

## Reflection on a Common Word and the Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together in the light of Enhanced Interreligious Encounter.

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### Abstract

In a world of diverse religious beliefs, mutual misunderstanding, lack of trust, violent-complex religious conflicts and the desire for revenge, peace-making requires significant concrete actions. Recently two documents: *A Common Word* and the *Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, in which Islamic and Christian leaders call for greater dialogic cooperation have emerged. This is symbolic as the Catholic Church through the Second Vatican Council documents (*Dignitatis Humanae* of 1963 and *Nostra Aetate* of 1965) expressed her ardent desire to forge fraternal relationship with people of other faiths. The Church has made noteworthy strides but not without glitches. Yet, she remains resolute in getting across to people of other faith traditions through dialogue encounter; pivotal to her evangelising mission. This article examines the text of *a Common Word and the Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace*, highlighting some significant feats of the Catholic Church's dialogue engagement with Islam, articulating how such could strengthen further dialogue encounters between the Church and other religions (Islam) especially in northern Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Human fraternity, common word, religious peace

### Introduction

One of the watershed moments of the Catholic Church was during the Second Vatican Council (1960-65). The Council Fathers stated clearly that the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions (Flannery, 1981. no. 2). This came against the backdrop of the fact that the Church for many centuries held and taught: *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* (Leclercq, 1910). That is, there is one universal Church of believers, outside of which there is no salvation. This was the teaching of Saint Cyprian of Carthage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, upheld by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and contained in the Bull of Pope Boniface VIII *Unam santam* of 1302 and reaffirmed by Pope Eugenius IV's document *Cantate Domino* of the Council of Florence in 1442 (Leclercq, 1910). It meant that in the economy of salvation, other faiths or religions had no place. The Church however, in *Dignitatis Humanae* of 1963 recognised, accepted and

promoted freedom of religion, and in *Nostra Aetate* of 1965 shifted its position urging Christians to enter with prudence and charity into discussion, dialogue and collaboration with those of other religions (Flannery, 1981. no. 2). The Church in its wisdom and dynamism has come to esteem and accept the reality of other religions and the dignity of our difference, as a unique opportunity for friendship and enrichment (Sacks, 2003). Thus, a new paradigm is set in place. The Roman Catholic Church has tried to uphold, promote and sustain this model of the Church through reaching out to people of other faith in every way possible, especially through dialogue of encounter, aimed at fostering constructive understanding for harmonious existence in society.

Recently, two innovative documents have been issued. A Common Word of 2007 from world Islamic leaders and scholars inviting Christian leaders, scholars and theologians to dialogue (Volf, Muhammad and Yarrington, 2010), and the Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together of 2019. A plea to strengthen existing fragile fraternal relationship between Christians and Muslims for peace and harmony, jointly signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib (Pope Francis, Al-Tayyib, 2019). These texts could arguably be described as landmark achievement of the Church's dialogue mission, as they are essential in accentuating the prominence of interreligious dialogue and the need to commit to, and sustain such interactions. And so, what is the significance and implication of these documents in the dialogue process? How do these texts stimulate and strengthen dialogue encounter at the grass root level of society? What more can be done in the promotion of dialogue and harmonious existence among people of diverse religion? The article reflects on the cited texts, focusing on their unique contribution to dialogue process and how such can enhance a more fraternal dialogue encounter in pluralistic societies of our diverse contemporary world.

### ***A Common Word: crux of the text***

The text of *A Common Word between us and You* is an invitation to dialogue from the world Islamic Community to Christian leaders, clerics, scholars and theologians. The idea was contemplated, and the invite extended as a response to the speech of Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI during the pontiff's visit to Regensburg Germany in September 2006. The Pope quoted a 14th century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos which stirred an angry reaction from the Islamic world (Bauschke, 2008). Consequently, in October 2007 the Muslim *Ummah* (Islamic community) issued the text of *A Common Word Between Us and You*; an invitation letter in response to the Pope. It was launched as an open letter authored by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan, signed by 138 prominent personalities and leading Islamic politicians, academics, scholars, writers, theologians and Muftis (an Islamic jurist) from Egypt, Syria,

Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul, addressed to Pope Benedict XVI and other world Christian leaders.

