Breaking the Cycle of Religious Violence in Nigeria: Towards Interfaith Collaboration in Ile-Ife

By

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This Capstone Project by ADEFI, Adegbola Tolu was carried out under my supervision

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Dr. Darrell Ezzell  
Date
Abstract

Religious intolerance manifests in diverse ways the world over. Power and privilege enjoyed by dominant faiths in localities across the globe and their large followership within each social context often blinds the eyes of the privileged to the reality and urgency for change. Several approaches have been advanced to address this imbalance and give hope to the oppressed. However, interfaith action remains one of the most potent tools for reversing religious intolerance.

Conflicts arising from incompatible religious views have claimed several thousand lives in Nigeria. To address the social malaise, an attempt was made to assess the level of ingrained religious intolerance in Ile-Ife, Southwest, Nigeria.

Results of findings show the endemic religious chauvinism among followers of African Traditional Religions, Muslims and Christians in the community and their aversion towards one another. Having assessed the spate of intolerance, the need for interfaith collaboration and understanding in relating with the religious other across boundaries is strongly advocated.

The constraint of time, resources and dearth of knowledge of interfaith collaboration among the faith communities together with safety concerns of the researcher and respondents limited the scope and coverage of this endeavor significantly. It is recommended that further attempts be made quickly to ride on the ground-breaking efforts through this project to advance the course of interfaith dialogue in the community in a bid to foster understanding and peaceful coexistence among the faith groups in the community.

Acknowledgements
Many personalities have contributed to my success in accomplishing this academic pursuit. Firstly, I acknowledge the providence of Jehovah for providing me with this unique opportunity to increase my knowledge on how to keep the universe growing into one big family where religious differences will no longer be a source of conflict but a unifying force for advancing the course of humanity.

I thank Dr. Olusegun Olawoyin for recommending me for the program. I equally appreciate the Global Peace Organization for full sponsorship of the course. To all my instructors and colleagues at the Claremont Lincoln University, you have made my period in the school eventful. To my wife, Christiana and our daughter, Joan, thanks for enduring those long hours when I had to sit at my study in other to fully participate in the course. You all have been supportive and I say a big thank you to you all.
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Executive Summary

Towns and villages of the Yoruba people were home to indigenous or autochthonous religious traditions from earliest times. These societies continued to follow the customs and religious practices handed down to them by their fore-bears until their interactions with traders who came through the trade routes from North Africa and Mali and the entry of European missionaries and explorers into their territory. Until the time of these incursions, there was religious freedom, harmony, shared understanding and peaceful social relations and coexistence among the people. However, from the time Islam was introduced into the Yoruba country from parts of North and West Africa and Christianity from Europe, the entirety of the Yoruba race who traces their ancestry to Ile-Ife began to experience religious rivalry. Claims and counter claims of supremacy and disharmony in the religious and other aspects of their social lives became common place in their community.

Consequently, the relationship among faith groups in Ile-Ife has since been characterized by ideological, physical and verbal assaults as well as hate speeches. Muslims and Christians in the community deploy various tactics when competing and scrambling for followership. Having identified the genesis of and contributory factors to religious competition and rivalry in Ile-Ife, the project sought to assess the level of understanding and the readiness of votaries of each faith to embrace change in their attitudes, perspectives and claims that fuel religious disharmony in the town with a view to create a new awareness and sustain attitudinal and ideological changes that propel healthy, peaceful and prosperous relations in the religious circle in Ile-Ife community.
A survey was conducted where interactions with respondents from the three different faith groups confirmed the prevailing relationships among votaries of the various religious groups in the town. It was established that Christians are the most intolerant religious group in the town. They are closely followed by Muslims. These two groups sometimes accommodate one another but almost always disrespect and disregard the traditional worshippers and their right to freedom of worship. Relationships that will make for mutual understanding, shared vision for peaceful relations and respect for the fundamental human right for freedom of religious association of all without fear or intimidation was put forth to all participants in the survey. The project suggests a transformative, positive and collaborative engagement among the different faith communities in Ile-Ife and environ. This will go a long way to reposition the town for prosperity and advancement along the religious frontiers.
1.0 Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Issues Identified

The prevailing situation in Ile-Ife is at best that of negative peace. In some situations, the negative peace turns violent with members of some religious groups engaging in sharp disagreement over issues of faith and dogma. Many times, ideological violence and hate speeches are uttered in the religious and social spheres. In most of the cases, members of the various brands of the African Traditional Religions (ATR) are ridiculed, discriminated against and branded as idolaters by Christians and Muslims. The effect is that some Christians and Muslims feel repulsed towards them and teach their followers to abstain from interacting with them in matters of faith and religion. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians also express and manifest their repulsion towards one another in the community. These forms of interactions are considered dangerous for the future of the community. As such, it was considered that attempts be made to introduce interfaith dialogue and collaboration to members of the various faith groups in Ile-Ife to assess their understanding of the need for dialogue and the implications of their religious intolerance towards one another. This would raise their level of consciousness towards interfaith understanding in a bid create a platform for engagement and the exercise of freedom of worship without fear or intimidation of any sort.

1.2 Importance of the Project

The need for the project stems from the primacy of saving the community from full scale religious violence. Though various forms of violence (ideological, verbal, pictographic, cold war, etc) have been identified in the community, at the moment, the various faith groups are only enduring one another. As much as possible, they keep patching up relationships. The atmosphere is tense but
total breakdown of law and order has so far been prevented. No one can tell how long it will take to subdue the tension but proactive actions must be taken to change the turn of events and sue for positive peace and a progressive engagement in the religious landscape of the community. Some pictorials selected at random to depict the level of Christian violence and intolerance towards the African Traditional Faiths which can trigger religious conflicts are here presented. While the makers of the banners went as far as putting some on the internet in addition to hanging them in strategic places in the town, they also place some in public vehicles boarded by all religious adherents in the community.
Figure 1: A banner hoisted around Phase 3 area, along Ife-Ilesa Road by A Pentecostal Christian Group. Snapshot taken on Thursday, 16th June, 2016.
Figure 2: A banner hoisted by an unidentified Christian group along Oranfe Road, Opposite Phase Two Gate, OAUTHC, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Snapshot taken on 6th April, 2016.
Figure 3: Found around Ile-Ife City Center
Figure 4: Found around Ile-Ife City Center
Figure 5: Found around Ile-Ife City Center
1.3 Project Purpose or Goal

