

# Religious Studies Scholarship in Nigeria: The Professional Ethics Imperative

by

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## Abstract

The paper observes that scholars have not written much on the need for professionalism in the teaching of religious Studies as it is done in several professions such as medicine, nursing, computer, accountancy financial management, information systems among others This, is the vacuum that the work intends to fill. Within the context of functionalism as research methodology coupled with interview and observations, the paper examines rationale for the call for code of ethics in Religious Studies Scholarship, connections between Ethics and Scholarship. Added to the above, the paper proposes some codes of ethics for religious Studies Scholarship as they relate to teaching and research and with attention paid benefits of the code and its attendant grey areas. The paper concludes that, meaningful Religious Studies Scholarship in Nigeria today cannot be done without concern for ethics or code of ethics guiding the profession. This becomes imperative in the light of global desire for integrity in scholarly activity

## **Introduction**

The need for professional ethics in several professions such as medicine, nursing, computer, accountancy financial management, information systems among others (Chadwick, 1998) has received much attention in scholarly and non –scholarly world across the globe but with little or nothing said or written about Religious Studies scholarship. Thus, as many people (trained, untrained and semi trained) are taking much interest in Religious Studies today thus expanding the horizon of the field in general, there is an urgent need for appropriate professional ethics in Religious Studies scholarship enterprise. This is imperative because within the context of millennial goals development, one of the outstanding issues deserving attention is the quest for professionalism in all aspects of human endeavour. Professionalism in all its form and context is an effort geared towards perfection, dedication to duty and enhancement of competency so that proper things (duties) are done in a proper manner not only for the benefit of the doers but also for the advantage of individuals, group of individuals and the entire community who are always at the receiving ends of what everybody does at one time or the other. It is in light of this, that people talk of professional ethics, which simply concerns one’s conduct of behaviour and practices when carrying out professional work. Such work includes lecturing or teaching, researching and writing. In other words, code of ethics guiding the above are concerned with a range of issues such as academic honesty, data privacy professional accountability, impartiality in data analysis and professional consulting among others.

## **Scope and Methodology**

The work is strictly restricted to discussion about the essence, benefit and implications of designing and implementing Codes of ethics for Religious Studies scholarship. The method of approach is both descriptive and argumentative and these would be done within the ambit of functionalism theory propounded by Talcot Parson and expanded by Emile Durkheim. This theory suggests that society is an organic whole each of its constituent parts working to maintain the others and the body as a whole. This theory is relevant to our examination of the relevance of code of ethics for Religious Studies scholarship because it would help scholars of religion make meaningful the phenomenon of religion as an institution with capacity to enhancing, preserving and maintaining a stable social whole. To make sense of this desire before our readers, precisely the target audiences- scholars of Religious Studies, we also advance more argument from the viewpoint of Immanuel Kant’s theory of categorical imperative, which suggests, “Do unto others what we expect others to do unto us”(http://www.animalfreedom.org/english/column/kant-categorical-imperative.html) The merits of Kant's categorical imperative to scholars of Religious Studies is that it would help them overcome egoism, which manifest in seeing sense only in the religions they practice as against other religions different from theirs.

This will probably forbid them, that is, scholars of Religious Studies, from action (teaching and researching) characterized by selfish interest. It would also make them uphold code of morality associated with their profession, which firmly establishes the reign of reason, elevates the dignity of man and his religion and appreciate the sensibility in religious practice. In the end, this would encourage them to engage in more rational and objective scholarship independent of bias and sentiment.

In addition to the theoretical aspect of the research methodology, through interview, we also elicit information from stakeholders in Religious Studies scholarship precisely students and lecturers in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State. The questions we asked them pertained to religious profiles of academic staff in the Universities. This is done to know how many of them are priests and priestesses. Other questions relate to Students' assessment of their lecturers on whether or not they are subjective in the lecturing. Answers to the question have implications for understanding our subject of discussion.

