

**THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON UNLIMITED LOVE**

**AN ENTRY FOR THE YOUTH ESSAY COMPETITION ON THE PRINCIPLES OF  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, TOLERANCE, AND UNLIMITED LOVE FOR ALL**

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**Love is a language that defies all barriers, convincing even  
the hardest hearts.**

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## **Love is a language that defies all barriers, convincing even the hardest hearts**



Whenever I remember how Musa and Ibrahim became my best friends and how my parents became their parent's friend, I begin to wonder if there exists a barrier which unlimited love cannot break.

My country was facing serious security challenges from a terrorist group called Boko Haram. The terrorists have severally claimed to be an offshoot of Islamic religion. Though the Muslims denied having anything to do with the terrorists, journalists and news anchors still formally address the terrorists as an Islamic terrorist group. This generated a strong hatred to Muslims from other religious groups.

I had just finished my primary school. I was posted at a boarding Secondary school in Guwa. The school drew students from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. I had gotten my stuffs ready to travel the next day. In the wee hours of the day I was to travel, my parents woke me up and took me to their room. I thought they wanted us to pray longer than we usually do. But no, I was wrong! It turned out to be an hour advice. "Be very careful with those Islamic terrorist students so that they don't kill you" were among the things I was told.

As the bus bumps along the way to the school, I didn't enjoy the sights I must admit. I was pondering over many issues. "I must be sure I don't have anything to do with those Islamic terrorists. God please help me to identify them on time. I must isolate them completely..." my thoughts were ineffable. "This is Federal Government College Guwa" the driver said. He dropped me close to the school principal's office and zoomed off.

After my registration and clearance, Mr. Femi, the principal said, "Awolowo is your hostel and your bed number is 27", his outstretched right index finger pointing towards a nearby building. As I was struggling with my heavy bags to the hostel, two students ran after me putting a 'heaven-on-earth' smile on their faces. They gave self introduction as Musa and Ibrahim. Afterwards, they helped me carry my bags to the hostel. They hospitably accommodated me as if we were friends before. Incidentally, Musa's bed number was 25, Ibrahim 26 and mine 27. While I was arranging my things, we both cracked jokes and laughed together. In love, I made friends with them. But guess what? I was knocked on my heels when I discovered that Ibrahim and Musa are devoted Muslims. Do I still remember my parent's injunctions? Can I still pull out of our burning friendship? At that point in time, I have to disobey my parent's orders because the love Musa and Ibrahim showed me has cleared the doubt.

Nevertheless, I was meticulously watching and following them to know if they were only "paying lip service" under pretension. Weeks after weeks, their love and friendly nature remained genuine. Though, I noticed there was limited friendship and signs of isolation among the Islamic students and the students from other religions- maybe what they were told were not different from mine.

One night after our dinner, I called Ibrahim and Musa under an umbrella tree close to our hostel. I looked into their eyes emotionally, "tell me nothing but the truth, does Islamic doctrines encourage the killing of other people?" It was really a long conversation. But at the end, it was a bolt from the blue to me when I discovered how much the Islamic doctrines and observances advocates for diverse tolerance and mutual love. I narrated my story to them. They also narrated

to me how their uncle uses to say that Christians are haters and warns them never to associate with us. We both cried like soft-hearted women. It was a great night of discovery and reconciliation. But then, how we can influence others to also discover the truth as we just did was the big deal!

Later that semester, Ibrahim and Musa gave me their Holy book 'Qur'an' while I gave them ours (Holy Bible). We did so in order to acquire necessary knowledge from each other's religious doctrines which will help us to influence others. I was marveled when discovered how closely related the doctrines of Islam and Christianity are.

With the kind of love we show to other students and the overlapping similarities we quote from the Holy Books, we were able to influence our fellow students. Without mincing of words, before we could close for that semester, religious extremism and isolation became things of the past in our hostel. I went home after the semester as a renewed person with the burning zeal to convince my parents, siblings and friends with the truth I've discovered.

