APPRAISING THE PHENOMENON OF PLURALISM AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined the phenomenon of pluralism and religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria. The phenomenon religious pluralism is one of the reasons of religious conflicts and these religious conflicts have many negative effects on the country. Given the growing religious tension between Muslims and Christian in Northern Nigeria, the need to rethink the phenomenon of religious dialogue becomes imperative. The study adopted the historical, phenomenological and analytic methods in order to analyse the religious pluralism in Northern Nigeria, pluralism and religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria, Christian-Muslim interaction in Northern Nigeria, the history of religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria, threats to peace between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria in order to enhance an effective dialogue between Christian and Muslims in Northern Nigeria. The study relies on primary and secondary sources. A Sample of 14 respondents was used in the study. It is found out in the study that the universal claim by the adherent of both Islam and Christianity as to which religion is superior is one of the major problems in Northern Nigeria today. It is also found out in the paper that many people are ignorant of the facts that, religious pluralism in Nigeria presents a great challenge for effective religious dialogue and peaceful co-existence in Northern Nigeria. This is seen in the instances of religious hostilies, violent, terrorist activities, herders-farmer conflict and clashes in Northern Nigeria. The study recommended that, Muslims and Christians should make their message of peace practical oriented and should check other tendencies such as intolerance, fanaticism and extremism in their interactions and religious practices.

Introduction

Nigeria like other African nations is a pluralistic society and this pluralism covers many aspects of our national life such as religion, ethnicity, politics, economic and ideologies. Religious pluralism presents a challenge for religious dialogue and peaceful co-existence in Northern Nigeria. This could be seen in some instances of religious hostilities, violent and clashes in Northern Nigeria. Nigeria was born in the year 1914 when Fredrick Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates. Nigeria became a democratic nation with corporate and legal existence in 1960 when she gained her independence. The amalgamation which gave rise to one "Nigeria" was the brainchild of the British Government which operated parliamentary system of government where democracy was in full operation (Ibenwa 162). "Religious riots have become a recurring decimal in the nation leading some important Nigerians to raise their voices against this ugly trend. Today, we discover that the problem of diversity is affecting the relationship between individuals and groups in Northern Nigeria. Religion among other factors has been a source of conflicts in our nation, Nigeria. Now, there is a problem of coping with religious differences which give rise to religious conflicts.

Today, the universal claims of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism which are the major world religions give rise to religious conflict. There has been a great contact among theologians of different religions, but more important is the fact that adherents of these religions are faced with the challenge of working and interacting together with people who have different belief systems therefore, there is the tendency of the adherents of these different religions to vie with one another for supremacy (Ijeoma 93). This paper is therefore an attempt to examine the phenomenon of pluralism and religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria. For the sake of clarity and organization, the paper is divided into sections beginning with an introduction, the brief history of Nigeria nation, politics of secularism in Nigeria, Christian-Muslim interaction in Northern Nigeria, the history of religious dialogue in northern Nigeria, threats to peace between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations and works cited.

Religious Pluralism In Northern Nigeria
The word pluralism is defines as the dialogic response to religious otherness. It is a vehicle for interfaith understanding and pluralism requires a communicative climate in which religious differences and disagreement are interpreted as learning opportunities rather than sources of conflict that must be resolved (Keaten and Soukup 180). Scholars argued that pluralism is the only paradigm

congruent with the understanding of dialogue from a communicative perspective.

"Pluralism" and its cognates, "plural", "plurality" and "pluralistic" have become very current in modern discussions, both in the practical ways of life and in the humanistic studies. In practical life, it is used in the discussions about many religions, races, nations, cultures and so on that has to live together as a society today. In technical usage, the philosophies of Anaxagoras and especially of Leucippus and Democritus in the Ancient times, and William James in the Modern times are technically termed 'pluralistic'. In this technical sense, pluralism is "the metaphysical doctrine that reality consists in many reals" (Hunnex 74). In contemporary scholarly discussions, pluralism is the 'ism' of plurality, the affirmation or acceptance of difference (Williams 78). There could be differences within society without the differences being accepted as the norm. Pluralism, however, is an evaluation of the fact of difference in the acceptance of the difference as ideal.

