the way and that every other person is a *kufr* that needs to be converted. The word *kufr* (disbelief) and *kafir* (disbeliever/non-believer) have diverse and contextual uses in the Qur'an, literally means "to cover," "to reject," or "to be ungrateful" (Ali, 2023). While the term is generally used to denote those who reject God or a prophet, its application varies widely. Likewise, the Traditional believers are so committed to their way of religion that even though they recognise other religions, they are more likely to hold onto their traditional practices and implore to be left alone in their religious practices. Although the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* did not mention any religion in particular, this paper will, however, refer to Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religions as the three main religions in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Christianity

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion that is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity is focused on the "life and ministry (work) of Jesus Christ. The life and teaching of Jesus Christ are told in the sacred book called the Bible. Christians believe that the story and message of the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) foretell and lead up to the incarnation of Jesus in the world." (DCU,

n.d.). Its sacred text comprises both the Old Testament and the New Testament, which chronicles the life, teaching, and works of Jesus Christ and his disciples in the early Church (Woodhead, 2004).

**Islam**

Islam, one of the main world religions, is linked to the Prophet Muhammad and began in Arabia in the 7th century CE (Khan, 2019). The Arabic term *islām*, literally means surrender, which illuminates the fundamental religious idea of the Muslims (surrendering to the will of Allah). Allah is viewed as the sole God, creator, sustainer, and restorer of the world (Khan, 2019). In Islam, the will of Allah is made known through the sacred scriptures, the Quran, as revealed to his messenger, Muhammad who is considered the last of a series of prophets (including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jesus), and his message simultaneously consummates and completes the revelations attributed to earlier prophets (Fazlur et. al. 2019).

**Traditional**

Traditional religions represent indigenous ways of engaging with the divine as found among Africans in general (Akin-Otiko, 2018). Among the Yorubas, the religion is known as *Àdìmúlà (*Akin-Otiko, 2018*)*. There have been different ideas and definitions provided for the religions of the Africans. Historically, the religions of Africans were dismissed as unreal, but recent discourse has led to better acceptance and perception. The Yoruba religion is characterised by "the worship of *Olódùmarè,* who is called *Òrìsà-Òkè* (the divinity above)" (Akin-Otiko, 2015:39).

**Religion**

Akin-Otiko (2015:4) noted that for several scholars, religion does not admit an easy and straight forward definition. However some have attempted specific definitions. Ebhomielen and Ukpebor (2013:166) asserts that religion is "a fixed relationship between the human self and non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existence, the absolute or simply God". To show the relationality in religion, Akin-Otiko defined religion as "a means of maintaining a relationship with one's source/creator, with the hope of returning to that same source/creator at the end of one's life on earth." (2015:6). Similarly, "religion is the maintaining of cordial relationship with the Deities and one's fellow humans" (Ajah et al. 2024:100).

**Literature Review**

Religion in this study basically goes beyond the huge argument about the nature, type, framework, accidents, and fundamental properties of religion to a definition that contains the two fundamental roles that religion plays: the devotional and the functional roles of religion (Wienclaw, 2021). Akin-Otiko (2015) defines religion as "a means of maintaining a relationship with one's origin/creator, with the hope of returning to that same source/creator at the end of one's life on earth" (6). This includes fulfilling one's needs while on earth and journeying back to the creator. Adherents of religious exclusivism are referred to as religious exclusivists. An exclusivist is a person who, "in recognition of the diversity of the world's religions, believes that her religion is true, and that other religions are false insofar as they

contradict her home religion" (Gellman, 2000:401). From the point of view of an exclusivist, religions exist are often handled assuming that one's own tradition alone contains the truth, and that other religions are mistaken, at least in those teachings that do not align with one's own. (Quinn, 1998). The exclusivist position is captured in Bertrand Russell's idea that "it is evident as a matter of logic that, since [the great religions of the world] disagree, not more than one of them can be true" (1957, xi). In the case of Nigeria, although the constitution allows for pluralism, believers from each religion have, over time, been exclusivist in their approach and thinking.