From the manner my parents pampered me since birth; I never believed they could lay hard their hands on me, talk more of beating me with a belt. On that fateful morning, we gathered for morning devotion as usual. My senior sister had just finished reading the Bible after which I suppose to proceed with praises. But I interrupted immediately opening a passage of the Qur'an, "please I will like to show us something from the Qur'an. It is a hidden truth I discovered about Islam", I said. "Did you say what?" my daddy interrupted. They became mad at me. Before I could say Jack Robbins, my hot-tempered father pulled out his belt and descended on me. While he was flogging me all over the body, I could hear my mum and siblings applauding him. After the beatings, I was instructed to kneel down. "Could my parents and siblings actually watch me suffer like this" I thought. I was physically and emotionally depressed but the passion and determination to expose the truth was still burning like flames.

As I couldn't give up after several punishments, they decided to grant me audience. I narrated my encounter at the school to them. To cut short the story, I was able to convince them after counter questions.

Before I could finish my secondary school, Musa and Ibrahim had spent at least three vacations in our house while I had spent about five in theirs. My parents and theirs developed a strong family relationship. The notion of "*we're Christians*" and "*they're Islams*" was effaced. The refreshing spirit of peace bestowed on us. Our minds became freer, relaxed and more prosperous.

Ibrahim was in senior class 2 while Musa and I were in junior class1. So, before we could finish secondary school, he (Ibrahim) had finished his university education. In 2013, he got married to my senior sister and today they are living happily with their children bearing both Islamic and Christian names.

From experience I can affirm that the reason for religious hostilities around the world today is not as a result of the so-called "differences in religious doctrines and observances". Rather it is because of the following:

Firstly, we're always fond of generalizing bad things of a particular person or group of people to the whole people, without proper investigation. Due to the fact that the Bokoharam terrorists claimed to be an Islamic offshoot, many people were too fast to generalize that all Islams are terrorists.

As a result of sheer ignorance, we digest fallacies into our minds and pass it to next generation thereby grooming a lineage of religious intolerants. This shouldn't be! The core values of all religions are just the same but designed and ordained in different languages, rituals and modes.

Secondly, one of the major reasons for religious intolerance and arrogance is that we are most times more theoretical than practical. Yes, Islam admonishes for mutual love and tolerance. But assuming Ibrahim and Musa did not prove it by practice; I would have believed that what my

parents said was true. And as such advocate for more haters. The Love they had towards me defied the barriers of hatred, convinced my determined heart. The only way you can prove the genuineness and ‘superiority’ of your belief/religion is by tolerating and showing love to others even when they hate you rather than conflict and vengeance.

Thirdly, as a result of oppression or even humiliation, we are always afraid to expose the truth. So many people actually understand that all religions are one. But due to the fact that they grew up seeing others as their enemy, they keep silent and watch things go wrong. Whenever I look at my back through the mirror, the mark of the belt which my father left, stares at me. I was punished severely because I wanted to influence them to love our Islamic brethren. I never gave up. At end, I did not only convince my parents and siblings but we ended up having an Islamic believer (Ibrahim) as an in-law. That’s the power of boldness and determination! Never look back to share the truth. Never be afraid to steer people in your own religion to respect, love and tolerate people from other religions.

Finally, let me reaffirm that all the religions and believe systems in the world are good. The differences that exist in their doctrines, observances and rituals should enrich our humanity. They should make us better not worse. They should be our stepping stones not stumbling blocks. Mother Teresa summed it up when she said: *“There are dozens of major religions in the world and thousands of belief systems by which people guide their lives, design ethical codes and find happiness. Learn to use one another’s religious beliefs as a way to connect, not as reasons for conflict.”*

Life is easier, healthier and more prosperous when we love others and keep no enemy. Make yourself an advocate of religious tolerance and unlimited love today!

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