Pluralism as it is being considered today has many forms, such as religious pluralism, ethnic pluralism (Otite 86, Schermerhorn 143), political pluralism (Baskin 197, Manley 23-26), moral or ethical pluralism (Parekh 117-154), value pluralism (Skorupski 101-116), cultural pluralism and philosophical pluralism (Russell 80). Among all the different forms of pluralism under discussion today, none is as virile as religious pluralism.

One can define pluralism, however, in more than one way. Although traditionally, pluralism stood for belief in more than one ultimate principle and opposed monism, the belief in one ultimate principle, the modern use of the term does not necessarily imply a denial of one ultimate reality which is God. In effect, the original notion of pluralism referred to the acceptance of many gods (Cooper 824). Today the idea leans toward the toleration of a wide variety of religious orientations such as varying forms of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and so on.

Religious pluralism as recognition of independent validity of other religions had obtained in many societies in many parts of the world and at different periods in history (Evans 57-60). Examples are the ancient Roman Empire, India and many ancient empires in Africa. However, there had been religions also, that were making exclusive claims, such as in many branches of Christianity and Islam. Because these consider their religions to be the only true one, or the best, they

seek to convert others. The increase in travel from the 17th century was an increase in evangelization of the world.

There had been theoretical discussions of religious pluralism before the 17th Century European Enlightenment. Rizvi cited Qur'an chapter 109 as one of the earliest messages of peaceful coexistence thus, "O unbelievers! Neither do I worship what you worship; nor do you worship what I worship. Neither am I going to worship what you worship; nor are you going to worship what I worship. To you shall be your religion, and to me shall be my religion" (3). The theoretical discussion, however, gained in pace after the acceptance of political liberalism in the West.

According to Diana Eck, pluralism is a direct concomitant to religious freedom. They go together (10). Other factors also accelerated the discussions on the nature and validity of religious pluralism. The most important of these factors are the fast trend of globalization in the 20th century and the involvement of religions in many conflicts in the world, such as between India and Pakistan, Israel and Palestinians, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq and Syria. As Bernhardt has said, at present, the fronts between the religions are hardening in a dramatic way (10). Kung therefore observed that there will be no peace in the world until there is peace between the religions (108).

In the process of theoretical discussions among scholars on religious pluralism, different forms of pluralism had been proposed and justified. According to Banchoff, religious pluralism is being discussed in two major disciplines. The first is in Theology/Religious Studies, and the second is among Social Theorists, Sociologists and Political Scientists. The former are discussing the implication of religious pluralism for individual religion, belief and practices; the latter are discussing the impacts of religious pluralism on civil society and democratic politics (118). Furthermore, it was discovered that, within each of these broad disciplines, especially the former (Theology and Religious Studies), there are varieties of proposals.

Religious Pluralism becomes prominent in the twentieth century as a response to two other views of relationship to other religions: exclusivism and inclusivism. (Eck 21-25). The debate started among Western (Christian) thinkers. Exclusivism is the view that only one religion possesses the truth, and that there can be no truth or salvation outside it. It is based on the belief that the revelation of the

religion is the final; no other one is possible. An inclusivist recognizes partial truths in other religions, but considers his or hers as absolutely true. In contrast to exclusivism and inclusivism, pluralism is the recognition of the independent validity of other ways, religions, cultures, moralities, races and so on. Pluralism should also be distinguished from plurality. Raimundo Pannikkar explicitly states that Pluralism does not mean plurality (109).

Religious plurality refers to "the fact of difference" or "the empirical reality of diverse religious systems in the world (Demarest 135). David Tracy distinguishes the two thus: Pluralism is one of the many possible evaluations of that fact (2). Religious pluralism should also however be distinguished from religious relativism. The latter is the claim that no religious belief is absolutely true. Rather, pluralism rests on an assumption that there are some underlying and fundamental religious truths which are presented in a variety of cultural forms in various religious belief systems (O'Keefe 62).