Different from exclusivism is religious pluralism, which argues that more than one set of beliefs or practices can be, partially or wholly, true simultaneously. It believes that multiple religions are correct; they just offer different paths and have different perspectives on the *Ultimate Reality*. Religious pluralism is to be distinguished from religious relativism. In relativism, the truth of beliefs or the efficacy of practices are dependent on the perspective of the religious individual and her cultural environment. Relativism denies universal truth about religious claims; each religion is 'true' only insofar as it fits within the broader worldview to which it belongs (Norton, 2023**).** There are different arguments around religious exclusivism and pluralism. One of such arguments is presented by Basinger (1994), who observed that "an exclusivist cannot demonstrate on epistemic grounds that 'are (or should be) accepted by all rational people that her perspective actually is a more accurate description of reality than those descriptions offered by proponents of divergent perspectives" (41). Religious exclusivists need to know as well that others also have "at least the right to assess [their] beliefs in the face of religious diversity" (Basinger, 2018: 42).

The extract from the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* clearly indicates the existence of plurality of religions in Nigeria and the freedom of worship. It states that:

> (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
>
> (2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony, or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian.
>
> (3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.
>
> (4) Nothing in this section shall entitle any person to form, take

> part in the activity or be a member of a secret society (Article number: 37).

This constitution highlights the legitimacy of indigenous religions (Number 4) as against the misconception that they are secret societies.

Religious pluralism exists where individuals in a religiously diverse society have and are allowed the rights, freedoms, and safety to worship according to their belief systems. An epistemic responsibility to examine religion and reflect on beliefs and not leave it at the unreflective level, is encouraged. However, there is not much this can do as it is not a reflection on the suitability of the religion, but a reflection on the personal conviction - why one should belong to the religion, whether one joins, or not, the religion remains the same. Christian (1987) believes there is a logic of religious difference, stating that in the absence of specific overriding contradictions, it is logical to base beliefs on experience. This will allow each believer to hold onto his/her experience where there are no contradictions. This has been further argued directly by Alston (1991) and indirectly by Alvin Plantinga (in Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983), that the basic defence of holding exclusive religious beliefs presupposes religious experience. These arguments are not religion-exclusive; anybody from any religion can use them against the other religion.

Many philosophers have recently shifted their focus to the relationship between religious diversity and religious tolerance, especially exploring whether recognising and reflecting on religious differences can encourage greater tolerance (Basinger, 2018). The main argument that diversity can foster tolerance was developed by the late Philip Quinn (2001, pp. 57–80; 2002, pp. 533–537; 2005a, pp. 136–139). He argued that (1) taking the reality of religious diversity seriously naturally weakens a person's confidence that their own religion is superior to others, and (2) this reduced confidence can—at least for some individuals—promote a more tolerant attitude toward people of other faiths. However, some philosophers, while fully aware of the widespread reality of religious diversity, still adopt an exclusivist stance. They refuse to abandon confidence in the truth of their own religion, sometimes appealing to empirical claims about human psychology and religious behaviour to support their position (Alston, 1988, pp. 442–446; Plantinga, 2000, pp. 189).

In the context of Nigeria, there have been studies about ethno-religious crises that have resulted from religious diversity, such as the violent religious clashes that occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s between members of the two main religious groups (Salawu, 2010). To reject religious pluralism is to reject other religions as possible authentic religions; this can fuel religious intolerance. Religious intolerance, defined as the "practice of keeping others from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs, is not new (Basinger, 2018: 42). Furthermore, exclusivist positions have been linked to several instances of religious unrest in Nigeria. Much of the conflict and instability in Nigeria can be

traced to entrenched social divisions, particularly religious differences, which have historically sparked both vigorous public debate and episodes of intense violence (Salawu, 2010). It has been argued that the three main religions in Nigeria should not cause crises in Nigeria. This is because, according to Religious Diversity Index, a version of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (2014), "Nigeria does not belong to the countries with high religious diversity, which makes it a big wonder that the poison of diversity is so deep in Nigeria, when there are only two big religions and the different traditional religions of the indigenous people" (Grim et al., 2017: 32).

Although the above studies have been done, there have not been direct studies to indicate the views of believers from a particular religion towards the other religions that are not their own. Making this a study may contribute towards members tolerating others and accepting true freedom of worship as contained in the Constitution of Nigeria without prejudice. This paper recognises the possibility of exclusivism in the mists of plurality and investigates what is logical and possible given this dichotomy.