Furthermore, it is important to note from the beginning that the call for a code of ethics in Religious Studies scholarship does not presuppose that scholars of religion have been doing their work without reference to ethics or that they are ignorant of the ethical implications of their scholarship. But beyond this, there are at least five interrelated reasons why the call is imperative. These are explained as follows:

### **Ignorance Syndrome**

Many people think that Religious Studies is mainly about studying the Bible and Qur'an. Both scholars and non-scholars of Religious Studies express this ignorance. Ignorance in the context of our discussion refers to lack of knowledge or information about particular doctrinal religious beliefs and practices. It could be a lack of sufficient knowledge or information about religion we ourselves practise by another person belonging to a religious faith different from ours. The meeting point between the two is lack of sufficient knowledge about a particular religion in terms of its cardinal beliefs and practises at one point or the other. For example, an average Nigerian Christian/Muslim does not have sufficient knowledge of what Christianity or Islam stands for. This happens because majority of them either rely on their pastors, Imams and other leaders for the little they know about the religion as most of them hardly create time to read the Bible or the Qur'an on their own. The over dependence on the religious leaders probably heightens the degree of religious ignorance among Nigerian religious practitioners. Besides, a few of them are religious converts who are probably yet to have firm root in the new religion.

Even the old converts, especially the first generation who got converted from African traditional religions to either Islam or Christianity also still know little about the religions because some of them were blackmailed to become Christians or Muslims. They did not willingly change their traditional religions. This is evident in some of the words used by Christian and Islamic missionaries when they had contact with the traditional religious practitioners. For example, the traditional religious practitioners were called names such as *ajebo* - ritual eater, *elebo*- ritual maker. This got to the climax when the Western anthropologists who studied African Traditional Religions used derogatory words such as paganism, fetishism, juju, and idolatry (to mention but a few) to describe traditional religion (Parrinder, 1977:7-13).

### **Possible Temptation**

There is the tendency for scholars of Religious Studies to want to advance their religions in the course of teaching a course because some of them do think the period of teaching always offers opportunity to evangelize or proselytize thinking that such has divine blessing. This becomes an issue especially since the majority of lecturers in Religious Studies are priests and priestess in their different religious affiliations.

This assertion is buttressed by some statistical information gathered from some Universities in the South Western Nigeria. For instance: (1) In the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Out of 14 members of staff, 9 of them are priests in their churches while only 5 who are non priests hold one ecclesiastical position or the other in their churches. (2) In the Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, all the nine members of academic staff are Muslims. In the University of Ibadan, I learnt that some Muslims demand that only Muslims by faith and practice are the ones teaching Islamic and Arabic Studies. Statistically, all lectures in the Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies Muslims. (3) Also in the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, there are 15 members of academic staff. Statistically 2 of them are Muslims and are also Alhaji while the rest that is 13 are Christians by religious profession. 7 out of them 13 are practicing priests.

### **Qualification Debate.**

There is this insinuation and impression going on among the public and scholars alike that a practicing religious person who is also a scholar of Religious Studies can not teach religions different from the one he/she practices without showing prejudice; hence the cold war between Christians and Muslims in some Universities. This perhaps account for the establishment of the Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies in the University of Ibadan independent of Department of Religious Studies.

## **The Sensitivity of Religion in Nigeria**

The sensitivity of religion itself and its implications in Religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria. In Nigeria religion has been a sensitive enterprise because anything said about religion is capable of being interpreted negatively or positively. This owes largely to high degree of religious misconceptions among scholars and non-scholars of religions. Both the adherents of a religion and non-adherents more often than not have wrong or misconceived idea about what a particular religion is all about especially regarding its meaning, purpose, message, and overall worldview. On the part of a religious adherent, he holds misconceived idea about his religion because more often than not, he relies solely on what his religious leader says or does. On another account, he is ignorant of his religion because he lacks adequate theological understanding of his religion, which could be as a result of his/her failure to develop him/herself spiritually. It could also be that the whole belief system is still strange to him being a new convert or, it could be that his religious leaders have wrongly indoctrinated him. Hence, he is blindfolded to know that religion is an individual affair.

We should know that what we profess about religion is nothing but an expression of our religious experiences. Since, everybody has religious experiences as he lives there is the need for us to appreciate what a person professes based on his/her religious experiences. On the part of a non-adherent of a particular religion, there is this impression that the other religion is subsidiary to his own. If we consider misconception about Islam as an example, there is the possibility for a Christian to treat Islam with levity with the impression that it is sub-standard to Christianity. What often brings about such an impression is the tendency towards particularity. This is the claim made by a religionist that his/her religion is the best, the only universal religion that vouchsafes salvation of men and women. This is a claim of self-superiority, which goes down in human nature. The claim to particularity arises only in a religiously pluralistic situation where one of the existing and competing religions attempts to assert and super impose its authority over other religions and attribute inferior value to them: In such a situation, the uniqueness and importance of other religions are undermined.