Varieties Of Religious Pluralism
In the field of Theology and the Philosophy of Religion, John Hick is considered the greatest advocate of religious pluralism. His proposal is found primarily in his major book, *An Interpretation of Religion* but also in many of his other publications (Hick, 1980, 1985, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001). Hick's theory of religious pluralism is philosophical, reconstructing the concept of Transcendent in the religions. His focus is on the religions he terms, 'post-axial religions'. These are religions that began between 800 BCE and 200 CE (Hick 13). They consist of world's major religions which Islam is considered as an offshoot of Judaism and Christianity.

According to Hick, these post-axial faiths focussed on "transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness". The transformation occurs are transcendentally oriented. Hick used Kant's philosophy to account for differences between the religions on the conception of the Transcendent/Ultimately Reality. The Ultimately Real/Transcendent/Real is the noumenon, the reality in itself, which cannot be conceived as it is. Different human perception and conception of the Real, which are due to different cultural contexts, account for the differences between the religions. The different conceptions are the phenomena. Hick found support for his proposal in the religions themselves. They all distinguished between the Real as it is in itself, and at is perceived and conceived.

In a negative response to John Hick's form of religious pluralism, Gavin D'Costa outlines five types of religious pluralism (223-232). That of John Hick is the first, called "philosophical pluralism." Other types include the practical or pragmatic religious pluralism of Paul Knitter, Houston Smith and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's "perennial philosophy" or esoteric pluralism, Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan's mystical unity of religions in which the implicit pluralism within Hindu Brahmanism and Advaita Vedanta was brought into surface, and the Dalai Lama's (of Tibetan Buddhism) tolerant pluralism. Of these, John Hick's and similar ones had provoked more responses.

It was Hick and Paul Knitter in an edited volume, *The Myth of Christian Uniqeness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* who thrusted the issue of religious pluralism into modern intellectual discussion (29). The book was the result of a Conference held at the Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California from March 7-8, 1986. The conference was highly organised and the contributors specially chosen. The motivating factor of the organisers was that, Christians had started to realise that religious plurality is a fact; more than that, they are feeling that other religions are as vital as theirs and influential in the modern world. The non-Christian religions have depths and beauty, which an unprejudiced observer can see, and the religions are attractive to many.

The Basic Tenets Of Religious Pluraism
Keaten and Soukup introduced eight tenets that serve as orientations to pluralistic dialogue: these includes;
1. Pluralism requires active engagement of the religious other. Thus, pluralism is a dialogic response to religious otherness.
2. Pluralism focuses on personal religious experience communicated through narrative.
3. Pluralism requires empathetic listening, that is, setting aside assumptions and entering the discursive faith world of the religious other.
4. Pluralism neither presumes nor requires a person to adopt the central assumption of religious relativism.
5. Pluralism is a vehicle for interfaith understanding not conversation.
6. Pluralism conceived of religious difference as an opportunity for insight and inspiration rather than as a treat to one's own faith tradition.
7. Pluralistic dialogue focuses on faith rather than religion.
8. Pluralism requires a communicative climate in which religious differences and disagreement are interpreted as learning opportunities rather than sources of conflict that must be resolved (180-181).

According to Iremeka, for one to think about what is pluralism, here are some points to begin our thinking pluralism, these includes;

It is Energetic Engagement with Diversity: Pluralism is not diversity alone but the *energetic engagement with diversity*. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettoes with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement.

Active Seeking of Understanding across Lines of Difference: Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the *active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another and to leaves in the place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Encounter of Commitments: Pluralism is not relativism, but the *encounter of commitments.* The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

Pluralism is *based on Dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table with one's commitments. Religious pluralism generally refers to the belief in two or more religious worldviews as being equally valid or acceptable. More than mere tolerance, religious pluralism accepts multiple paths to God or gods as a possibility and is usually contrasted with "exclusivism," the idea that there is only one true religion or way to know God.

More than the Sharing of Certain Values: Pluralism is more than the sharing of certain values or agreement on some social issues. Buddhists and Christians both agree that helping the poor is important, but such limited concord is not pluralism (169-170).

Pluralism has to do with lending credence to competing truth claims and accepting diverse beliefs regarding God and salvation. In addition, two or more religions can share some doctrinal beliefs yet remain fundamentally different as belief systems. For example, Muslims and Christians agree that there is only one God yet both religions define God differently and hold many other irreconcilable beliefs. The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today.