This paper adopts the principle of "Live and let live" (*Se jé kin se tè mi*) as a theory. This was used during the First World War to spontaneously arrive at a non-aggressive cooperative. It is said to have developed as a behaviour during the First World War, particularly during prolonged periods of trench warfare on the Western Front. Ashworth (2000) did research around this theory based on the content of diaries, letters and testimonies of veterans from the First World War. His research showed that 'live and let live' was widely known at the time of the war. The principle of "Live and let live" has its equivalent in *Èjì-Ogbè* (a chapter of the *Ifá* corpus), and as *Se jé kin se tè mi*, it is representative of the teaching of this *Ifá* chapter and reflective of the attitude of Traditional religious practitioners towards other religions. This principle will help with the understanding of the idea of INFORMED EXCLUSIVISM, as is recommended in this study, different from the rigid exclusivism largely found among practitioners of the different religions in Nigeria.

This paper is developed around the fact that the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* allows religious pluralism, but the members of various religious groups are largely exclusive in their attitude and practice. This problem creates a level of discord in the religious context of Nigeria. The discord has led to rivalry, forceful conversion, and intolerance among members of different religious groups. Religious pluralism suggests that people in Nigeria can choose among several religions that are all seen as valid. However, religious exclusivism views other religions as existing but rejects them as genuine paths to salvation. Therefore, this paper highlights the logical implications of religious pluralism and the gains of religious pluralism. It responds to questions such as: how should an exclusivist relate to the fact that there are as: aware, sincere, and knowledgeable about God and at the same time differ from him/her on some issue of religious

significance? Precisely, how should a Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmuúlà* who comes to realise that others who seem as knowledgeable and devout hold incompatible religious perspectives respond? Can a Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmuúlà* exclusivist justifiably disregard such diversity? If not, what are the logical implications that should guide his/her reaction?

To achieve the purpose of this study, there was a pilot study to validate the hypothesis that members of each religion in Nigeria are religiously exclusivist. A total of 242 responses were received from members of the three main religious groups within Nigeria during a gathering for different religious groups. Respondents were selected based on their willingness to engage in the study. Respondents were asked whether the three religions worship the same God and whether the three religions can serve as a means of salvation. These data were complemented with a literature review on the beliefs of the three religions regarding God and salvation. The findings were analysed using tables to show the result of the pilot study, while the logical implications of religious pluralism were descriptively analysed within the context of the Nigerian State.

## Results

### Primary Data Analysis

All the respondents were randomly selected based on the fact that they identify as believers. All were at least in their teens, with a basic knowledge of the religion they profess and what other religions do. The respondents were both male and female with no specific preference for gender. There were a total of 242 respondents based on the randomly selected population in Lagos metropolis: Christians - 194 (80%); Islam - 42 (17%) & Traditionalists - 6 (3%). This was used based on the percentage analysis of each religious group. The representation gives an indication to willingness and availability of members of the different religious groups in a randomly selected population. The discrepancy in the number is not a problem as it did not affect the quality of responses.

(A) Is it the same God that is worshipped in Traditional religions, Christianity, and Islam?

Christians

Table 1: Christian Perspective on One God

| S/N | % | Religion | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 73% | Christians | Christians and Muslims worship the same God. |
| 2 | 32% | Christians | Christians and Traditionalists worship the same God. |
| 3 | 32% | Christians | Muslims and Traditionalists serve the same God. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025).

Table 1 reveals that more Christians (73%) believe that they share the same God with Muslims, whereas fewer Christians (32%) believe they serve the same God as the Traditionalists, and since Christians share the same God with Muslims, the God of the Muslims is the same as the God of the Traditionalists.

Muslims

Table 2: Muslim Perspective on One God

| S/N | % | Religion | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 47% | Muslims | Muslims and Christians worship the same God. |
| 2 | 40% | Muslims | Christians and Traditionalists worship the same God. |
| 3 | 21% | Muslims | Muslims and Traditionalists worship the same God. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025)

Table 2 reveals that an average Muslims (47%) believe that they share the same God with Christians, fewer Muslims (40%) believe that Christians and Traditionalists worship the same God, and even fewer Muslims believe that Muslims worship the same God as the Traditionalists.

Table 3: Traditionalist Perspective on God

| S/N | % | Religion | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 84% | Traditionalists | Traditionalists worship the same God as Christians. |
| 2 | 84% | Traditionalists | Traditionalists worship the same God as the Muslims. |
| 3 | 100% | Traditionalists | Christians and Muslims worship the same God. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025).