We have examples of this phenomenon in all the three major religions in Nigeria. For example in Christianity Jesus said "I am the way the truth and the life, no one cometh to the Father but by me". What this verse is saying is that Christianity is the only religion of man, the only true religion, the only way to God. This assumes that other religions are false and that they cannot offer salvation to man. In Islam, the concept of Kafir (unbelievers) presupposes that non-Muslims are unbelievers who should be dealt with for the Qur'an says: "O you, who believe, smite the Kafir in your neighbourhood until you bring them to cry mercy" -. The Kafir in this context include non-Muslims such as Christians, Jehovah witnesses, traditionalists among others. What this Qur'an passage suggests is that non-Muslims are unbelievers in God and that their religion(s) are false so it cannot lead man to salvation. The same view echoes in traditional religion in which non-adherents of a particular divinity is regarded as a sheep, a novice, an amateur or a greenhorn; all these suggest that the fellow is ignorant and he is outside the gate.

This particularity brings about conflict regarding who is holding absolute truth about a religion. Such often leads to bias, and prejudice about other people's faith and consequently to conflict. For this reason, it appears that both Christians and Muslims are always conscious of what anyone they do say either individually or collectively about one another's religion.

Bias is putting a slant on something so that it reflects one's prejudices and views and it is not a true image of the world. As a result, students' knowledge of an academic area becomes corrupted with 'facts' which are not really facts at all, but opinion or at best self-serving selective facts (Nigel Meek, 1998) Corroborating Meek on the implications of bias in scholarship, Cathy Young observes that:

one of the implications of not teaching the student full truth is to alienate them from intellectual life. It is not good for any group of people to spend a lot of time listening only to like-minded others. It is especially bad for a profession whose lifeblood is the exchange of ideas (Cathy Young, 2007).

### **The Use of Church/Mosque Language**

From some information gathered through interview, we understand that more often than not, many Scholars of Religious Studies in Nigerian Universities who are also priests and priestesses of their religions are fond of using church or mosque language in their teaching enterprise. For instance, Christians among them use words and expressions such as Apostle Paul, Brother Paul, and Our Lord Jesus Christ; Praise the Lord and Hallelujah among others. Muslims among them always says (pbuh- peace be unto him), which is an Arabic words meaning 'Peace be unto Him' whenever they mention the name of Prophet Muhammad. It is also discovered that a few of them say prayers within the context of their religion at the start of class work.

The implications of this are wide. Firstly, one would easily know the religious inclinations and sentiments of such lecturers. Secondly, such practices are likely to offend students who do not share the same religious sentiment with the teacher. If care is not taken, such could generate conflicts. In essence, such practice is not expected in a secular university, but could be allowed in Mission oriented universities, seminaries and theological institutions. For the reasons discussed above, one can justify the call for setting ethical standards regarding what and what not scholars can say about religions different from the ones they practice. To prove this further, we need to explain the connection between ethics and scholarship. This is important because we still have some skeptics (scholars and non scholars alike) who believe that scholarship and ethics do not mix or are not interrelated.

## **Ethics and Scholarship**

It is important to show the connection between ethics and religious scholarship for the purpose of clarification and emphasis. Ethics basically is a systematic study and evaluation of human actions and intention in order to determine their goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, correctness and incorrectness. Attention is given to how such course of actions and intention being evaluated affects the person who performed it or showed an intention in question. There is also a focus on the person at which the action is directed, and the society or the environment where the action in question is performed or the intention is muted. In other words, ethics considers the principles of decision making (oughtness), concerning moral issues (right and wrong), which principles are based on reason, standards, religious beliefs, results, goals, and values that stem from cultural presuppositions, and on the fact of man's freedom and responsibility to make proper choices (Smith, 1991:7). Scholarship, which connotes study, erudition, learning and research, is an action-oriented enterprise like many other human actions, which are subject to moral evaluation. Because people always raise questions about whether it is done rightly or wrongly and such questions are raised within the framework of society's definition of right and wrong. Hence, we are familiar with words like good scholarship and bad scholarship in academic domain.

On the other hand, Religious scholarship is the academic study of religion that aims at treating all religious traditions equally. It utilizes apart from theology many tools from other academic fields such as philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and theology. The academic study of religion arises out of a broad curiosity about the nature of religion and religious traditions. Religious Studies offers a unique opportunity to ask fundamental questions about religious traditions. It also allows experimentation with some of most exciting ideas from other areas of study (<http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html>). In terms of methodology, most Departments of Religions offer students training in a unique combination of skills, including direct observation, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding.

