

**THE NEIGHBOURHOOD RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MUSLIM TO A  
CHRISTIAN AND OTHERS FOR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBLE  
LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**



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## OUR NIGERIA

The Sovereign and Legal State of Nigeria is made up of citizens who proclaim the faiths of Islam and Christianity in the main. The constitution also permits African Traditional Religions in their various forms. Indeed, someone can even claim to be a practitioner of Judaism.

The constitution provides for **citizenship and governance for the welfare or safety and prosperity of all parties, without material or spiritual discrimination that will mean imposition of one over another or more.**

For all the citizens of Nigeria, this is a sufficient provision because it accommodates the tenets of scriptural **neighbourhood and humanity**. For Muslims and Christians, the provisions of the constitution are therefore already **best enshrined** in the Guidance of God.

In consequence, the requirement or challenge of Muslims and Christians is to **know, understand and live the tenets**, to their best ability, in the interest of all parties. This is **especially or more so**, because we constitute the majority.

Still more, in the case of Muslims, is the belief that the message of Isa (AS) was only completed by the message and example of Muhammad (SAW). This is why if a Christian accepts the message of Muhammad (SAW), he gets **double reward**, unlike an unbeliever. For Muslims, Christians are essentially related in faith.

The immediate logical implication of this is that, every individual Muslim needs to know what his responsibilities are and to consciously act them out continuously. The collective action of Muslims will only be wider and more qualitative. For Muslims, it is part of **worship**.

The second implication is that, the basic terms that are not negotiable and those that are commendable, are neither undefined nor unclear.

The third implication is that no Muslim can rightly think or suggest that the free practice of his religion will be inhibited or restrained by **our differences**. Indeed, accepting Islam is not by compulsion.

The fourth and most critical implication is that, **until the Muslims do their part as required by the Guidance, they can neither be rightly understood by others nor will they rightly understand others**. The identity of Muslims or with Islam is a combination of transparent knowledge and conscious discipline, in **all aspects of livelihood**.

## **THE APPROACH**

The requirement is part of the discipline of Islam, based on the knowledge and consciousness of the Guidance that should drive livelihood. No particular or special additional arrangements are required for Muslims neighbourhood responsibilities towards Christians and others.

Where there are concerns, it cannot be out of lack of guidance. It can be out of ignorance, manipulation or hypocrisy of the Muslims. It is only after these three factors are **ruled out** that the possible **mischief** of others can be considered. And for this, the Guidance has defined limits of tolerance, which has been captured by the provision and limits of freedom, in our constitution. Fundamentally, the Christians are not a threat to Muslims because we are both rooted in the faith of Ibrahim (AS).

It will be only fanciful if not diversionary, to have this subject becoming a concern. Therefore, wherever there is a practical breach of relationship, it is **first and more** about the level of knowledge and discipline of one's identity. The indicator for this

is that, most of the experiences would not fit into **responding to oppression by Christians**. And if Christians are blamed for igniting the breach, it can hardly be more than by **provocation**.

None of these is right. And the challenge is **not with either scripture guidance, but the knowledge of it and the required discipline on the part of the believer**.

The burden of the solution is **specifically on each rascal participant in such breach and additionally on the leaders across the members of the faith**. This is because it is a proof of identity failure. And the only one and best instrument is the scripture of each party and the **living example of the leaders**.

None of the two scriptures prescribes **gangsterism** for its adherents. The rational and sensible implication of this is that **no breach between the two parties can responsibly go beyond WHAT A SCOLDING BY A LEADER FROM EITHER PARTY WILL NOT RESOLVE**. The Muslim party **will be able to submit to the immediate intervention by a Christian leader**, just like the Christian party **will be able to submit to the immediate intervention by a Muslim leader**. And absolute possibility as well as the reliability of this responsible relationship is that, **once the knowledge that requires the discipline of one part is clear, the wrong party will be revealed**. Where the wrong party still believes that he is right and the **intervening leader is partial or ignorant of his right, a higher authority that is nearest can be approached**. This person can still be of the identity of the party considered as right. This is because the two scriptures **do not prescribe enmity of or to the other**.

While it is still possible to have the wrong party claiming to have been wronged, it is **easy to then invite or involve a leader of the wrong party along with the higher**

**leader that has been disagreed with.** Indeed, beyond these, formal authorities can be engaged.

None of these levels of resolution requires **another structure or institution or literature** to save **all of us** from religious miscreants and rascals, against our religion, society and constitution.

## **THE TWO POSSIBLE OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES**

With this definition of our secular but religious state, it will be **ordinarily** foolhardy for any **outsider** to expect that **any anti-Islamic or anti-Christian** tenet to be embraced with love. An example is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender concept and practice. This is responsible for the commended law against same sex marriage in Nigeria.

However, it can become complicated, where a party decides to adjust its position and stands against the law. This will generate a new implication because the common stand has been adjusted. This is technically not the business of the other party. However, it **demands for adjusting relationship terms, because it affects what is fundamental in the boundaries of Allah.** This is why a new structure is not helpful to our bonding, because building neighbourhoods relationships **must not involve BREAKING NEW GROUNDS.**

The grounds can be **creative**, like anything that is firstly against the standard of the scripture. For example, the Qur'an defines the scope of women permissible for marriage by Muslim men. They include women of the people of revealed books. And it cancels Muslim women marrying other than Muslims. It will thus amount to religious rascality to consider, suggest or practice what is contrary to this.

Another ground can be driven by the ambition of evangelism or da'wah. The discipline of neighbourhood responsibilities or relationships is both an individual and collective burden. The education for this is a **within brotherhood** requirement. It is part of the process of education and socialization between Muslims or between Christians. As a result, it is above board, for any theological education, interaction or dialogue, to seek or expect to achieve socialization or reorientation of members of either faith or both, by elite theological agreements.