The goal of the project is to engineer a smoother, warmer, friendlier and sustainable relationship among faith groups in Ile-Ife. Since interactions among the faith groups have been characterized by intolerance, grudges, competition, suspicion and violence, it was considered that an interfaith initiative will address some of the issues identified among the faith communities which keep them from interacting freely with one another. A dangerous dimension the situation is assuming is the exposure of youths and children to religious views that impress upon them the believe that other faith communities cannot be accommodated in the larger social environment but to be resisted, subdued and eliminated if possible. With all the implications of the ideologies being spread in the city, it was considered best in the interest of the future of Ile-Ife to engage members of the community in an interfaith dialogue targeted towards bringing peace, understanding and mutual respect to the religious landscape of the town.
Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Universally, it is considered appropriate that while attempting an enterprise to glean from the experiences which include successes, failures and challenges of those who have gone ahead on such similar terrain. This is with the intention to draw lessons, to build on previous successes or to avoid pitfalls and failures that pioneers inadvertently plunged into. In many cases, when reviews are carried out, findings of pioneers are fine-tuned, critiqued, refuted or validated. This is equally true when embarking on academic enterprises and researches. Works previously done which are relevant to current studies are reviewed with the intention of assisting researchers in the course of executing their endeavors. From their reviews, they would naturally pick lessons which would serve as guide in the course of undertaking their research. This work is no exception. In the work, all the literatures reviewed are relevant to the current study in quite significant ways. Their contributions range from expositions to the understanding of the process of institutionalizing violence, discrimination, exploitation and how they have negatively impacted human societies to alternative ways of engagement which hold the promise for building shared understanding and cordial relations among erstwhile hostile groups. Conflicts, if not well managed, split societies and breed bad blood among opposing groups. While all violent conflicts must be condemned in very strong terms with attempts made to resolve them by seeking pragmatic ways of addressing them, this work specifically seeks to explore the incidence of religious conflicts in Nigeria with a view to bridging the gap and blurring the rather imagined “otherness” that trigger such violence. While considering how best to tackle the religious violence in Ile-Ife, I considered a step by step approach to ending the religious intolerance prevalent in the community. It was viewed that embracing
mindfulness in all endeavors of the votaries of the different faiths in the town will be a good way to start addressing the problem.

2.2 Mindfulness

Many scholars have contributed to the understanding of the universe with respect to the assumptions of men holding varied perspectives towards accommodating the “other”. Naturally, when men are confronted with people who hold opinions that are different from theirs, they tend to be defensive and confrontational. However, divergent or dissimilar opinions are only views from the other side which should be studied, appreciated and processed to further the course of humanity\(^1\). Sadly, this is not always so. In the midst of the chaotic and crumbling social relations in the world therefore, it is important to take some steps back and retreat from perpetuating the cycle of intolerance, violence and wars. A conscious effort must be taken towards disengagement from intolerance and disabusing one’s mind from the assumptions that cloud one’s thoughts and energize us to further deepen the gulf of religious intolerance. Available literatures on steps to be taken towards building peace agree on the importance of the practice of mindfulness. According to Kabat-Zinn\(^2\), mindfulness is awareness, one of the many forms of meditation. It entails our systematically regulating our attention and energy thereby influencing and possibly transforming the quality of our experience in realizing the full range of our humanity and of our relationships to others in the world. As the practice of mindfulness is embraced, it will afford those cultivating it to be sober and present in their respective situations. The effect of this will be attitudinal changes

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\(^2\) Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment – and Your Life” (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True Inc., 2012), 1-20
and a resolution for openness and engagement. Upon the prevalence of mindfulness over rashness and unguided impulses, the process of Appreciative Enquiry where groups previously opposed to one another can collaborate and build a sustainable future can then be birthed. The practice of Appreciative Enquiry has potentials for initiating change between groups by promoting peaceful engagement that crystallize into blossoming relationships from previously tense and hostile encounters.

Mindfulness in Plain English comes as a text that elucidates on helping individuals in reducing stress, improving physical and psychological well-being, being more effective, skillful and kind in relationships, at work, and throughout their lives. To become more effective, skillful and kind in relationships, one must embrace mindfulness or meditation. Taking some time to pause and be detached from happenings around to consider deeply and dispassionately the cause of action, the present situation and the outcome of our actions entail the adoption of mindfulness. This exercise is most appropriate in my community where the fabric of the society is almost being ripped apart by claims of superiority by one faith group simultaneously over another. This has continued to trigger religious intolerance and has remained a potent source of reoccurring violence for centuries.


5 Bhante Gunaratana, “Mindfulness in Plain English” (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014), 26-32
As the practice of mindfulness is cultivated among faith groups in the community, it is hoped that the perspectives of the people to validating the institutionalization of religious intolerance will change. Once this happens, physical and ideological violence will abate while the need for dialogue aimed towards the commencement of a new form of relationship among the faith groups will emerge. To effectively arrive at this destination, there will be the need for a dialoguer, a negotiator and a mediator.

2.3 Skills needed for Interfaith Dialogue

My efforts to find a lasting solution to the perennial religious violence in my community has led me to meet some individuals who have imbibed some of these skills which will be useful while addressing the problem subsequently. Though all these skills are also being developed in me since the process of engaging in the interfaith program commenced, I will also value the contribution of others in carrying out the interfaith project. These skills become necessary because they will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the interfaith work in the voyage to midwife a better community. No one can unilaterally call peace into existence. The tense atmosphere needs to be approached tactfully. The social construction of the holders of each worldview and the bounds they have set for themselves will demand cautious treading, if the ambition of fostering understanding and peaceful coexistence would be achieved.