Table 3 reveals that almost all the Traditionalists (84%) believe that they worship the same God as Christians and Muslims. All Traditionalists believe that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

Generally, more Christians (73%) believe that they share the same God as the Muslims compared to the (47%) Muslims who believe they worship the same God as Christians. Fewer Christians think that they worship the same God as the Traditionalists. More Muslims think that Christians and Traditionalists worship the same God. Fewer Muslims (21%) think that they and the Traditionalists worship the same God.

(B) Will members of other religions go to heaven?

Table 4: Christians' Opinion on Heaven

| S/N | % | Religion | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 97% | Christians | Christians think that Christians will be saved. |
| 2 | 82% | Christians | Christians think that Muslims will be saved. |
| 3 | 59% | Christians | Christians think that Traditionalists will be saved. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025).

Table 5: Muslims Opinion on Heaven

| S/N | % | Religion | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 90% | Muslims | Muslims think that Muslims will be saved. |
| 2 | 36% | Muslims | Muslims think that Christians will be saved. |
| 3 | 31% | Muslims | Muslims think that Traditionalists will be saved. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025).

Table 6: Traditionalist Opinion on Heaven

| S/N | % | Religion | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 100% | Traditionalists | Traditionalists believe that they will be saved. |
| 2 | 84% | Traditionalists | Traditionalists believe that Muslims will be saved. |
| 3 | 84% | Traditionalists | Traditionalists believe that Christians will be saved. |

(Akin-Otiko, Field survey, Lagos, 2025).

Tables 4-6 reveals that believers from all religions believe that salvation is most possible through their religion. In the case of Christians and Muslim, the Traditional religions are the least trusted for salvation, whereas Traditionalists have a higher reckoning with Christianity and Islam as possible means of salvation (84%).

These analyses show the relatedness of the religiousness of Nigerians, and it also shows the 'doubt pendulum' swinging toward the religions of the Africans, which explains why there is a move towards converting them or disparaging them. This analysis also shows the disposition of the Traditionalists toward both Islam and Christianity, "a o pe ki won o ma se ti won, sùgbón ki won fi wa sile" (We have not asked them not to practise their religion, what we ask is that they let us be).

**Secondary Data Analysis**

**God and Salvation in the Main Religions in Nigeria**

Christianity is a monotheistic religion that teaches that "there is only one God who is the creator of all things, 'visible and invisible' (Omoregbe, 2012:23). This is evident in the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai: *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. Worship no god but me. Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth"* (Exodus 20:2-4). For Christians, God is the eternal being who created and preserves all things. He is both transcendent (wholly independent of, and removed from, the material universe) and immanent (involved in the world) (Leith, 1992:87-88). Paul described this in his letter to the Corinthians: *"for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live"* (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).

Although there is one God, Christianity also teaches that there are three co-eternal persons in this one God. This is referred to as co-essentiality (Latin: *coessentialitas*), a notion referring to the common properties of the divine persons of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit share the same substance (consubstantial), and they have the same essence (coessential) (Jinkins, 2001:117). The doctrine of the Holy Trinity remains a mystery that cannot be understood or explained fully.

The Scriptures, however, provide insight into the teaching of the Trinitarian doctrine. Jesus, in different parts of the Bible, taught his followers to recognise in Himself the Eternal Son of God. "*The*

*Father and I are one."* (John 10:30) The fourth Gospel especially emphasises Jesus' divinity, the author presents Jesus as the Logos, the word that pre-existed creation and is divine. It says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) The same fourth Gospel ended with the declaration of Thomas about Jesus as God. "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). In the Gospel according to Matthew, when Jesus' ministry was ending, He promised that the Father would send another divine person, the Holy Spirit, in His place (Matthew, 14 & 17). Finally, after His resurrection, He revealed the doctrine in explicit terms, bidding them "go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:18). There are other references in the Bible such as 2 Corinthians 13:13, 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, Ephesians 4:4–6, 1 Peter 1:2 and Revelation 1:4–5, that point to the Trinitarian formula. Essentially, Christianity teaches that God is one and that he loves all "as a father loves his children. God is infinitely good, infinitely just, infinitely merciful, all-knowing, all-seeing, omnipresent, etc." (Omoregbe, 1999:23).