*A Common Word Between Us and You* is a dialogic proposal based on verses from the Qur'an and the Bible, in which both sacred Scriptures share the golden commandment of paramount importance... love of God and love of neighbour (Mohammad, 2010). The crux of *A Common Word* text centres on a critical examination of the current state of Muslim-Christian relations vis-à-vis politics, Western-style democracy, foreign policies, war and violent religious conflicts. The refugee's syndrome, poverty, destitution, terrorism, the general worsening religious attitudes and tensions between Communities, the growth of extreme-religious fundamentalism and the overall quest for peace. After an in-depth analysis of the situation, the root causes of such hostilities can be said to centre on global socio-political and economic inequalities, deeply rooted historical, cultural and racial misunderstanding, loathing and the overall religious misjudgements of the 'other' (Volf, Muhammad, Yarrington, 2010). Consequently, the way forward is to engage with each other to negotiate and nurture peace in order to avoid a worldwide crisis between for instance Muslims and the West, and religion provides such a platform for the proposed harmonious encounter through dialogue (Mohammad, 2010).

*A Common Word* therefor calls for dialogue of peace, harmony and dynamic understanding between Christians and Muslims in the world. The text asserts that Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions in the world and together make up about fifty-five percent of the world's population. Hence a relationship of goodwill and friendship between these two religious communities is the most important factor in contributing to meaningful interreligious peace and harmony around the world (Longhurst, 2009).

It avers, even though the relationship in the past has been rough, it is pertinent to make amends and live in peace in this 21st century. Moreover, Christianity and Islam both profess to be religions of peace, their scriptures enjoin worship of the one God and the commandment to love God and neighbour, which forms the basic substance of both faith traditions (Mohammad, 2010). It is imperative to accept that the Bible and Qur'an contain the foundation for peace making and living together even though there are significant differences in articles of belief, nonetheless, Islam and Christianity share the same divine origin and the same Abrahamic heritage (Longhurst, 2009).

The Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, and the Vatican welcomed and expressed their deep appreciation for *A Common Word* initiative and invitation. Christian leaders around the world responded positively to the invitation to dialogue. While not denying however, the differences between Christianity and Islam, Muslims and Christians can concentrate on what unites them as the basis for

friendship and mutual understanding. Moreover, *A Common Word* is a clear reaffirmation of the potential to further develop the existing dialogue and common action between Christians and Muslims, and such prospect must be utilised (Thavis, 2009).

### **The declaration on human fraternity for world peace and living together**

This declaration was co-signed and issued by Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad *Al-Tayyib* for the Muslims of the East and West, and Pope Francis for the Catholic Church, East and West. It declares the adoption of a culture of continuous dialogue as the path for nurturing cooperation and reciprocal understanding as the code of conduct in fostering communal relations (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019).

The text begins by acknowledging the one divine God who created all things and all humans with equal rights, duties and dignity; who has called all to live together as brothers and sisters (Acts 17:26 1 Cor 8:6 and Q 49:13). And through faith in the one God, believers are called to express in human fraternity support and respect for all persons, as faith leads them to see in each human person as one to be loved and cherished. This declaration came to be as a result of sincere fraternal open discussions, meetings and interactions between Roman Catholic and Islamic leaders, expressing profound hope in a bright future for humanity. The text seeks to invites all persons who have faith in God and in *human fraternity* (especially Christian and Muslim leaders) to unite and work together, serving as models for future generations in the advancement of a culture of mutual respect, in the awareness of divine grace that makes all humans one family (created by God Gen 2:7 and Q 32: 7-9).

The aim of the declaration is to foster fraternal harmony in the face of extremist division, propelled by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate and endangers the future of men and women. It calls upon religious leaders and leaders of the world as well as the architects of international policy and world economy, to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace. To intervene at every opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to (violent) conflicts, war and every form of environmental degradation (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019). The text recognises that failure in the value of human solidarity has caused suffering, disasters and calamities, and firmly believes that the leading cause of crises in the our contemporary world includes: desensitized human conscience, deterioration of moral ideals, distancing from religious values, poverty and prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and advancing worldly material values in place of supreme transcendental principles (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019). It farther observes that in-spite of growth in modern civilization, the fields of science, technology,

medicine, industry and welfare, there still exist in many parts of the world situations of injustice and lack of equitable distribution of natural resources, political crises, hostilities and moral deterioration that weakens spiritual values and responsibility. All these contribute to a general feeling of frustration, isolation and desperation, leading to all forms of extremism (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019).