2.4 Developing a Humble and Communicative Perspective
Pearce\textsuperscript{6} asserts that a communicative perspective would enhance the success of interactions between any two people. Of interest in this circumstance is the engagement between people who belong to different social worlds. In the pursuit of this project, it has become very clear that unless a deliberate effort is made to teach all participants to be in the learning mode and to give opportunity to all to express their views or opinions and choose to humbly reflect on them to extract and glean life’s lessons from them, the journey to collaborative engagement would be difficult to complete. Like Dr. Michelle Bachelet, the first female Chilean president whose father died due to injuries sustained under state-sponsored torture during the tenure of Augusto Pinochet remarked upon her electoral victory later in her life that … because I was a victim of hate, I have consecrated my life to turning hate into understanding, tolerance, and why not say it – love. In another interview, she remarked when asked about the policies she would follow to promote the kind of understanding and tolerance between those who were tortured and killed in the past like herself. She responded … the idea of how we are able to build places in our society where tolerance, understanding of diversity, integration – and not discrimination – will be main policies. Love, reversing hate and reconciliation are all necessary in building a new relationship.

2.5 Dismantling a Culture of Revenge

On the collective front reencuentro would be more fitting, a movement for the general reconciliation of all members of the society. This was exactly what Nelson Mandela\textsuperscript{7} and Desmond

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\textsuperscript{7} Nelson Mandela, “Ubuntu Philosophy” Uploaded on the Internet on 21\textsuperscript{st} August, 2010, accessed on YouTube from \url{https://youtube.com/watch?v=CGox0EKqiaE} on 13\textsuperscript{th} March, 2016
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Tutu\textsuperscript{8} had in mind when they constituted and led South Africans of all leanings to the Peace and Reconciliatory Commission. Retribution and forgiveness were two popular choices everyone saw. Rather than adopting any of these two perspectives, they chose to adopt the principle of “Ubuntu” which epitomizes love, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. Wounds were healed and a new course was charted for a new South Africa\textsuperscript{9}. This was also the Dalai Lama’s style in bringing peace, freedom, and liberty to Tibet. He knew that canvassing for sanctions against China was not the same as being occupied with seeking for justice and the freedom of his people. Unconventional and highly proactive approaches to conflict resolution become an invaluable asset for peacemakers and transformational leaders\textsuperscript{10}. Tapping into these approaches to peace will no doubt advance the course of making my community a better place to dwell in.

2.6 Refraining from Adversarial Tendencies

Being adversarial, confrontational and defensive of one’s viewpoint is one pitfall many who intend to bring change fall into. All efforts to project one’s views as sacrosanct, sure and superior to those of others gets one locked in an unnecessary and avoidable argument. The movie, Twelve Angry Men, portrays this clearly\textsuperscript{11}. Stating one’s views as one of several views that may exist and allowing others too to state theirs with a commitment to reviewing all views at the table together

\textsuperscript{8} Desmond Tutu, “Voices: Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu Discusses Ubuntu”, UCSB, Published 13\textsuperscript{th} June, 2013, accessed on YouTube from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntwXEtbxiZU on 12\textsuperscript{th} March, 2016
\textsuperscript{9} Ken Beller & Heather Chase, “Great Peacemakers: True Stories from around the World” (Sedona, Arizona:LTS Press, 2008), 79-86
\textsuperscript{10} Ken Beller & Heather Chase, “Great Peacemakers”, 97
\textsuperscript{11} Peg Bouges, “Twelve Angry Men”, (1957 edition), Posted 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 2016, accessed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfAbTyAegpE on 14\textsuperscript{th} March, 2016
and reasoning through them all to arrive at a collective decision would always prove a better approach to handling moral conflicts. At the end, issuing a joint statement about findings cement otherwise separate, opposing views and ideologies together. All these will be attempted in fostering a new form of relationship among faith groups in Ile-Ife.

A local proverb in my community captures the desirable situation aptly. *Agbajo owo la fi n soya, ajeji owo kan ko gbe eru de ori* meaning there is strength in unity as collective efforts yield tremendous benefits, being divisive and adopting separatist mentality prevents individual efforts from yielding results. This is true of collaboration.

### 2.7 Need for Collaboration

The principle of collective ownership will characterize the interfaith group to be established. This will afford each constituent part equal voices to be heard and equal opportunities to decide on their future. Power imbalance will be consciously avoided as it creates an atmosphere of unequal voices and further deepens the gulf of discrimination within groups\(^\text{12}\). Therefore, to sustain collaboration, I ensured that the voices of all groups were heard and that every group’s views were valued and considered in the best interest of all.

When all opinions are examined and collective reasoning prevails, transition from the era of conflicts to a new experience of change will be seamless and acceptable to group members. In essence, since desirable change is a transition from what has been to what is considered a better

option, it must not be seen to be a unilateral decision of a section of the society. Carrying everyone along in the process becomes important. The group will be led to willingly resolve that outcomes of deliberations will be seen as a no-winner-no-loser-decision. It would never be a sum-zero situation or a winner takes all approach. This will only become possible when the prosperity of the community is placed above sectional viewpoints and separatist agenda. This perspective derives from lessons learned in the Bosnia conflict\textsuperscript{13}. Just like Pearce, Bohm\textsuperscript{14} also reveals that the mentality of winning or losing during negotiations and dialogues should never be anticipated. Accordingly, a paradigm for change is a tool to full integration and community participation in the change process.

\textbf{2.8 Leading the Call for Change}

Campaigning for change is a starting point for rallying support for a review on interventions and prevailing situations in any community pursuing change. The leader’s conduct exposes his/her sincerity bringing them under scrutiny. In preparing this community for interreligious dialogue, several leadership styles have been reviewed. The transformational leadership style stands out as the best to be adopted. It guarantees the chances for motivating and securing the support of followers in accomplishing set goals. Since the religious landscape of Ile-Ife is one bedeviled with suspicion, distrust, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, injustice and repression, all it takes to mitigate against all elements capable of escalating the already entrenched religious encounters are

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\textsuperscript{14} David Bohm, “\textit{On Dialogue}” (London: Routeledge, 2004), 6-19
been addressed. Through the process of engagement, the participating groups will be exposed to the various changes needed for transforming their religious boundaries into fruitful encounters and collaborative engagements. Leadership is one area of human endeavor that has continued to suffer even though it has been studied over and again as it has received considerable attention over the years. The type that would be considered as most beneficial to this endeavor is the one that is not only able to provide direction or a path that leads to solution but one that is also able to help followers find, appreciate and embrace the higher way of peace and harmony. This is what transformational leadership provides\textsuperscript{15}.