Islam is also a monotheistic religion; however, it does not subscribe to the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity. The word for God, in Islam, is *Allah*, "this is an abbreviation of the Arabic words *'A-ilah'*, which means 'the God, that is, the real God, as distinct from the polytheistic gods" (Omoregbe, 1999:55). Chapter 112 of the Quran, titled 'The Sincerity' reads: *"He is God, [who is] One. God, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.*" Islam rigidly teaches that God is one, and that he does not have a child, nor did anyone give birth to him. Omoregbe (1995) notes that, "God is unique and transcendent. He has no equal and no companion, no Son. He is the omnipotent creator of all things and the absolute controller of all things. The whole universe (and whatever happens in it) is under God's absolute sovereignty and control" (55).

In Islam, there is only one God, and there are 99 names of that one God, each of which evokes a distinct attribute of God (Bentley, 1999). Islam emphasises the attributes and names of God, such as the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Omnipotent, Omniscient, All-seeing, All-hearing, All-wise, All-just, etc. Among the 99 names of God, the ones that are most familiar and frequent are the Compassionate (*Ar-Raḥmān*) and the Merciful (Omoregbe, 1999).

Religions of the Africans are monotheistic religions, "like other monotheistic religions, African Indigenous Religion teaches that there is only one God, and that he is supreme, unique and without equal" (Omoregbe, 1999:64). Africans have always had knowledge of the existence of a Supreme Being. For example, "the Yoruba have an elaborate hierarchy of deities, each with special duties and functions. They believe in a supreme but remote spirit- Olórun, also known as Olódùmarè – the Lord of Heaven and the Creator" (Idowu, 1996:2). This idea was however not so clear to the

early missionaries who made the mistake of thinking that "the Africans have no idea of a Supreme Being" (Nwaigbo, 1995:200). The missionaries taught that they "brought the idea of the Supreme Being to the Africans. This erroneous understanding gave rise to the theory of the *Deus Otiosus*, which postulates that God is thought to have withdrawn to the skies and left the administration of the universe in the hands of the spirits who act as his intermediaries (Wallis, 1912).

Many scholars have mistakenly said African religions are better understood as involving elements of monotheism, polytheism, and pantheism at different theological levels and in different contexts of experience. Peel (1968) observed that "Yoruba paganism is a very discrete religion, with many varied theological elements (a Supreme Being, subordinate deities, ancestors, sacred kings, all sorts of local spirits and an elaborate system of divination), and the whole system looks different from different social standpoint" (p.29). These views are responsible for scholars saying that the religions of the Africans are "liberal monotheism which allows that God be approached through subordinate beings who are his servants" (Omoregbe, 1999:64). This is so because "it is generally recognised that there are two fundamentally different types of divinity in African religions: the one creator - God, who is usually remote from daily religious life, and the many lesser gods and spirits which are constantly involved in everyday religious experience" (Ray, 1976:50).

It is important to note that each religion of the Africans has terms that refer to God alone. "The word for the Supreme Being (God) is unique, and it has no plural form – it is always singular since there cannot be more than one God" (Omoregbe, 1999:64). For the Africans, God knows it all, sees it all, rules the whole of the universe, and is the source of everything.

> The Yorubas know, despite all this heavy structure of theocratic, governmental arrangements, that at the head of all, and controlling all, is Olódùmarè, and that there is no time, really, when He is far away from them, or when they keep Him out of their minds. They may appear to live their lives in absolute devotion to the divinities, but underneath all their acts of worship is the deep consciousness that Olódùmarè is above all and ultimately controls all issues (Idowu, 1996:46).

God is the head; the *Odù Ifá* particularly *Èjì Ogbè* talked about God as the Almighty. For the Africans, God is so immeasurable that nothing can be used to represent him in any shrine. The religion of the Africans is monotheistic; other beliefs allow for a relationship with divinities and spirits, but this does not essentially change the monotheistic nature of the religions of the Africans.