According to Jude, Religious pluralism is therefore an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society (160). The introduction of Christianity and Islam in Northern Nigeria marked the beginning of religious pluralism on the continent, thus putting to an end the monolatric religious system that operated in the traditional Nigerian societies. Corroborating this view Chuta, said that the introduction of western education in Africa brought in western idea of rationalism and individualism into Nigeria. Many Nigerians began to doubt their religious traditions, and subsequently decided to live without it, and that was the inception of secularism in Nigeria (48). The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. According to Taylor, Religious pluralism is therefore an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of <u>religious</u> <u>belief systems</u> co-existing in society (337).

From a look back at Nigerian history since the pre-colonial era, it becomes evident that Nigeria right from its inception has remained a pluralistic society comprising different cultural, political, religious and social groups co-existing in the same political society. The country is divided into four different regions; the North, South, West and East and each with itself, has different people who are different in their cultural, political, religious and social background (Baxter 16). Religion therefore is an important dimension of the pluralistic nature of Nigerian society and therefore forms the basis of discussion in the essay.

The traditional religions consisting of a variety of localised religious practices and beliefs, common to our people, were thriving, undisturbed by any foreign influences. Fr. Mathew Kukah notes that: the introduction of the Islamic empires

and subsequent missionary activities across the continent produced different and sometimes divergent worldviews among communities (172). In our situation, two world major religions Islam and Christianity, are added to the alreadt existing traditional religion and even over shadow it. The most decisive impact of Islam came in the first decade of the 19th Century when Usman Dan Fodio, one of a group of Muslims scholars mainly of Fulani origin initiated a major Islamic reform in the north (Beversluis 119). Thus Islam is more influential and dominant in the North, especially in the far north areas described as the holy north. It also has interests in the South-West.

After the Islamic presences had been registered in the northern part of Nigeria, Christianity was planted in the country through the South Coast of the Atantic by some explorers who were principally Portuguese and later developed by Holy Ghost and Missionaries fathers (Ozigbo 91). Traditional religion which was the initial religion in the country now claims a small percentage of the population and is scattered in all the four major regions (Onyeidu 47). On the whole, the universal claims of both Islam and Christianity are adherently conflictual and contrast sharply with the communal world views of African religions as practised by various ethnic communities, African religion, being the spiritual ideological expression of the total worldview of the community, was hardly a source of conflict, since by its nature it did not seek converts nor did it try to impose its beliefs patterns.

The central basis of religious pluralism is this last observation. Tom Driver points this out in his Postscript to the book. He writes, "… the case of pluralism is at bottom a moral or ethical one, not the result of any salvific, revelational, or rational harmony." (Driver, 1992: 216). John B. Cobb, Jr who was a participant in the conference, but not a contributor makes an interesting observation, which again helps distinguish pluralism from relativism. According to Knitter, (Knitter, 1992: 184) Cobb chides Hick, Cantwell Smith and Knitter himself for searching for a basis on which the unity of religions can be based.

Today, the country has become more pluralised in nature. The major religious adherents are growing in alarming proportions. People are now aware of others who do not share the same beliefs as they do. There is a struggle for supremacy between these two major religious groups which constitutes a problem of peaceful co-existence and unity in the nation. Thus, the situation today is very complex. However, these problems can be isolated and treated.

Christian-Muslim Interaction In Northern Nigeria

It is argued that, Nigeria is one of the most heterogeneous societies, because her religious character is a pointer to that effect. Before the coming of Islam and Christianity, during the pre-colonial Nigeria, the inhabitants were religiously very heterogeneous (Iremeka 148). In the different societies that have merged to form the entity called Nigeria today, religion played integrative roles. Different people had similar concepts of the Supreme Being and believed in the intermediary deities and spirits who provided social, political and moral guidance. Membership of this society was such as being synonymous with religious identification. Since the people of the various tribal groups had similar belief systems, religion was able to serve as a rank of identifying or distinguishing members of different groups (Ogbeide 67). Imo concured with the above fact that:

> Today, pluralism has become a feature of modem Nigerian society, with the coming of Islam and Christianity; three major religious traditions were established in the country. Before independence in 1960, the effects of pluralism had begun to be felt along with those other factors of social change such as civilization, modernization, urbanization and technological advancement. Colonialists accentuated inequality and projected particular religious groups above others, thereby, promoting discrimination (7).