Moreover, the declaration affirms the family as the fundamental nucleus of society and humanity is essential in building up society, hence the need to awaken religious and moral values in the hearts of all through sound education and appropriate erudition. Consequently, it becomes the collective responsibility of all to safeguard life from its beginning to its natural end. The document condemns all those practices that are a threat to life and every policy that promote such practices (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019). Besides, religion must never incite war, hostilities, hateful attitudes or any form of extremism; as these tragic realities can be the consequences of deviation from religious teachings. Furthermore, political manipulations of religion, poor interpretation of text by religious groups or individuals who take advantage of the power of religious sentiments can result in making others act in ways that that does not represent religious truth (Pope Francis and *Al-Tayyib*, 2019).

Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahamad Al-Tayyib frantically called upon all concerned to stop using religion to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, terrorism and oppression (2019). Because authentic religious teachings invite all to remain rooted in the values of peace, mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence. Religious pluralism and diversity of colour, sex, ethnicity and language are willed by God who in His wisdom created and endowed all with the right and the freedom to be different. Therefore, dialogue of mutual understanding and the widespread promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others and of living together peacefully would contribute significantly to reducing many economic, social, political and environmental problems that weigh so heavily on society.

The declaration calls for honest and sincere dialogue among and between believers. That is, the coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values, to encounter and transmit the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. Moreover, through dialogue and fruitful exchange, each can be enriched by the other's culture and tradition, and community can be enhanced by common action initiated and aimed at improving society.

The text concludes by stating the clear aspiration of the declaration which constitutes an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, non-believers and all people of good will; to rejects deplorable violence and

blind extremism, cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity among all in society.

**The significance and political implication of these documents in the promotion of religious dialogue for world peace**

The Catholic Church has always esteemed diversity because of the enrichment, values and resource other faiths, cultures and people bring to bear can be inspirational as long as such do not contradict what the Church holds as revealed truth. Moreover, the dynamism of our contemporary world necessitates the need to engage and correlate with others if we must build and nurture a humane atmosphere for peace. Consequently, the Church in her mission of evangelization continues to champion and promote dialogue especially with Islam and other faith traditions. *A Common Word* and *the Declaration on Human Fraternity* are a testimony to that nascent relationship that is critical, decisive and timely.

The essence of these manuscripts anchors on the fact that both Islamic and Christian leaders recognise that Christianity and Islam share a rich spiritual patrimony that can and must be ever more esteemed and appreciated for mutual growth in fraternity and the fruits of such corporation can bring enrichment to society. Therefore, sustained dialogue of reciprocal friendship and cooperation becomes the way to better understand one another and work together in cultivating a climate not only of tolerance but also of respect within and between faith traditions. Besides, our strength lays in the gentle strength of encounter, learning from, and experiencing the unicity in the 'other' in spite of our difference, and assenting to the humanity of each one as created in the image and likeness of God. This can be achieved through continuous engagement, unrelenting social encounters, listening, initiating and participating in common community projects, and a lasting commitment to the process of dialogue. Farther, engaging with the other does not lead to impoverishment, but rather an enrichment that enables us to be more humane in recognizing that we are all participants in a greater collectivity, and bringing to fore one's life as gift for the 'other' remains the goal of our fraternity (Pope Francis, the Credential Letters of the Ambassadors, 2019).