\section*{2.9 Cultivating an Attitude of Engagement and Collaboration}

An approach that opens the leeway for engagement through difficult situations and conversations that would build a new understanding and mutual respect for the traditions of constituent parts was taken. Collaborators were advised not to necessarily assume intentions from the impact on them but to disentangle impact and intent\textsuperscript{16}. The wisdom Prothero\textsuperscript{17} suggested in seeking to drive religious literacy across boundaries and providing avenues through interfaith groups in seeking deeper understanding about issues, doctrines, creeds and teachings of each faith community was harnessed. Since religious conflicts are deep seated and touch on moral values\textsuperscript{18}, the project was

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conducted in a way that it will not set out to offend the sensibility of any group for holding to their views. Mistakes in this area could spell the failure of any collaborative work should any group feel offended by the way their observances, practices or beliefs are handled. Rather than seek conflict resolution alone, social justice was projected and encouraged by all participating groups in the light of the anticipated future engagement for which the community will benefit immensely. From the outset, it was decided that derogatory terms, abusive languages and prejudiced views are jettisoned in the course of engagement. Future relationships will be premised on the principle of freedom of religious affiliation and practice as put forth by Edward Said\textsuperscript{19}, Adams and Joshi\textsuperscript{20} and Moyaert\textsuperscript{21}.

I consistently played the role of an organizer. In doing this, I refrained from acts that suggest anyone, including myself, will serve as the leader who empowers people. I continued to show that everyone will be part of a process that collectively derives its power from within its constituent parts. It was indicated that the interfaith group to be formed will be constituted to draw strength from within itself and not from an individual or external force. The power to be generated from the group will be for the use of the group for forging a new direction of engagement\textsuperscript{22}. For this to

\textsuperscript{21} Marianne Moyaert, “Interreligious Dialogue”, in Understanding Interreligious Relations, ed. David Cheetham et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 201-204
\textsuperscript{22} Saul David Alinsky, “Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals” (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 12-22
happen, a commitment to an unusual strategy of thinking intuitively and proffering uncommon solutions to the problems of intolerance and religious conflicts was advocated\(^\text{23}\).

To further advance the course of collaboration in the group, it would be beneficial to the group to cultivate the practice of interacting between the external and internal worlds. The Archimedean point that will allow the enabling condition of the global field to evolve and change must be tended and constructed\(^\text{24}\). Since this is but the first stage in a long process aimed at proffering solution to the lingering religious rivalry among faith groups in Ile-Ife, as the project gets underway, other useful materials and works will be consulted and wisdom derived from them will be deployed in furthering interfaith collaborations in Ile-Ife. At the moment, the focus is on gleaning information from the various faith groups in order to ascertain their views about their own faith, the faith of others and their disposition towards other faiths and their adherents in the community. Since this is about all that time can allow for the Capstone project, as a follow-up, the project will consider how to bring the willing participants of all the faith groups together so they could be opportune to freely discourse how to move from adversarial engagements to peaceful coexistence in an atmosphere devoid of rancor, acrimony and violence. All these will depend on fulfillment of certain conditions necessary to the execution of the plans.

\subsection{Conclusion}

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\item Otto C. Scharmer, “Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges”, (San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishing Inc., 2009), 81-83
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This change process being undertaken demands a mindful consideration of both the prevailing practices and the proposed practices. Identifying that the proposed practices present benefits that surpass what the prevailing practices offer encourages participants to adopt changes in their relationships. This has been vital to the acceptance and adoption of the new process being introduced to the community. From ancient times, men through the practice of religion had in a way promoted discrimination, exploitation and injustice though these concepts are strangely outside of what most religions set out to achieve. It is therefore necessary to consider religious dialogue, pluralism and interfaith action as they offer promises for cordial, smooth and enduring relationships that benefit the society. If the call for attitudinal and ideological change with respect to religious practices and faith will succeed, engagement among people of living faith must be continuous, progressive and enduring. This work is a call to individuals and faith groups in my community to embrace peace and respect for the faith traditions of others by promoting societal bonding which is the hallmark or foundation stone for a prosperous society. Its success therefore spells a new beginning not only in the religious front but in all dimensions of relationships in my locality.

All the works consulted in the course of carrying out the capstone project were so reviewed because of the invaluable lessons and perspectives they offer towards the successful execution of this project. For example, the approaches to solving moral conflicts, forgiveness of ills done to individuals and groups and the practice of embracing peace and collaboration in social relations were vividly brought to the fore while consultations were being made to books, internet sources and other materials used while developing models, methods, tools and techniques for a right approach to interfaith action in Ile-Ife. Consequently, the methods presented in the works provide a springboard upon which the work was launched. The approach to tackling the changes proposed
in my community therefore stem from ideas, views and proven results presented in the works consulted.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Methods

3.1 Introduction to Implementation

Conducting research entails setting up a road map for navigating and traversing the terrain which lies ahead. Issues fundamental to the success of the research should of necessity be anticipated in the course of the planning and at the beginning of the exercise. This is not to say that some important issues and details can never escape the consciousness of planners and researchers which would necessitate supplementary appropriation as the journey progresses. This research examines the need for interfaith action in Ile-Ife community. Such dialogues are essentially to be held between faith groups with a view to seeking better understanding among them. This will make the idea of working towards harmonious relationships among the groups realizable. Because interfaith action is a relatively new concept in this part of the world, and owing to some peculiar situations
in the town, some standard practices in interfaith action had to be delayed or shelved altogether when they were localized to the Ile-Ife community. For the smooth conduct of this research therefore, many concerns were reviewed while the religious climate of the city was also considered. After an initial bogus and elaborate ambition to storm the community with the message of interfaith dialogue, it became clear that, at least, considering the prevailing situation of ingrained religious intolerance in the city and the issue of the safety of the researcher and those willing to participate in the engagements to limit the interfaith dialogue with volunteers to private venues jointly and uniquely decided by the researcher and each participant in every circumstance.