It is in the compliment of the above quotation that Makozi pointed out that, the development gave Islam and Christianity a privileged position over the indigenous African religion, which our colonial masters and missionaries of both Islam and Christianity condemned. Within a recent decade, members of the two religions have ascribed high positions to their religions at the national level and they strive and compete for dominance over each other. Each religious tradition tries to protect its ideas at the national level. This has produced an antagonism which has generated fear, suspicion and acrimony (4). The consequences of this development are alarming as religious disturbances have often degenerated into serious crises resulting to loss of lives and properties worth trillions of naira.

Francis Nyiku rightly observed, that "current indications suggest an accelerated movement towards Islam and Christianity, so that avowed adherents of traditional religions seem to be in a very thin minority". He further postulates that, the result of the declining number of those who can identify as traditionalists, some scholars are of the view that only Christianity and Islam be recognized as the major religions in Nigeria (Oral interview). Within the two

major religious traditions of Christianity and Islam, there are internal divisions and subdivisions that sometimes produce sharp contentions. Christians and Muslims interact in Nigeria with suspicion, hate speech, discrimination, distrust and hostile tendencies. This situation helps to compound the problem of religious crises in the country, although it has often been down played in discussion on the subject. This religious diversification presents to us the pluralistic character of the Nigeria society. Seeing this, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the tenth article of the 1999 constitution stipulates that the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion (Anjov 25).

In addition to the above postulations Nyiku attested that, the existence of the two main competitive religious traditions with the intra-group subdivisions has created serious problems for effective governance. With an increase in rivalists, Christians and Muslims have become more conscious of their rights and do not only demand what they consider to be their entitlement but ask that their special religions be included in the national ethical system. As a result, there is a constant cold war between Muslims and Christians, and religions have become unpredictable factor in the socio-political life of the country (Oral interview).

Traditional religion of Africa seems to be neglected as Islam and Christianity are growing at a very fast rate and their adherents are found in varying proportion in different parts of the country (Kukah 5). According to Hon. Dugeri David what worthy of note here is that, inter religious interaction that calls for attention is mainly' centered on Christianity and Islam because, they have taken over the country in terms of religion and because both of them are scrambling for identity from the federal coffers and more so, trying to dominate one another (Oral interview). That is where the major problem lies, and it is the reason for why much mention is made of Christians and Muslims without giving prominence to the traditional religions of African which is the indigenous religion of Africa and Nigeria in particular.

In dialogue, talking across religions is the main focus, and it is with the intention to encourage tolerance, where there had been conflicts. Pluralism goes further than dialogue. Although talking across religions is not discouraged, yet it is not emphasised. The reason for this is simple, the equal validity of the different religions is assumed. What remains for a theorist of pluralism to do is to spell out the meaning of the equality in practice. As Kenny and Mala have pointed out, Dialogue is taught and encouraged in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria because

of the recent religious controversies and conflicts in Nigeria (Kenny and Mala 104).

According to David Griffin, those who accept religious pluralism accept two affirmations, a positive one and a negative one. The negative affirmation is the rejection of religious absolutism, which means rejecting the a priori assumption that their own religion is the only one that provides saving truths and values to its adherents, that it alone is divinely inspired, that it has been divinely established as the only legitimate religion, intended to replace all others. The positive affirmation, which goes beyond the negative one, is the acceptance of the idea that there are indeed religions other than one's own that provide saving truths and values to their adherents. (Griffin 3)

The word dialogue is a positive term, which connotes peace or the search for peace. With specific reference to inter-religious dialogue, Oloso notes that:

> Inter-religious dialogue can be defined as a forum purposefully created to generate contacts, discussions and interactions between two or more different religious groups with a view to bringing about an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence... Its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that poses a threat to the peaceful co-existence between different religious groups (23)