**The Idea of Salvation and Eligibility for Salvation in the Three Main Religions in Nigeria**

Each religion expresses the means of salvation as contained in its creed. Religious exclusivists believe that "those,

and only those, who have met the criteria set forth by one religious perspective can spend eternity in God's presence" (Basinger, 2018: 46). Most Christians believe that human beings experience divine judgment and are rewarded either with eternal life or eternal damnation. This includes the general judgement at the resurrection of the dead, as well as the belief in a judgement particular to the individual soul upon physical death (Herbermann et. al. 1907). Paul the Apostle talked about his belief in his letter to the Galatians (3:29) that sacrifice can bring about new kinship ties, purity, and eternal life (Eisenbaum, 2004). The necessary sacrifice was the death of Jesus. This sacrifice was for both the Gentiles and the descendants of Abraham, and according to the promise. (Wright, 1997:121). In Romans 8:9, 11, and 16, Paul said, the God who raised Jesus from the dead would also give new life to the mortal bodies of Gentile Christians, who had become, with Israel, the children of God, and were therefore no longer in the flesh (Eisenbaum, 2004). Basically, Christianity teaches that salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

In Islam, salvation refers to the eventual entrance to *Paradise*. Belief in the "One God", also known as the *Tawhid* in Arabic, consists of two parts (or principles): *Tawḥīdu*: believing in the attributes of God and attributing them to no other but God. Such attributes include Creation, having no beginning, and having no end. *Tawḥīdu*: directing worship, prayer, or deed to God, and God only. For example, worshipping an idol or any saint or prophet is also considered *Shirk*. Muhammad is quoted to have said, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah," and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of a barley grain will be taken out. If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter, he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)" (Muhammad Sahih al-Bukhari, 1:2:43). This suggests that Islam teaches that all who enter Islam must remain to receive salvation. This is why Islam teaches that people who die disbelieving in God do not receive salvation. It also teaches that non-Muslims who die believing in God but disbelieving in his message (Islam), are left to His will. Those who die believing in the One God and his message (Islam) receive salvation (sura 3 (Al Imran) ayat 25).

In *Àdìmúlà,* the fourth article of the creed as developed by Akin-Otiko (2015), expresses belief in life after death, as well as reward and punishment after death. *"Mo ni ìgbàgbó nínú ìmò-rèrè, ibi èrè ayérayé fún ìwà rere, àti ibi èsan ayérayé, fún ìwà ibi.* (I believe in heaven, an eternal place for reward for good deeds, and hell, a place of punishment for evil deeds) (Akin-Otiko, 2015:53). *Àdìmúlà* teaches that life on earth is a journey, and like every journey, life on earth is never like being at home in heaven. No matter how long one stays on a journey, one always prays to return home with the profits or benefits of the journey*. "àjò ni ilé yìí, àjò kò sì dà bí ilé, bí a ti wulè ki á pé l'ájò tó, àdúrà kí a kó èrè àjò tàbí oko dé'lé ni Yoruba máa n se"* (Adeoye, 2005:11)*.* Life after death is not a strange

element in the teaching of *Àdìmúlà*. It is believed "that the death of a man is by no means the end of his life, that life continues after death… after death, the individual faces the judgement of God, following which he will receive his reward or punishment from God, according to the kind of life he lived on earth" (Omoregbe, 2012:73). *Ifá* corpus has it put as:

*E mó sìkà láyé* - Do not partake in wickedness while on Earth
*Nítorí à ó ròrun* - For the singular reason that we would all return to Heaven
*Bí a bá dé bode* - When we get to the border
*A ó rojó* - We would all give reports (Salami, 2008:212).

**Comparative analysis of the study and the literature review**

**Table 7: Positions from the Study**

| Religion | Primary Source | Secondary Source |
|---|---|---|
| Christianity | Exclusivist | Pluralist |
| Islam | Exclusivist | Pluralist |
| Traditional Religions | Pluralist | Pluralist |

(Akin-Otiko, 2025).

Table 7 shows a comparative analysis of the results of the study and the literature review on the idea of God and salvation in the three religions.

**Researcher's Inference**

There is a dichotomy between the results of the study and the literature review in Christianity and Islam, whereas, in the Traditional religion, there is a common result in the study and literature review. This section of the paper discusses the findings of both the study and the literature review on who God is understood to be and who is eligible for salvation in Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religions (*Àdìmúlà*). This discussion highlights the logical implications and possible gains of religious pluralism along the structural line of a syllogism. The attitude of Traditional Religion practitioners flows from *Èjì-Ogbè* as it explains why the practitioners of Traditional Religion are more receptive to other religions:

1st Premise: Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* all worship the same God,

2nd Premise: Each religion has a means of salvation

Conclusion: Therefore, members may view other religions as inferior, causing conflict, aggressive evangelism, and inter-religious hostility.