The Church for decades has prized the value of reaching out to extend a hand of friendship and bridge building through dialogue. She continues to invest in personnel to promote such engagement with those of other faiths (social and civic) by creating the opportunity and participating in the process of dialogue for peace and harmony. The prime example of this responsibility is in a whole dicastery of the Vatican Curia dedicated to the activities of Interreligious Dialogue. Messages of greetings and best wishes are sent to our Muslim brothers and sisters at the beginning of Ramadan fast and E'Id festivities. The

same felicitations are extended to those of other religions. The visits of the Pope for instance to some Islamic countries with greater population of Muslims has remained an opportunity to strengthen fraternal ties (United Arab Emirate-Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco). The recent visit of Pope Francis in December 2018 to Algeria was momentous as it was both for religious and diplomatic purposes. More than one hundred Algerian officials representing the civil society and religious authorities, came to the restored Chapel of Santa Cruz to celebrate the canonization of 19 monks of the late Bishop Claverie. Similarly, the recognition of the heroic virtue of Mohamed Bouchikhi, the bishop's driver, a Muslim who was killed in a bomb blast alongside the bishop testifies to the Church's commitment to continuous diplomatic-dialogue feat (Radcliffe, 2019).

Politically, society cannot grow without cooperation, peace and harmony. *A Common Word* and *Declaration on Human Fraternity* are paramount as religious leaders acknowledge the variety of positive contributions religion can make to politics for the world's common good and the responsibility of religious and political leader's bear together to protect the most vulnerable in society irrespective of our diversity (Lamb, 2019). Consequently, Christians, Muslims and those of other religious traditions in fraternal cooperation must be apt and united with political leaders in the promotion of integral human development as we face an increasingly challenging and complex contemporary diverse universe (Lamb, 2019). Moreover, such mutual action cannot be over-emphasised in the quest to ensure a just and lasting peace. This however is not a merely socio-political and cultural strategy but a leading example of that solidarity which runs deeper than a shared desire to achieve a common goal (Lamb, 2019). Thus, with good relations between religious groups, governments, politician and policy makers, it is probable to initiate common actions that are proficient in creating the necessary atmosphere for peace and tranquillity and religion plays a decisive role. Besides, with the growing level of global poverty, terrorism and conflicts; the world is in need of peace and harmonious corporation. Hence, the continuous fraternal dialogue of Christians and Muslims possess formidable potential for peace, as we believe humanity is the creation of God and a single family (Acts 17:26, 1 Cor 8:6 and Q 49:13). As people of faith, we do not wish to impose our beliefs on humanity or history, but rather seek to propose respect for differences, freedom of thought and religion, the protection of human dignity, and love for truth. Moreover, the world expects those who claim to adore God to be men and women of peace who are capable of living as brothers and sisters, regardless of ethnic, religious, cultural or ideological differences (PCID, 2015).

Correspondingly, the promotion of better understanding of the complex relationship between religion, culture and identity is essential if politicians and

policymakers are to work out when political-economic forces are exploiting religious faith, or when a conflict assumed to be about religion is actually fuelled by something else, so that the issue can be properly addressed (Lamb, 2019). And so, sustained dialogue of interaction has the propensity to offer the needed hope and meaning, effectual in helping people build and nurture bridges of harmony required for peace and growth in society. It is thus reputable for religious leaders to engage and collaborate with politician-policymakers and other stake holders in society, in order to achieve the desired goals of peace for development. The call to dialogue in *A Common Word* and the mutual signing of *the Declaration on Human Fraternity* by Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyib are significant and fundamental actions consequential in any peace building process.

### **The prospect of these texts to enhance inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria**

The diverse nature of the Nigerian society calls for sustained dialogue if peace, social order and development are to be entrenched. Multiplicity in religious beliefs requires unrelenting interreligious dialogue that is mutual, stimulating and enriching, especially in a society that can be socio-political and economically scurried with tension, exacerbated by poverty and deep rooted ethnic and cultural divisions. Islamic invitation to dialogue in *A Common Word* and the mutual signing of *the Declaration on Human Fraternity* is decisive, conceding a global outlook on interreligious engagement that goes beyond just religion, as religion permeates every facet of human life and endeavour. Northern Nigeria for decades has suffered violent religious conflicts triggered many times by extreme-fanatical motivations, exacerbated by deplorable socio-political, economic and educational dearth, quest for justice and fairness and sometimes intensified by deep rooted ethnic rifts. However, Nigerians of different political, socio-cultural, ethnic and religious strata, community leaders and other stake holders over the years have demonstrated the proficiency to bridge those ideological barriers that cause divide, to work towards specific goals that unites and nurture community harmony (Iwuchukwu, 2013). The Catholic Church recognises such resilience in humans. Consequently, *A Common Word* and *the Declaration on Human Fraternity* becomes that distinctive opportunity to stimulate a kind of dialogue that is open, dynamic, engaging, and lucid, keen at making-peace. The Church acknowledges that diversity is not only about religion and religious beliefs, but also of socio-political, cultural, economic and ethnic dimension which presents prospect for engagement and growth to which understanding and cooperation between religions (Christianity and Islam) can be fostered. Religion can become an instrument of peace and development when leaders and adherents desire and work in the promotion of peace. Meanwhile, dialogue of friendship is indispensable as our fraternity establishes our equal dignity, embraces variety and differences as the root of our common humanity (Apostolic Trip of Pope