When this concept is applied to Muslim-Christian relationship in Nigeria, it can be said that dialogue has been effective, to a great extent, in many communities, with particular reference to the South. That is not to rule-out occasional and isolated clashes, but these will be nothing compared to what obtains in many parts of Northern Nigeria which is said to be dominated by Muslims. Dialogue presupposes three things: Toleration or, in the better terminology of Vatican II, religious liberty (Kanu 2016 & 2017). It is possible to avoid interfering in the beliefs of another while still being convinced that he is on the road to damnation, dialogue presupposes also a recognition that the members of another religion can be on the way of salvation. Since the influence of the Holy Spirit should be manifest in such people's lives and religious practices, dialogue attempts to recognize these values, which, it must be admitted, these religions mediate (Cited in Machado 45). By its nature, dialogue is applicable to many areas of human life. As Smith notes, it has socio-political, historical, cultural, economic, intellectual, and other dimensions. He notes further that dialogue can feature at both corporate and inter-personal levels.

Madaki quotes Pope Paul VI as stating the essence of dialogue, when the latter noted that:

> We must meet each other, not just as tourists but as pilgrims on the road seeking God, not just in stone-buildings but in the hearts of human beings. Human beings and nations must meet each other as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In mutual friendship and understanding, and in holy fellowship, we must also begin to work together to build a communal future for the human race. (56)

In the same book, Madaki also notes how three indispensable principles of dialogue were listed by the World Council of Churches. The three principles are: 1. Frank and undisguised witness to one's faith; 2. Mutual respect between participants in a dialogue and 3. A recognition of religious freedom as an inalienable human right. The three principles imply that dialogue is about mutual understanding for peaceful co-existence, and "must never be used for proselytisation" (57). Indeed, turning dialogue into an opportunity for propagating one's faith can only scare away adherents of a religion who fear that their members may be lost in conversion to another religion. Of course, similar difficulties exist in Nigeria, particularly in the northern part of the country.

Religious Dialogue In Northern Nigeria
Muslim-Christian dialogue dated back to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Rooted as both traditions are in the monotheism of the patriarch Abraham, Muslims and Christians share a common heritage. For more than fourteen centuries, these communities of faith have been linked by their theological understandings and by geographical proximity. The history of Muslim-Christian interaction includes periods of great tension, hostility and open war as well as times of uneasy toleration, peaceful coexistence and cooperation (Kramer 127).

Islamic self-understanding incorporates an awareness of and direct link with the biblical tradition. Muḥammad, his companions, and subsequent generations of Muslims have been guided by the Qurʿan, which they have understood as a continuation and completion of God's revelations to humankind. The Qurʿan speaks of many prophets (anbiyaʿ, singular nabi) and messengers (rusul, sg. rasul) who functioned as agents of God's revelation. Particular emphasis is laid on the revelations through Moses (the Torah) and Jesus (the Gospel) and their respective communities of faith or "People of the Book" Historically, Christians living under Islamic rule were usually treated as "protected peoples"; the practical implications of dhimmi status fluctuated from time to time and from

place to place (Massoudi 17). Even in the best of circumstances, however, it was difficult for Christians and Muslims to engage one another as equals in dialogue.

On the Christian side, the advent of Islam in the seventh century presented major challenges. In the short space of a century, Islam transformed the character and culture of many lands from northern country, disrupted the unity of the country, and displaced the axis of Christendom to the north. Islam challenged Christian assumptions. Not only were the Muslims successful in their military and political expansion, but their religion presented a puzzling and threatening new intellectual position (Michaelides 449).

The dialogue movement began during the 1950s when the WCC and the Vatican organized a number of meetings between Christian leaders and representatives of other religious traditions. These initial efforts resulted in the formation of new institutions. In 1964, toward the end of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II), Pope Paul VI established a Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions to study religious traditions, provide resources, and promote interreligious dialogue through education and by facilitating local efforts by Catholics. Several major documents adopted at Vatican II (1962–1965) focused on interfaith relations (Onaiyakan 146).

The most visible Christian leader during the last quarter of the twentieth century, Pope John Paul II, was a strong advocate for the new approach to interfaith relations. The spirit of his approach to Islam is evident in a 1985 speech delivered to over 80,000. Muslims at a soccer stadium in Casablanca: We believe in the same God, the one God and the Living God who created the world (Igwara 37). In a world which desires unity and peace, but experiences a thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers come together? Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more urgent than ever. In 1989, John Paul II reorganized the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions and renamed it the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The WCC established its program for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) in 1971: Muslim-Christian relations were a primary focus from the outset. (Lalley 62-3).