This syllogism raises the following questions:

1) If the members quarrel with one another, what should be done?
2) If the members evangelise forcefully, what should be done?
3) If the members see other religions as less, what should be done?

1st Premise: Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* all worship the same God.

Literature review shows that all three religions in Nigeria teach the existence of one infinite being, that they all call

God/Allah/*Olódùmarè*. Although each religion has a unique name for God, each differs from the other in teaching and doctrine. Christianity teaches the doctrine of the Trinity as synonymous with One God; The religions of the Africans teach belief in divinities as well as one God, and Islam teach that God is one, he was not given birth to, nor did he give birth. Despite the doctrinal differences, they are all monotheistic; God has common attributes (eternal, unchanging, source of everything, all-knowing, seeing, benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc.). God is known through their sacred texts as the Almighty.

2nd Premise: Each religion has a means of salvation

There is the possibility of salvation in all three religions. According to the literature review, all three religions are equal because of their object of worship (God), and can lead to the end, which may be *Àlùjaánà/ìmò-rèrè*/heaven. It is impossible not to be an exclusivist by the very nature of religion. What respects pluralism is INFORMED EXCLUSIVISM, which portrays someone who: 1) believes that his/her religion contains the truth, and 2) believes that other religions can contain the truth in their respective creed.

Findings show that all three religions have room for INFORMED EXCLUSIVISTS. Gellman notes that,

> in more contemporary times, the home religion may recognize some truth and some salvific value in other religions but will interpret that in terms of the home religion. For example, if the religion is Christianity, it might teach that genuinely spiritual adherents of other religions are 'anonymous Christians' who live in Jesus, without knowing it (2000:402).

Similarly, Karl Rahner discussed this in his idea of the 'anonymous Christians'. For him, all have been invited to salvation and can be saved.

> Christianity, he argues, cannot recognize any other religion as providing the way to salvation. However, since God is love and desires everyone to be saved, God can apply the results of Jesus's atoning death and resurrection to everyone, even to those who have never heard of Jesus and his death or have never acknowledged his lordship. Just as adherents to pre-Christian Judaism were able, through the redemptive acts of Jesus of which they were not aware, to enter God's presence, so, too, is it possible for adherents of other religions to enter God's presence, even though they are not aware of the necessary redemptive acts of Jesus that makes this possible (Peterson et al. 2013, 334–335).

This same idea of possible salvation for members of other religions is found in the teachings of Islam, for it is said that *"those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians, - any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness,- on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve"* (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:62).

And Murtadha Mutahhari, a respected proponent of Muslim inclusivism, argued that

> Non-Muslims are at a disadvantage because it is the Islamic Divine Law that leads people to God. And those who fully understand this law (Islam) but choose not to accept the truth will be damned. However, in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence, God will be merciful to those who seek the truth but from whom, through no fault of their own, the reality of Islam remains hidden. Such people cannot be called unbelievers; they are rather "dispositional Muslims" since it is possible to possess the requisite spirit of submission without being Muslim in name. And these individuals will receive the divine grace necessary to achieve salvation from Hell (Mutahhari, 2006; Legenhausen, 1997).

In *Àdìmúlà* (Yoruba religion), *I*, one of the chapters of *Èjì-Ogbè Ifá* in the *Ifá* Corpus says:

*Èjì-Ogbè ni mo gbe, no gbe eni kan*
*Omo eni o ni sedi berekete, kia fi okun sidi omo elomi,*
*Omo eni lomo eni se*
*Ko p oko po ni ti irawo,*
*Okan sho sho ni ti oshupa*
*Adifa fun Olodumare,*
*Oba akin ninu oba akin loju ogun.*
*Lojo to fe lo joye apase lori*
*Bi omo eni o ba bi okunrin, omo eni a bi ide*

This has been interpreted to mean that God allows a plurality of ways to reach him. God will not say because one is trying to reach him through a particular religion and refuse to respond. God is too big to have only one way of reaching him. He created diverse ways so that we can relate to him in diverse ways. Every way is valid.

**The questions from the conclusion of the syllogism:**

1) The members quarrel with one another, and what should be done?