When the research was being planned for, I was compelled by the urgency with which interfaith engagement and dialogue was needed in the city to plan an elaborate and exhaustive interfaith program. As a result, I rolled out a massive arrangement to hold ten interfaith dialogues with leaders and adherents of the three established faiths (African Traditional Faith Groups, Muslims and Christians) in the town because of the history of religious intolerance that pervades the town and the need to seek understanding and peaceful coexistence among the faith groups. A budget was drawn, which would cater for the rental of a neutral venue, the rental of some gadgets (electrical, public address system, moderate refreshments and for other logistics including community entry). This plan was been pursued until the issue of my safety came under threat. Some adherents of the monotheistic faiths were unwilling to see face to face with those of the “religious other”. These people, individually and collectively expressed reservations in strong terms to the idea being proposed with a threat to disrupt the program and cause trouble if the planned engagement which will bring the religious groups together was not cancelled.

At the time the threats were being made, I was also having difficulties with the funding of the project. While progress was being made with securing the consent of other participants, it was
decided in the best interest of everyone that private meetings between each willing participant and me be arranged at a most convenient time and venue for each participant. At this point, the need for funding was put aside. However, the researcher had to bear the cost of transporting himself to the venues of meetings for discussions with all participants and the cost of other logistics that cropped up during the course of the research.

When tasks requiring actions or problems requiring solutions are identified, there is always the need to carefully consider ways of circumventing the problems and resolving issues attached to them. When informed steps are taken towards resolving issues, solutions usually fall within the reach of those who attempt to act accordingly. In the same vein, for the capstone project to turn out well, the right methods and approaches were contemplated. There were a series of decisions that took time, attention and experimentation. Identifying the problem and vividly envisioning the solutions which the project set out to bring in other to resolve the obvious issues was a major breakthrough in the work. Since the attempt was to address the violence, discrimination and oppression in the religious front in Ile-Ife, members of the three religious groups identified in the community were approached a second time, this time, privately in other to seek their views on the causes of the problems and possible solutions to the perennial problems besetting the community. Compassion towards the oppressed group was advocated while forgiveness and reconciliation were projected and presented to all parties in a bid to kick start a new form of relationship among the faith groups.

3.2 Statement of the Problem
The problem the research intends to address is the issue of religious chauvinism and intolerance among the faith groups in the city. This attitude is prevalent among adherents of the monotheistic faiths in the community. It is understood that Islam and Christianity were introduced into Yorubaland\textsuperscript{25} and by extension, the community in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries respectively\textsuperscript{26}. However, they have consigned the tolerant faith (indigenous traditions) which opened its borders to them to freely coexist with them in a bid to jointly propel the city on to prosperity to the background. It has become the case of the proverbial visitor who met their host feasting on a sumptuous meal and after invitation was extended to them, they held and tied the hand of the host to prevent the magnanimous host from eating further. The visitors (Abrahamic faiths; Islam and Christianity) have now settled in the community and garnered so much strength to the point that they have become more popular than the initial settlers (indigenous faiths). They now discriminate against the faith so mercilessly. In the present circumstance, the problem I intend to solve is the necessity for all the faith groups to live together in harmony without anyone dominating, oppressing, suppressing, marginalizing and victimizing the other.

3.3 Methodology

Some methods were adopted in carrying out the task of introducing and projecting a community where religious understanding and engagement will be embraced as a viable alternative to the religious intolerance and violence been witnessed in the community at the moment. One major means of doing this was a review of the present situation with regard to interreligious encounters

\textsuperscript{26} Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Ltd, 2009), 47
in the town. The research methodology adopted is the qualitative research style\textsuperscript{27}. This research style is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena which includes researching into the world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is also concerned with social aspects of our world as it seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do, how opinions and attitudes are formed, how people are affected by the events that go on around them and how and why cultures have developed in the way they have. Qualitative research also seeks to study and reflect on the differences between social groups and why/how such differences are sustained and/or eroded. In addition, it asks qualitative questions like how, why and what.

There are two methods of data collection in qualitative research\textsuperscript{28}. These include direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis or direct interaction with individuals in a group setting. Because of the peculiarity of the religious climate in Ile-Ife which was earlier explained, I adopted the direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis. In conducting qualitative research of this type, the process of data collection is usually time-consuming. This is so because the same information which would have been collected from a meeting with all participants will be collected from each participant one after the other until the list is exhausted. This accounts for the collection of fewer data by researchers using this method when compared to those using the quantitative data collection style. Notwithstanding the obvious disadvantage of this method, it has the proven merit

\textsuperscript{27} University of Surrey. Module 9, Introduction to Research: The Nature of Qualitative Research, Accessed on 20\textsuperscript{th} May, 2016 at 12:40 p.m (CAT) at http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/Introduction%20to%20Research%20and%20Managing%20Information%20Leicester/page_53.htm

\textsuperscript{28} University of Surrey. Module 9, Introduction to Research: Methods of Collecting Qualitative Data, Accessed on 20\textsuperscript{th} May, 2016 at 10:24 a.m (CAT) at http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/Introduction%20to%20Research%20and%20Managing%20Information%20Leicester/page_54.htm
of presenting information that is usually adjudged as richer with a deeper insight into the phenomenon under study.

Methods used in collecting data in qualitative research include personal interview, focus groups, observations and action research. Of these methods, personal informal interviews were used at this stage of the project because of the suspicion religious groups nurse towards one another in the community, they have a practice of hiding facts when they feel they are in a formal setting where their opinions may be used as delimitations of their group’s positions when they do not have the permission of their religious community to so be presented. At the conclusion of the capstone project, more actions will be taken in furtherance of what time and resources could not permit this work to reveal.

3.4 The Actual Conduct of the Qualitative Research in this Capstone Project

In the conduct of the capstone project, ten adherents from each of the three faith groups in the community participated in the work. Aside from the adherents, three priests or faith leaders from each of the faith groups also contributed to the findings the work came up with. Ten Christians; three from the orthodox setting, three from the African Independent Church movements and four from various Pentecostal denominations were interviewed. In addition, ten Muslims, only two of which agreed to belong to a particular Muslim denomination took part in the project. Members of the indigenous faith also made their contributions to work. Furthermore, from the three religious groups, three leaders each were interviewed providing their various views to the findings. Three Muslim clerics, three Christian leaders; one each from the orthodox, African Independent Church
movements and Pentecostal bloc have been interviewed so far. Three priests of the Indigenous faiths; one from the *Ifa* cult, one from the *Orunmila* cult and the last from the *Esu* cult were interviewed. The research relied heavily on the use of ethnography in the conduct of the project\(^{29}\). This was considered appropriate because it has been described as the methodology for descriptive studies of culture and people. Ethnography looks at people, cultures and commonalities of shared experiences. As a method of qualitative research, it entails extensive field work and involves the use of formal and informal interviews. This comes with the possibility of multiple interviews with each participant with occasional participative observations.