By the 1980s and 1990s, other international organizations developed formal and informal programs for Muslim-Christian dialogue. The Muslim World League, the World Muslim Congress, and the Middle East Council of Churches are notable examples. At the local level, hundreds of interfaith organizations have facilitated dialogue programs. Christian institutions have studied Islam and

pursued dialogue programs for decades. These academic programs stimulated particular initiatives by churches and Muslim organizations. The large influx of Muslims since 1950 has spawned numerous local and national Islamic organizations, many of which are engaged with Christian counterparts in local churches or through programs of the Churches. Their concerns range from education and health care to the resolution of Middle East conflicts (Lalley 64).

In addition to numerous dialogue programs organized by local interfaith organizations or state councils of churches, two major academic centers in the country provide leadership and programs centered on Muslim-Christian relations. For over fifty years, Hartford Seminary in Connecticut has specialized in the study of Islam and Muslim-Christian relations through degree programs, continuing education, and publications. The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU) was founded at Georgetown University in 1993 (65).

On the local scene, there is the example of the Catholic Diocese of Ijebu-Ode which has an "Interreligious Dialogue Commission." The body is reported as having organized four public fora between June 11, 2000 and March 15, 2002 (Machado 114) This type of dialogical effort can be said to be theological in nature. It is possible that many unsung socio-religious dialogues take place in many Nigerian communities. The possibility is predicated on the existence of religious peace that is perceivable in many communities. In his book, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience*, Bidmos traced the origin of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Nigeria. He highlighted the four forms of inter-religious dialogue that are obtained in Nigeria (71).

In addition, one can mention some other academic efforts, such as the books by Dopamu, Raji and Oduyoye. These books are not dialogical as such, but they contain contributions from scholars from various religions. The limitation of these efforts and those mentioned above is that the factors which usually cause tension go beyond theological differences (34). A deep look into the issues reveals socio-political and economic rivalry as being the main bone of contention under the smokescreen of religious allegations. Hence, as earlier noted, Christianity monopolized the Roman Empire, and the Emirs resisted the introduction of Christianity to Northern Nigeria. Thus, dialogue may suffer where ulterior motives reign.

As mentioned above, the Secretariat for non-Christians, in 1969 published in *Guidelines for a dialogue between Muslims and Christians*, the work of Joseph Cuoq

et Louis Gardet. After further experience in such dialogue, Maurice Borrmans rewrote the book in 1981, giving it the title, *Guidelines for dialogue between Christians and Muslims* appeared in 1990 (11). John-Paul II encouraged this dialogue at Ankara on 30 November 1979 (Cited in Machado 34).

The Secretariat for non-Christians and the World Council of Churches Sub-Commission for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies have constantly been organizing meetings with Muslims, and sometimes Muslims have organized such meetings themselves.

Threats To Peace Between Christians And Muslims In Northern Nigeria
The organized dialogue movement represents a new chapter in the long history between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria. Intentional efforts to understand and cooperate are hopeful signs, particularly for religious communities with a history of mutual antipathy. Muslims and Christians who advocate and engage in dialogue still face many obstacles. Many Muslims are wary of the entire enterprise because of the long history of enemity and the more recent experiences of colonialism. Some Christians argue that dialogue weakens or undermines Christian mission and witness. For many, the perception of Islam as inherently threatening is deeply ingrained; they are unwilling or unable to move beyond stereotypes or to distinguish between sympathetic and hostile counterparts in the other community (Samartha 320).

At the same time, the voices of some highly audible Christian and Muslim leaders became more polemical. The long history of misunderstanding, mistrust and animosity continues to inform the attitudes of many people in both communities of faith in Northern Nigeria. Muslim-Christian dialogue represents a new and major effort to understand and cooperate with others in increasingly interdependent and religiously diverse countries. The newness of dialogue and the absence of conceptual clarity have required experimentation. Questions about planning, organization, representation, and topics need thoughtful consideration and careful collaboration. Many local, regional, and international dialogue groups have developed guidelines to address common concerns and avoid pitfalls (Tyolumun Aker Oral interview).