The only and best fitting approach to attending to Muslims neighbourhood responsibilities towards Christians and others must be based on the simple basic template provided by the scripture and history or example of Muhammad (SAW). The Guidance is rich and sufficient to safeguard the believers against mischief and rascality.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ISLAMIC TEMPLATE**

From the **inside** Anas ibn Malik reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**None of you will have faith until he loves for his brother or his neighbour what he loves for himself.**” Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 45.

For clarity, this love is **racing together in the submission and commitment of good deeds** that will earn a believer closeness and the pleasure of Allah. And it is defined by **justice to self and whoever, FOR ALLAH**. The Muslim is consequently not different or free from keeping to the Guidance, in worldly matters as against in spiritual matters. All affairs commence with Allah and end with Him. The duty of a believer is to seek knowledge and follow the Guidance consciously, to the best of his ability. “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both.” [Quran, 4:135]

This status and role of neutrality that is really positively godly, is the foundation for Islamic neighbourhood responsibilities. “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.” [Qur’an 49:13]. The mischief or rascality of ‘justice’ for a fellow faithful and different ‘justice’ for others is completely ruled out.

The concept of a neighbour is **not limited to a member of the same faith**. In one description, it is forty houses occupants in four cardinal directions of one’s house. In another, it is in reference to a Mosque. Impliedly, you can have a neighbour, **by work place, study place, etc.** The specific focus on Muslim and Christian neighbourhood responsibilities is therefore only for analytical convenience. The neighbour can be a fellow Muslim, Christian or others. This is clearer with: Abu Shurayh reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said three times, **“By Allah, he does not have faith!”** It was said, “Who is it, O Messenger of Allah?” The Prophet said, **“He whose neighbour is not safe from his harm.”** Source: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6016

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, **“He will not enter Paradise whose neighbour is not secure from his evil.”** Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 46. Aisha reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, **“Gabriel continued to instruct me to treat neighbours well until I thought he would make them my heirs.”** Source: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6014, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2624.

The summary of this template is that for Muslims, they have neighbourhood responsibilities for all humans, without discrimination informed or driven by



injustice. There is no preference or superiority of a fellow Muslim over others, on the basis of religion.

This should make a Muslim who has any required competence, to serve or live with others, as **an equal, as a subordinate, manager, director or leader**. The basis for this will be his **orientation for justice, in respect to himself and others**. But, this is possible **only if he has the knowledge and discipline of his Guidance**. If, when or where he **lacks these**, he **can** end up as an impostor, oppressor or a real failure. This is the case since a fellow non-Muslim **can similarly be just**. The point is that where a person identifies himself as a Muslim, he can still be a failure, because of the comprehensive scope of his Guidance.

Hence, based on our constitution, a Muslim neither expects discrimination from any other party nor has he the right to discriminate against any party. This should make it feasible and commendable to have a non-Muslim group, community, society or state, making a Muslim member its representative or leader.

This often plays out subtly in professional bodies, when they vote for their leaders. The attributes of their identity leads the credentials of competence. With two good fellows the marks or record of fairness in dealing with disagreements, truthfulness, firmness and humility **dictate** the choices. It is then easier to make the one with record of abuse of financial trust an editor or a patron. Where members have foresight, they will hesitate to make the person even a deputy, a vice or assistant.

The **only difference** of a Muslim that can **ignite** his disapproval, withdrawal and resistance is where the neighbourhood relationship **exceeds the scope of mundane responsibilities of others to him** due to the equal status and protection given to all parties, for spiritual freedom. The constitution prohibits the official adoption of a

spiritual identity against others. And for a Muslim, he has the backing of Allah, in **unambiguous terms:**

“Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.” [Qur’an 60:8]. Thus, both at work or making livelihood and at residence, the Muslim has the responsibility of neighbourhood, **provided his identity that includes spiritual duties do not face intrusion by others.**

For that reason: “Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion – [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers”. [Qur’an 60:9]. Not even allies of the enemies of the spiritual identity of Muslims are to be spared.

## **THE ADDITIONAL EXPECTATION FROM OTHERS**

Over and above the **equal terms** of entitlement relationship between Muslims and especially Christians is **the responsible support of the identity of Muslims.** This is extremely important in respect of **major Sins.** I have heard of a Christian who had his daughter impregnated by a Muslim, **without marriage.** The responsibility of the Christian was to take the matter to the nearest Shari’ah Court. He is expected to surely get a responsible resolve, with the benefits of developing both the Shari’ah records and relationships between Christians and Muslims. But he didn’t.

The factors that contributed to his not **doing anything** were not better than the misbehaviour of the Muslim. One is that, another daughter was impregnated by a fellow Christian without marriage, and the man ran away. The second is that such **misfortunes are very common.** The ‘intelligent’ conventional resolve is to ask the

man to at least provide some allowances for the mother or for the mother and child, for some time. This is because some of such children have become ‘blessings’ for the family.

As distasteful as this real experiences are, in spite of the fact that we share some similar guidance, the real root of the challenges is **ignorance of the knowledge and discipline of one’s identity**. The requirement of transparent and informed relationship between parties and the approval of the parents or guardians of the two parties was sacrificed by all the parties. This irresponsibility generated the real shame that was responded to with hopeless bias. A thread of poverty can be sensed, admixed with the deliberate coverage of their own **primary lapse**.

The subject and challenges of neighbourhood responsibilities will remain as long as **our identities are corrupt**. The impact on nation building will continue to be **negative**.