While the project was in its early stage, there was the opportunity and good fortune of stumbling on the gathering of a group called Initiators of Global Peace. Much enthusiasm trailed the accidental discovery as the immediate feeling was the need to join forces with them to bring peace to Ile-Ife community by partnering with the group at least through the capstone project. A few minutes after entering the hall where the meeting was holding, a request was made that the meeting was for a closed group. They asked to be excused. For the few minutes before the request was made, the discussant’s message centered on proper conduct in an Islamic society. Apparently, it was a gathering of Muslim peacemakers. It would have been an opportunity to learn about their concept of peace but the privilege of collaborating with them was denied. Exploring their views would have added significant value to this work while the impact their approach could have on this work might only be imagined.

3.5 Stakeholders

In total, thirty nine people were reached as stakeholders in the research project. Thirteen of them represented each of the three faith groups in the community. Ten from each group are followers or adherents of their various faiths while the remaining three will represent their faith communities as leaders and priests. Views presented by each adherent were assessed and reviewed with those of other adherents from the same faith tradition while those of their priest were used as the control sample for the groups they represent. This arrangement is considered because the leaders are naturally expected to know more than their followers. However, where the opinions of majority of followers are at variance with that of their leaders, it will be so stated. It might be concluded that either the leaders have not been able to disseminate and pass down doctrinal issues clearly enough or there are some missing links somewhere.

3.6 Needs Analysis

It has been observed that religious groups in Ile-Ife hardly have serious and positive formal interactions with one another over the years. The case is not different from the practice in other communities in Nigeria. The religious war been waged by the Boko Haram group in North West Nigeria is just a step further than the manifestation of intolerance among the religious groups in Ile-Ife. In fact, it has been proven that natives of all ethnic groups in Nigeria are represented among the extremist Islamic sect, Boko Haram. With a somewhat porous internal security, the city of Ile-Ife could be said to be vulnerable to attacks by religious extremists. If the condition in the city remains supportive of such religious encounters and intolerance, those with proven links to Boko
Haram, Al-Shabab, ISIL, Al-Queda and other terrorist groups may find it easy to invade the town. The need to embark on the project was borne out of the desire to keep the religious climate in the town safe, cordial and flourishing among the various faith groups represented in the community. Since the need for the project was conceived, steps have been taken to drive the work to a reasonable conclusion even with the obvious challenges to the novel idea. The pattern of response received from participants indicates that adherents of the monotheistic faiths hold that their faith traditions are superior to the indigenous traditions partly because of certain ritual practices which the indigenous faiths observed until recently. This includes human sacrifice. Generally, all adherents of the indigenous faith traditions who were interviewed expressed respect towards all other faith groups. They were willing to engage with all faith communities in a bid to jointly develop and bring prosperity to the entire community. Some of the participants from both the Islamic and Christian traditions were not fully persuaded that any other faith tradition had the blessings of the Almighty and so they feel strongly that unless others embrace their own tradition, they may never qualify for eternal bliss. The project at this stage is only exploring beliefs of each faith group. The situation is not yet ripe for arguments or engagements. If it was a gathering of all faith groups, avenue for cross-checking with other faith traditions might have been explored. However, the opportunities provided by the informal interviews serve the purpose of identifying both the personal and corporate religious views of individuals and faith communities that participated in the project. The nature of the interview only permitted that requests be made to each participant to consider some of their views and personally embark on a soul search if those views will promote peace, positive interactions and engagement among faith communities in the town or if they will further polarize the religious landscape and promote the tradition of intolerance and violence.
3.7 Proposed Solution and Plan for Change

The solution to the problem of religious intolerance in Ile-Ife community cannot be supplied like one would attempt solving a simple equation. Since the problem has lingered for centuries and it has become interwoven within the very fabrics of the society, it will take a deconstruction of the mentality and ideology of many individuals and groups for a solution to be arrived at. All faith groups have to show commitment to the commonwealth of the community. This will enable each individual see the prosperity of each segment as contributing to the overall prosperity of the whole. Threats of violence, intimidation, intolerance and discrimination have to be dropped while all groups must join hands together to begin building a community of respectful and graceful individuals. Religious illiteracy has been a recurrent decimal among all faith groups interviewed. All religious groups in the community have to seek out ways of knowing their neighbors, identifying and recognizing what they believe in and stand for. As solutions to the problem are being suggested, the changes that will occur lie in the hands of individuals and groups which make up the community. As every group comes to embrace change, they will also individually and collectively seek the workability of the solutions in the interest of their community.

3.8 Possibilities for Exemplary Leadership Roles in Interfaith Engagement/Insightful Patterns

The situation in Bosnia Herzegovina\(^\text{30}\) after the crisis of the Roman Catholics, Muslims and Jews was settled shows the power in the collective will of erstwhile divided groups. If those faith

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communities could come together and build new relationships, it is certain that Ile-Ife community too can witness a steady decline of religious intolerance. The experience of religious and social prosperity is just within the reach of the community. It is projected that joint projects, interfaith services and ceremonies with solidarity marches, protests and processions will become common place within and around the community in no distant time. Some other developments that can be expected from the success of this endeavor include the exportation of noble and novel interfaith practices to other communities both within and outside Nigeria.

3.9 Plans to Evaluate Efficacy of Proposed Solutions

Once the proposed solutions are implemented, mechanisms will be set in motion to review their impact on the relationships in the community. Reports will be evaluated in contrast with the prevailing situation before the period of implementation of the interfaith initiative. Once it can be established that the cloud of religious intolerance is shifting or lifting, the project will be adjudged to be living up to the desired expectation. Otherwise, ideas will need to be injected to the change plan for possible re-evaluation and re-strategizing. Members of the religious groups including those who participated in the capstone and others besides them would be interviewed again to access their views on the impact of the interfaith efforts. With a follow up on the preliminary steps of informal interviews with participants, a review of the impact of the discussions may become necessary to access the level of impact the exposure would have had on participants. If change would be measured over time, a corresponding change in attitude of religious adherents and leaders will need to be reviewed in other to ascertain the extent of the impact of the project on participants.
From the interactions with the first set of willing participants of this project, it is hoped that a nucleus of interfaith actors will emerge who will first reach out to members of their faith groups on the need to collaborate with the religious other in a bid to grow a community of respectful and graceful people and not a society of divisive and separatist/splinter groups.