## **Proposed Codes of Ethics for Religious Studies Scholarship**

At this juncture, we present a proposal of what we think should be part of the Codes of Ethics for Religious Studies Scholarship. This appropriates the following variables; a preamble, Codes concerning Teaching, Codes concerning Research, Application of the Code of Ethics, Benefits of Code of Ethics and gray Area in the codes. The codes and methods of application as they relate to teaching and research come one after the other.

## **Preamble**

This code of ethics is meant strictly for scholars of Religious Studies, that is students and lecturers. The code is essentially concerned with teaching, learning and research. It aims at giving guidance for teaching and research methodology, which have ethical flavour. It should guide decision-making in teaching, learning and research and serve as a means for self-evaluation and reflection regarding ethical oriented religious scholarship and practice as well as provide a basis for peer-review initiatives. The code should not only educate lecturers and students about their ethical responsibilities, it also informs other scholars in other fields of learning who have something to do with Religious Studies and members of the public about the moral, social and professional commitments expected of them in a religiously pluralistic country like Nigeria.

This Code of ethics aims at providing scholars of Religious Studies with direction for ethical decision-making and practice in everyday situations as they are influenced by current trends and conditions in scholarship across the globe. It applies to scholars of Religious Studies in all scholarly settings, whatever their position and area of specialization.

## **Codes for Teaching and its Applications**

In view of the connection between ethics and scholarship, it is our proposal that:

1. Teaching should be differentiated from Sermoning,
2. Teaching should not be done with bias and prejudice for or against the religion the lecturer practices or does not practice
3. The Lecturer should not super impose his faith directly or indirectly on his students or on his academic audience.
4. The Lecturer must impart the truths and not half-truths or distorted information concerning what he/she teaches the students.
5. Every comment made on religion should be done within the spirit of respect and reverence for the religion(s) in question
6. Teaching should be an avenue for motivating students to learn in a manner that is relevant, meaningful, and memorable;
7. Teaching should bridge the gap between theory and practice.
8. Teaching is also about being human, respecting others, and being professional at all times.
9. Teaching should be geared towards caring, nurturing, and developing minds and talents



## Teaching of Religions: Codes of Ethics

Teaching in the context of our discussion, connotes Ethics of sound Teaching and faith detachment. It embraces the activities of educating or instructing and imparting knowledge or skill in class/lecture room. All the features of teaching highlighted under the codes constitute good teaching, according to Richard Leblanc, which in our own analysis have a moral flavour. (<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/topten.htm>).

Teaching is the ability to understand and communicate Religious knowledge so as to make the truth about it clear to student, to widen their horizon in order for them to communicate the same truth to whoever comes across them now and in the future. In addition, teaching of Religious Studies is also about employing a good style to pass information across to the students without the teacher imposing his/her religious faith on students. Appropriating the importance of the above assertion Thomas H. Huxley's (1825-1895) suggests the application of what he terms Methodological Agnosticism in the teaching of Religious Studies. According to him, this theory concerns the limits of what is and what is not knowable. It is a stance that avoids any and all stands on issues of knowledge. It seeks not to establish a position in response to this question but to describe, analyze and compare the positions taken by others. Still on this, Kurt Rudolph adds that:

To be absolutely clear, one should not add that for the study of religions "God" or "the divine" or "the numinous" does not constitute an object of study. Instead, this study examines the manifold evidence and multiple data for human belief and action which appear in this realm and which one still encounters in living, changing form today, either through personal experience or through reading and study (Rudolph, 2003:231-247).

Buttressing this valid point, the Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill writes that: "Religious Studies takes place within a secular, academic environment, rather than a faith-oriented community". Also corroborating this important assertion, which we shall revisit for proper exploration in the latter part of this work, Kurt Rudolph writes:

...the study of religion approaches religion and religious data in a way that is completely different from the approach of religion and its faithful advocates (Rudolph, 2003: 232 )

On account of the above, we can infer that a lecturer of Religious Studies is not expected to indoctrinate the students who as a matter of fact are mature enough to separate the facts from the fiction. Perhaps it is in recognition of this fact that Bruce Lincoln says that reverence is a religious and not a scholarly virtue (Lincoln, 2000:8). Because of the sensitivity of this matter, a scholar of Religious Studies should equip him/her self with at least four factual statements and teaching principles (which are outstanding and germane to our paper) outlined by Michael Pye as criteria to study religion in pluralistic religious world. These are:

- (1) The study of religions (Religionswissenschaft- that is scientific study of religion) is not concerned with the search for religious truth, but rather with the description and scientific investigation of religious phenomenon from a “meta-level”, that is, from the standpoint of independent reflection. This does not imply a claim to be superior to religious truth in any way.
- (2) It cannot be the task of the study of religions, therefore to substantiate or disprove truths, which may be contained in religious doctrine.
- (3) One’s own personal religious experience is not a prerequisite for working in the study of religions (as was claimed, for example by Rudolph Otto); neither is there any obligation to maintain an antireligious attitude (as in the traditions critical of religion deriving from Feuerbach, Durkheim and others)
- (4) Since the study of religions does not serve the interests of any religion, it should be distinguished, for example from missiology and apologetics or a theology of religion (Pye, 2004: 26).

At this juncture, we can then argue that the teaching of Religious Studies should not be persuasive, sympathetic, apologetic or dogmatic, rather it should be critical, analytical, objective, interpretative and explanatory (to borrow the word J S Jensen and L .H Martin in their description of principles underlying a scientific study of religion) (J S Jensen and L .H Martin, 1997: 231-247) This to us can be called ethics of sound teaching and faith detachment.

Invariably, the above suggests that researchers in religious matters should be faith neutral whenever they are carrying out research because according to Pye again, religious scholarship seeks to maintain an unbiased and value –free attitude. The attainment of this calls for openness and objectivity, which in fact intertwine. The principle of openness suggests that every person participating in dialogue must do so with an open mind, that is without bias or prejudice.

This presupposes a free attitude, a clear conscience, cordial interactions and interrelation and positive attitudes to the religions of other people. Care must be taken to guard against the danger of prejudice against the religion of others, which we teach or research. Prejudice manifests in religious bias, bigotry, discrimination, dogmatism, fanaticism, intolerance, narrow-mindedness, partisanship etc. Associated with this is the principle of caution.

Every lecturer or researcher of Religious Studies who wants to engage in effective scholarship must exercise caution by not claiming to know everything about every religion because all religions are enshrined in mystery and in order to be able to unfold the mystery and possess knowledge about the supersensible one must be a painstaking inquirer, learner and researcher. This implies, that every scholar must be spiritually and emotionally stable, and must not be in haste when dealing with any topical issue in Religious Studies in order to arrive at objective findings and conclusions. It is better to be cautious before one comment on sacred and non-sacred. For example, one may pause and ask such questions as “Do I know enough about this? Have I given sufficient time to my informants to think about this? We must bear in mind that religious truths are very difficult to comprehend and accept by anyone who is not an adherent of that religion because the language of religion is not like an ordinary man language.

Objectivity goes hand in hand with open-mindedness, which suggests that each religious scholar should hold objective opinion about the religion being taught and researched on. On this ground, he should not give room for his emotion to override his attitude to the said religion. At this point, he needs not query the logicity or the authenticity of religious faith given the fact that every religion is a sacred phenomenon and it is meaningful to those practicing it. Scholars must be ready to accept this fact and be prepared to appreciate the genuineness of religion as known to the worshippers. In other words, objectivity presupposes a mind, which exposes itself to reality, and a mind, which accepts without inhibitions the revelation in the actual situation. We must note that objectivity about another man’s religion does not mean that one should be unfaithful towards one’s religion.

## **Codes of Research and Methods of Application**

It is important to start with an understanding of what research is. Research is the systematic process of collecting and analyzing information to increase our understanding of the phenomenon under study. It is the function of the researcher to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and to communicate that understanding to others. Today, research involves collecting information about a subject from a variety of sources including books, journals and the Internet or carrying out experiments or talking to people and analyzing this information.

Research in Religious Studies is rational and empirical investigation of religious phenomena. On the account of this, we can argue that a scholarly study of religion involves seriousness, reflection, diligence, painstakingness, hard work, rational thinking, creativity, wit, insightfulness, perceptiveness, awareness, and discernment among others.