Tables 1, 2, and 3 reveal how strongly exclusivist many Nigerian religious traditions are. A significant number of adherents believe that followers of other religions do not worship the same God they do. In some cases, this exclusivism becomes intensified through indoctrination or fanaticism, leading people to assume that *solely* their tradition possesses truth. As Gellman (2000) notes, some believers feel that their personal relationship with God excuses them from seriously engaging the reality of religious diversity. However, a genuine exclusivist should also be an informed one. This is someone who recognises that others, too, are sincere, knowledgeable, and devout, yet still hold different religious convictions. A Christian, Muslim, or Aládìmúlà adherent should acknowledge that other believers may be just as committed to God, even if their beliefs conflict with one's own. This is where the idea of informed exclusivism becomes useful: *live and let live.* Because an exclusivist cannot reasonably deny the existence of diverse and well-established religious alternatives, Alston (1991) argues that a believer may remain committed to their faith while still seeking non-circular ways of evaluating competing religious claims. Hick (1989) illustrates

this through his famous parable of the blind men and the elephant: each man touches a different part of the same animal and reaches a different conclusion about what it is like. Likewise, religions perceive the same Ultimate Reality in diverse ways, some as a personal God, others as Brahman, others through multiple deities. These differences arise from one's cultural background, upbringing, and conceptual framework.

2) The members evangelise forcefully, and what should be done?

Tables 4, 5, and 6 indicate that exclusivists regard other religions as less certain paths to salvation compared to their own faith. The survey shows that most people believe that a person must come to understand and follow the unique way of a specific religion to be able to make it to salvation. Most people, as Hick (1989) pointed out, adhere to the religious tradition in which they were raised. This means that a Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* raised in a Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* way will generally believe in the Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* way of salvation if he/she remains religious. Gellman (2000) notes that "the religion one's parents raised one in will almost always be exclusivist. One's home religion will include as a matter of course a ready explanation for the failures of other religions to recognize the truth" (402). To be more specific, salvific exclusivists see, "the criteria for salvation specified by the one correct religious perspective [as] both epistemologically necessary in the sense that those seeking salvation must be aware of these conditions for salvation and ontologically necessary in the sense that these conditions must really be met" (Peterson et al. 2013:322). For example, "Muslim salvific exclusivists maintain that 'whether a person is 'saved' or not is principally determined by whether he or she responded appropriately to Islamic belief" (Aijaz 2014, 194). In line with this view, Plantinga (2000) acknowledges that "if a proponent of a specific religious perspective has no reason to doubt that those with whom he disagrees really are on equal epistemic footing, then he is under a *prima facie* obligation to attempt to resolve the conflict" (172).

3) The members see other religions as inferior, and what should be done?

It is said that "when confronted with other religions and their apparent spiritual successes, a religious believer may rationally treat his home religion non-reflectively and judge other religions by its lights, so long as his confidence in his home religion has not been challenged" (Gellman, 2000:403-4). Homegrown religious orientation should recognise the reality that a Christian/Muslim/*Aládìmúlà* sees religious issues from the view of what has been taught. As Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower" (Summa Theologiae, II/II, 1, 2). Exclusivists should be rational in dealing with other religions; they should be INFORMED EXCLUSIVISTS, even as they are doctrinally different in their beliefs. They must learn to remove prejudice (primitive, lower, etc.) because each believer is guided by the knowledge of the truth that he/she is exposed to, and no one totally knows God, otherwise God will

no longer be God. There should be dialogue among these religions for a better understanding of one another's teachings and doctrines. It is important that religious people should consider one another as equals and there should be no forceful conversion of people from other religions. Dialogue must portend that individuals come to the awareness "that seemingly sincere, knowledgeable individuals differ with [them] on an issue of religious significance" (Basinger, 2018: 48).

**Conclusion**

From the review of literature, it is evident that unlike the survey, the three religions in Nigeria have a common God. And all three religions have means of salvation peculiar to them. Nigerians, therefore, must realise that other religions have some level of truth in them. And no religion exclusively monopolises the means of salvation. Some people will be saved in other religions. Given the possibility of 'anonymous Christians' and "dispositional Muslims", the theory of "Live and let's live" and *Se jé kin se tè mi*, makes room for the idea of INFORMED EXCLUSIVISM as is recommended in this study, as against rigid exclusivism, largely found in Nigeria.

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