3.10 Artifacts

The results of Capstone Action project reveal that religious intolerance is endemic in Ile-Ife. At least, one form of intolerance was exhibited by each of the faith groups. No one is entirely free of complexities in the present situation. From each of the faith groups, there were respondents who felt that their disposition to others from other faith communities could be determined by the attitudes of the religious other towards them. Many Christians and Muslims were of the opinion that those of the religious other, especially ATR worshippers would not be admitted to eternal bliss on account of their faith tradition. They relied on scriptural quotations to arrive at this conclusion. A major explanation for the negative peace in the community could be attributable to the ideological intolerance expressed towards the religious other by each participating faith group. With this intolerance came the idea of peaceful, cordial and friendly relationships with people of other religious faiths. However, it may be said that such peaceful coexistence will only be superficial or will remain a figment of the imaginations of people who profess them. This ideological intolerance no doubt could be responsible for the negative peace prevalent in the community. Until the attitudinal changes are witnessed, the community may not be able to rise to a new dimension of relationships among the religious groups within its fold. This is the goal of the interfaith program that is being planned after the completion of the Capstone Project. Since the
problems have been researched, it becomes easy to tackle them when the collaborations begin. The findings from the research reveal among other things, the following results.

When asked whether their faith groups permitted them to relate well with people who hold different religious orientations from them, all worshipers of the various indigenous faiths answered yes. However, all but two Muslims also answered yes. One of the two who answered no gave the perspective that he was free to relate with them to the extent that it does not affect his faith. The other person agreed that he was permitted to relate freely with Christians but not with the Traditional worshipers.

In another development, all the worshippers of the indigenous creeds agreed that they have sufficient knowledge (religious literacy) about the faith traditional of the other groups. However, five Christians responded that they have sufficient knowledge of other faiths practiced in their community. Three admitted that they had sufficient knowledge of Islam but not of the traditional creeds. The remaining two answered that their knowledge of the two other faiths was substantially limited or not enough to relate well with them. From the Muslims, four also admitted that they had sufficient knowledge to relate well with those of the religious other. Three also admitted that they have sufficient knowledge of Christianity and little or insufficient knowledge of the traditional creeds while two also answered that they have very limited knowledge of the creeds of Christians and the traditional worshipers. Only one of them admitted that their knowledge of both faiths is about average (50%).

With regards to issues of compatibility, all adherents of the traditional religions agreed that their faith is compatible with other faiths while only one Christian agreed that their faith is compatible with only Islam. All others disagreed on the issue of compatibility completely. On the other hand,
three Muslims agreed that their faith is compatible other faiths. Again, two others said their compatibility with other faiths was partial. Three of the total number of Muslims interviewed agreed that their faith is compatible with Christianity but not with the traditional faiths. only two of them did not agree that their faith was compatible with other faiths practiced in the community.

When asked if members of other faith groups will enjoy the same eternal bliss each of the faiths preach, all traditional worshipers agreed that if there is an eternal bliss, everyone who is kind hearted, just and loving will get there. Though they expressed doubt that anyone had an hereafter in the context that Christianity and Islam preach. They held that we all will begin to enjoy the rewards of our good deeds here on earth or suffer the consequences of our evil as the case may be. Seven of the Christians expressed their strong rejection of Muslims and traditional worshipers, claiming they will never get into the same eternal bliss with them except they accept Jesus Christ as their savior. One of them said only God can tell who will make it to eternal bliss. Another one said our getting to enjoy eternal bliss is dependent on our good deeds though she admitted the bible has a different position. The last person agreed that it is a function of our conduct on earth that will determine where we will spend eternity.

One other area the questionnaire sought to know where each of the faith groups stands is on the issue of whether it was permissible for the respondents ot amend their views with respect to the religious other. All the traditional worshipers contacted expressed the view that amending their views will amount to being hostile and intolerant as their views are already supportive of religious understanding. All the Christians pointedly expressed strong aversion to any consideration for a change of views. Seven Muslims also were unwilling to amend their views while three would not mind amending their own views to accommodate the religious other.
What the above discoveries leave us with is the fact that intolerance is most common with Christians, followed by the Muslims. However, members of the traditional religious groups are well open to accepting adherents of other faiths in the community. This calls for the need to expand the scope of the project beyond the completion of the capstone project. If lasting peace will reign in the religious landscape of Ile-Ife, a sustainable interfaith program will have to be instituted and sustained in the town for any meaningful impact to be made.

3.11 Conclusion

Methods for conducting research are quite numerous. However, when engaging in research, it is important to use the right tools so as to arrive at the most logical and appropriate result. Without a critical consideration and evaluation of available tools, the mandate or desire to effect change may become defeated right from the outset. Choosing the most appropriate research method remains a right step in the right direction for an impactful research result. It is therefore very important to choose rightly the research method(s) that best fit(s) each research type if the hope of making meaningful impact in one’s field of academic endeavor will be realized. It is a careful choice of what to do and the adaptations to be made that allowed the successful completion of this project even at this stage.
Chapter IV: Conclusions

4.1 Introduction

The project researched into the causes of intolerance among the faith groups in Ile-Ife and found that ideological violence, intolerance and battle for supremacy were the most significant causes of religious violence in the town. It was revealed by many of the participants that their faith admonishes them to be wary of “unbelievers/disbelievers”. They should interact with them but such interactions should necessarily have boundaries.

4.2 Conclusions

The religious climate in Ile-Ife calls for urgent attention. The attention needed is one that would break the circle of intolerance and usher in an era of collaboration, engagement and interfaith dialogue. It was observed that the spate of intolerance in the religious sphere in Ile-Ife is promoted by the level of understanding and interpretation of scriptures which is usually claimed as the authority for action(s) and inaction(s) of the faithful of each religious group.
4.3 **Actions Taken**

4.31 **Moments of Discovery:** Questions were asked from respondents in such a way that will reveal the reasons behind their religious views. Many of them claimed that they derive their views from the teachings and doctrines they were taught in their various faith groups. It was repeatedly stated that they could not do otherwise as contemplating such will damage their devotion to their faith. Such actions were said to be forbidden in their faiths.