It is important to note that empirical and rational study of religion requires evaluation of religious truth. This has a good place in the philosophy of religion. For example, this method is capable of mirroring the question of the relations between revelation and reason or faith and reason as reflected upon in all the western theistic traditions. Reason and rationality has been the subject of debate in endless variations throughout Western intellectual history. Empirical study also entails historically or socio-scientific studies of documentable phenomena, which go hand in hand with adumbration of the field. Adumbration means to suggest or describe something in an incomplete way. However, one of the shortcomings of this method is that it has a tendency to mislead researchers to believe that “religion” is basically a state of mind. To the best of our knowledge, all religious systems exist in at least in part, in the mind of its adherents. But these adherents are socially observable. Studying religions empirically therefore, suggests collecting data in the field, which can be documented on the basis of sources open to more than one investigator and consequently studied in a publicly accessible manner. Empirical method as a scientific method suggests:

- (i) the systematic search for verifiable data (facts) firmly rooted in prior knowledge and theoretical formulations
- (ii) the production of evidence as opposed to hearsay, opinion, intuition, or common sense; and
- (iii) following procedures that others can verify and replicate.

This also implies that empirical research findings are testable. In other words, a research is said to be empirical when it studies and draws conclusions about phenomena that are observable. In order to confirm or refute any particular theory, the research must test that theory with relevant empirical observations, or data. For instance a rational attitude is to be adopted during the course of research.

The whole research enterprise goes with being rational that is being objective and open so that a researcher does not allow his personal religious experience, emotion and sentiment to influence his research observation, report and publication. In this sense, scholars like Helmut Gollwitzer and Rudolf Bultman and later Ninian Smart have proposed such terminologies such as “methodological atheism”, “dogmatic atheism” and “methodological neutrality (J S Jensen and L .H Martin, 1997: 231-247).

In essence research in the most general sense is simply a search for knowledge or truth. The search process itself may be as simple as informally consulting a friend or as complex as designing and implementing a formal billion dollar scientific study.

Furthermore, research in Religious Studies implies two things namely knowledge of religious language, reverence, sympathy and empathy which have moral flavour. Competence and Knowledge of researcher is another important principle, which should guide every person engaging in meaningful Religious Studies scholarship. It suggests that every scholar must be competent in terms of understanding and having full or deep knowledge about his own religion and the faith of others with whom he interacts. For example, the Muslim who wants to do research in Christianity must have a good understanding of Christian beliefs and practices and even the original language of the Bible such as Hebrew and Greek and must be able to do the exegesis of Biblical passages when the need arises. With this, he will be in a good position to understand and know the context in which a particular Biblical message is framed. The same goes for a Christian regarding his understanding of Islam. Besides, each of them needs to know fully the occasion that led to a particular statement so that such a statement will not be quoted out of context and thereby lead to misinterpretation. Each researcher should also be conversant with the cultures from which a particular religion evolved.

A researcher or scholar who relies on information gathered from a few books without obtaining additional information from religious leaders of the concerned religion and every other person who has vital information on the subject matter being studied would end up knowing very little of the required information and such a scholar is likely to make erroneous research findings and conclusions.

On the issue of reverence, it is important to note that, religion is a sacred phenomenon and therefore must be accorded reverences due to its sacredness. Therefore religion of other people with whom we enter into dialogue must be treated with respect, awe, honour, admiration, esteem, and veneration as the adherents of such religion accord it. No religious person will want his religion to be treated with disdain, disrespect, lack of reverence, and impudence. This is so because all religions are very important to their adherents, so much so that they are ready to die for the sake of it because it provides them information about yesterday and today and also the future regarding the mystery of the universe and the eternity. Therefore during the process of dialogue, every religious issue should be treated with reverence because each religion means a lot for the adherents.

Sympathy and empathy in Religious Studies scholarship goes with tolerance, which entails accommodating the feelings, opinion, assessment, belief, comment, conviction, estimate, idea, impression, notice, point of view, sentiment and way of thinking of a religion being studied and that of their religious practitioners, the researchers religious practices notwithstanding. For example, for a Christian scholar to understand Islam, he must find out why and appreciate why Muslims kneel, sit, bow etc during prayer.

The Muslim scholar too should appreciate why some Christians jump up, roll on the ground and even weep during prayer. In the same vein, we need to understand while traditional worshippers bow before objects in their shrines. Rather than condemning these liturgical activities because they are strange to us, we should seek information regarding the feeling of a religious practitioner noting that religion is a personal affair and it usually depends on people's a long-term experience. So, if I jump up in prayer, it could be that is the best way to show appreciation for what God has done for me.