Christian-Muslim dialogue, with such a push from the Church, is completely new. It is not surprised that there were some stumbling and disappointments after the success and euphoria of the first meetings. In the first stage there were quite a few international meetings. Each meeting seemed more daring and more

promising than the previous one (Kenny 22). The heavy applause and the numbers of Muslims who went up to the stage to embrace him showed the pleasure of the Muslims at this sincere confession. But there was no parallel confession on the part of the Muslims. Besides, a final communication was released with the intrusion of some political clauses regarding Israel, and immediately afterwards all international transmissions were cut. This made many feel disappointed at the conference.

The local Churches of the Northern Nigeria, where relations with Muslims have not been easy, challenged or resisted the efforts of the Secretariat for non-Christians to organize meetings with Muslims on their territory. Also Northern Christians showed their dissatisfaction with the lack of balance when Muslims in other parts of the country are given liberty for full religious expression, while Christians in Nigeria are not allowed to have any public Christian worship (Muhammad Ali Oral interview). And the imposition of Sharia law on non Muslims in some states in Northern Nigeria. Muslims also are mistrustful of dialogue. That was always the case in Northern Nigeria, except for some private exchanges. Otherwise Islamic fundamentalism is gaining ground and spread the impression that dialogue is a new missionary strategy to destabilize Islam; one Muslim called it "the new trap of the old trappers" (Kenny 23).

All these problems led the Secretariat for non-Christians to give preference to meetings with Muslims on a local level, without publicity. In fact such meetings were more fruitful. Besides, the focus of such meetings moved from looking for common belief to establishing the legal legitimacy of religious pluralism and to an awareness of the economic and social background that is often the root of religious tensions, where religious differences are only a mask camouflaging these other differences. What is perceived as moral decadence in Western countries is unfortunately often interpreted by some Muslims as the decadence of Christian civilization. And this is a fertile ground for the nurturing of fundamentalist or puritanical (extremist) orientations within Islam. The same tendency towards fundamentalism is noticeable today among fringe sects within Christianity (Oral interview).

The "Globalization of bad news," by which atrocities committed in any remote part of the world are beamed through satelite for everyone else to see, makes dialogue difficult today. Muslims in Nigeria can see all the violence in Iraq and in Palestine in a manner that would not have been possible before our technological age. There is need for international media corporations to know

what to do with bad news. It is a point to note that there is too much bad news in the media today. A few good things are happening in many parts of the world but it appears that good news is no longer news-worthy. This situation does not help our quest for global peace.

Conclusion

The need for an authentic dialogue between Christian and Muslims in Northern Nigeria is not only important but also necessary. For religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence to be achieved in the country, a sincere attitude towards dialogue from both Christians and Muslims must be enhanced. The dialogue between religions must be advance beyond polite posturing and into arena whereby mutual mis-perceptions are corrected and old dogmas transcended. To achieve this, it requires a particular framework for discourse, a language that belongs to neither religions in isolation but to both in the context of dialogical encounter. With the specific of the Christian-Muslim, a theological dimension of dialogue with particular tool of phenomenology of religion and John Hick religious pluralism is recommended. We need a positive attitude towards one another that we show true love, unity, peace, justice and the spirit of tolerance from both Christian and Muslims.

Recommendations

After a careful examination of the phenomenon of pluralism and religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria, the study made the following recommendations:

i.   Muslims and Christians should make their message of peace practical oriented and should check other tendencies such as intolerance, fanaticism and extremism in their interactions and religious practices.

ii.   The leaders of Islamic religion should adopt more peaceful means of expansion and eschew the violent approach.

iii.   Christian and Islamic scholars should promote the positive teachings of their religions like peace, care for the poor and the needy, the life of prayer and so on.

iv.   There is need for religious dialogue, justice, implementation of laws that will regulate Christian-Muslim relationship in Northern Nigeria.

v.   There is need for a campaign for a more positive interaction between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria as well as enhanced security measures to tame violence behaviours.

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