4.32 **Proposed Solutions:** When it became clear that the dispositions of the votaries of participating faith groups stem from the general religious perspectives, it was contemplated that it would be best to see the primary interpretations of the injunctions which the faithful base their convictions on. Though it would be a bit challenging, but it is not impossible to jointly come to shared understanding of the need to discontinue discriminations against people on the basis of their faith. It is being envisaged that when the interfaith sessions that will follow the implementation of the Capstone will commence, separate sessions will hold with religious leaders from each faith group to seek their views on perpetuating discrimination on the basis of religion. Such leaders would be requested to consider issues of safety for all men while holding such views that are divisive as well as anti collaboration.

4.4 **Recommendations**

After a careful examination of the issues of religious intolerance in Ile-Ife and the implications of such intolerance to the peaceful coexistence of all faith groups in the community, it was decided that some proactive steps be taken to address the problems and chart a course for collaboration, peaceful and progressive encounters and interfaith dialogue. Some of the steps include:
1. The establishment of an interfaith dialogue group that would be jointly administered by faith leaders from each faith tradition.

2. The cessation of hostilities among faith groups and the peaceful resolution of differences across board.

3. The re-assessment of discriminatory religious views with a humanistic perspective rather than a dogmatic obedience to injunctions that could tear the fabric of interfaith harmony apart even more.

4. The immediate establishment of an interfaith advocacy group that will build on the successes and discoveries made with respect to this research.

4.5 **Limitations and Implications**

The major limitations of this research are as follows.

1. Limitations with time and duration of the Capstone Project: The time for the capstone project was rather short. It did not give enough time for the exploration of many ideas and views presented in the course of embarking on the project.

2. Relative unpopularity of Interfaith Dialogue: Since the idea of interfaith dialogue is not very popular in my community, substantial amount of time had to be devoted to explaining the idea to prospective participants before they either gave their consent or declined participation in the program.

3. Uncompromised religious perspectives of Faith groups: Many faith groups and individuals representing them were so religious about their beliefs that an attempt to suggest that they reconsider their stand on the basis of peaceful coexistence met with brick walls. Such uncompromising attitudes could hinder the progress of interfaith collaboration in the community.
4. Funding: If there had been some means of funding the Capstone project, there would have been opportunity to explore the project further as such funding could have expanded the penetration of the project more as it would have afforded the opportunity of stumbling on more discoveries and more results than that which was found.

5. Internet Fluctuations: Perhaps, this was the single biggest challenge faced throughout the duration of the program. Unreliable internet access caused avoidable delays to the participation in the program almost on weekly basis. This made the work lag behind very often. As a result of this, I would often have to wait several hours and days in expectation of access to class responsibilities. Though, in all, I consider myself blessed being a part of the interfaith program.

6. Poor Electricity: Next to internet fluctuations was the electricity problem. Though Nigeria had been grappling with poor electricity for decades which has made many industries and factories relocate from the country to neighboring countries in search of electricity/power, it has not been as bad as we currently have it. Vandals, agitators and aggrieved youths have continued to bomb gas, crude oil and power generating plants all over the country. Many times, I depended on Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) powered generators to finish up assignments. This is also limited in supply or extremely costly when available. I have had to invest my meagre resources in procuring this commodity when I am left with no option. Often times, despite burning PMS, as if it is bent on frustrating me, the internet will refuse to cooperate, wasting the fuel and not permitting me to connect to the CLU and other websites. As this work is being typed, I am in the office after closing making use of the power provided at work while officially, I ought to have closed for the day four hours ago.
7. Cancellation of Appointments with Project Respondents: Many times, respondents failed to show up or at the eleventh hour, some call off appointments. I had to endure this again and again. In fact at some point, I had to replace some respondents when they had cancelled appointments several times.

The implications of these limitations to the execution of the Capstone project is that better results and greater advancements would have been recorded in the course of carrying out the project if those conditions had been satisfied or met. Had there been more time for the work, greater popularity of interfaith action, readiness to accommodate the religious other and some opportunities for funding, the program would have turned out better.
References


Appendix 1: Questionnaire

   41 – 45yrs  46 – 50yrs  51 – 55yrs  56 – 60yrs  above 60yrs

2. Sex: Male Female

3. Name of Religious Practice:

4. Sect/Denomination

5. Years of religious commitment in your faith tradition:
   Less than 5 years   between five and ten   between ten and fifteen
   between fifteen and twenty   Above twenty

6. What is your level of education?
   Elementary   High School   College   Postgraduate

7. How far have you travelled, within and outside the Nigeria? List them

8. Which other cultures apart from yours have you closely interacted with? List them
9. What are the central tenets of your faith group as you understand them?

10. How often does your faith group prescribe that you worship or appear for worship either individually or in company of others? Daily, Weekly Monthly or Annually?

11. How often do you personally make yourself available for such worship obligations?

12. How much do you know about other faith groups practiced in your community?

13. Does your faith encourage you to or discourage you from having anything to do with the religious other?

14. What is the form or extent of relationship you are permitted to have with them?

15. Do you consider the two other faiths practiced in your community incompatible with yours? If yes, How? And in what areas?

16. Is there hope of eternal bliss for those of the religious other? Yes/No? Why?
17. What are the implications of your answers to question nine and questions twelve to sixteen above to cordial, friendly and supportive relationships with the religious other in your community?

18. Do these views of yours portend danger to peaceful relationships with the religious other in your community or not?

19. Do you think being compassionate and amending your views to the religious other will do significant damage to your faith or not?

20. Is it permissible in your faith to do what question 19 suggests?

21. If envisaging question 19 is an anathema, how do you hope to keep open doors of engagement with the religious other in your community?

22. Do you consider your knowledge about the religious traditions of the two other faiths in your community sufficient to relate with them properly?
23. Do they recognize your own group or look at you with disdain?

24. Do you see yourself engaging with them through interfaith action to bring peace to your community?

25. Do you think their attitude towards you can ever affect your disposition towards them in anyway?
### Table 1: Timeline for the Execution of Plans

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