Research should be undertaken in accordance with commonly agreed standards of good practice as are laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki, which contains widely accepted principles essential for meaningful and result oriented research enterprise. It zeroes in three principles viz: The first is principle of Beneficence ('do positive good') and Non-Maleficence ('do no harm') which presupposes that:(a) It should be scientifically sound and the purpose should be to contribute to knowledge; and (b) that the research should be undertaken and supervised by those who are appropriately qualified and experienced.

The second is Informed Consent which implies that: (a) each potential subject must be adequately informed of the aims, methods, anticipated benefits and potential hazards of the research and any discomfort it may entail; (b) any documentation given to potential participants should be comprehensible and there should be an opportunity for them to raise any issues of concern; (c) consent should be required in writing and records of consent should be maintained; (d) potential participants must be informed that they are free to withdraw consent to participation at any time; (e) there should be a procedure for making complaints and participants should be made aware of this; (f) all participants should be volunteers. Considerable care should be taken where consent is sought from those in a dependent position and it should be made clear that refusal to participate will not lead to any adverse consequences. For example, students must be assured that any decision not to participate will not prejudice in any way their academic progress; (g) any inducement offered to participants should be declared and should be in accordance with appropriate guidelines; (h) consent must be obtained from a legal guardian in the case of minors or any others who do not have the legal competence to give informed consent.

Confidentiality/Anonymity is the third category. It suggests that all research should conform with legislation relating to data protection. In other words, details that would allow individuals to be identified should not be published, or made available, to anybody not involved in the research unless the individuals concerned give explicit consent, or such information is already in the public domain. In addition, all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that confidential details are secure and great care must be taken where there is an intention to use data collected for one study, for another study. It is important that relevant guidelines are followed.

## **Code of Ethics Benefits**

As a matter of fact integration of the suggested code of ethics for religious scholarship enterprise is rewarding for many reasons. One, it has the capacity to help stem the tide of possible conflicts that may arise from irreverent ways in which a few scholars of religion have treated religions different from their own. Besides, inculcation of the code of ethics would bring about innovation and creativity in religious scholarship enterprise more than before. This would in turn reduce suspicion, bickering and mutual distrust often associated with Religious Studies in the past. Such a good development has tendency to enhance respect and mutual respect within and without Religious Studies scholarship and among scholars of Religious Studies especially in Nigeria noted for her religious pluralism. The integration would not only promote inclusive scholarship because more scholars would open up to learn more about religions different from their own since Religious Studies is not about proselytisation but a pure academic work which in the long run would help to widen the horizons of scholars. It is in the light of this provable assertion that Jacob Neusner correctly remarks that the person who knows only one religion understands no religion (University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming, 1997). Consequently scholars of Religious Studies would be better equipped with good teaching and research tools that would enable them highlight and discuss the meaningful place religions occupies in solving global problems such as poverty, ethnicity, racism and gender problems.

## **Grey Area in the Codes**

As good as our proposition regarding the importance, relevance and justification for code of ethics for scholars of Religious Studies is, we cannot overlook its grey areas. One of these is the problem of implementation. One, it is difficult to measure the degree of compliance or otherwise of the stakeholders to the code of ethics not to talk of imposing sanctions on the deviant and giving reward to the compliant. We envisage that it not going to be easy to make some scholars who are religiously fanatical and parochial bend to the ethical rules on the ground that doing so is tantamount to a conflict of interest. Such could also raise questions of ethical relativism. Ethical relativism according to Oldenquist presupposes that an action that is right in one place or society may be wrong in another place or society (Oldenquist, 1978:47). In this context, each person may bend towards doing what he/she thinks is right for him/her regardless whether others around or distant from him/her is affected.

## **Concluding Remarks**

It is our belief that, meaningful Religious Studies Scholarship in Nigeria today cannot be done without concern for ethics or code of ethics guiding the profession. This becomes imperative in the light of global desire for integrity in scholarly activity. This concern is conspicuously reflected in the preamble of the University Policy and Procedures generated by the University of Calgary, USA, which runs thus:

There is increasing sensitivity in the academic community about integrity in scholarly activity and in the presentation of results of their activity. It only takes one incident, with its attendant publicity, to impact adversely on the credibility of a Department, a Faculty, even of a University. As individual academics, and as a member of a University, we must all share the responsibility. We cannot rely on external granting agencies, sponsors of contract research, publishers and editors, or those who are the ultimate consumers of our scholarly activity, to oversee the integrity of our work (University of Calgary, USA)

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