Francis to the United Arab Emirates, 2019). This means that grass-root dialogue of mutual enrichment in cooperation with political and community leaders remains of paramount importance for sustainable peace and development.

The unique action of Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad Al-Tayyib are exemplary to the Islamic and Christian communities in Nigeria. As the country continues to grapple with the issues of violence in a quest for peace and development, there is need for stability which cannot come about without sustainable peace. Moreover, the Continent of Africa is at the threshold of a new era of seeming innovative economic interest for investment by the West and South-East Asia, especially China. Such commercial concentration some scholars have tagged the new scramble for African (Carmody, 2016), can present new challenges. However, the desired growth and advancement can only come about in an atmosphere of peace and harmony where people focus on harnessing their talents, while exploring available resources. A situation of violent conflicts becomes an aberration. Besides, collaboration between religions can spearhead the needed political efficiency essential for building human community and the institutions necessary for service delivery. For when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it becomes a means of oppression and marginalization, and religion cannot be part such actions (Pope Francis, 2018. Shortt, 2019). Politics ought to be at the service of peace when it finds expression in the recognition of the gifts and abilities in people and go a long way to effect the preferred peace and development (Pope Francis, 2018). And sustainable dialogue between faiths can facilitate grass-root dialogue encounter, proficient for engagement with political leaders.

Religions generally (and religious people) cannot renounce the urgent task of building bridges between peoples and cultures. As Pope Francis admonishes, the time has come for religious leaders to be more active in exerting themselves, with courage and audacity, without any pretence, to help the human family deepen the capacity for justice, reconciliation, vision and hope through a concrete path of peace for a purposeful future (Apostolic Trip, 2019). For this to happen, there has to be shared dynamism, open-minded new approach and hermeneutics of scripture and religious tradition that takes into cognisance our communal diversity. At the same time, to uphold and nurture our fraternal living together, founded on daily mutual dialogue of education, justice and fairness, centred on human development built upon a welcoming inclusion and on the rights of all. These are the seeds of peace to which *A Common Word* and *the Declaration on Human Fraternity* invites world religions (Christianity and Islam) to help flourish (Apostolic Trip, 2019). These manuscripts have become beacons for religious dialogue of engagement and models of mutual encounter that is enriching with the capacity to break barriers of stereotypes, bias and prejudices,

nurturing fraternal peace and fostering one human family for instance in the (northern) Nigerian society.

### **On-going symbolic activities aimed at fostering collaboration to nurture fraternal world peace**

Christian and Islamic sacred texts (Bible and Qur'an) bears witness to the relationship between a loving-merciful God and his people. It follows then that religion can play significant role in leading a world ravaged by indifference, violent conflicts, war and poverty; to reconciliation, healing and fraternal concord (Swamy, 2018). This means that religious leaders ought to promote purposeful strides toward peace and harmony. Such concrete action we see for instance in the Second Vatican Council Document *Nostra Aetate* (Abbott, 1966. no. 3). The Council Fathers admitted that considerable dissention and enmities have arisen in the course of the centuries between Christians and Muslims, then urged all parties to forget the past and move towards a future of sincere mutual friendship of understanding in the promotion of social justice, peace and freedom for all people (1966 and Tanner, 2012). This call has been made tangible by the exemplary visits of the Popes to the Islamic world aimed at fostering fraternal relations, reminiscent of the visit 800 years ago of St. Francis of Assisi to Sultan al-Malik al Kamil, during which both recognised the other as men who knew and loved God (Smyth, 2019).

Furthermore, the Vatican Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue have continued to engage with Islamic and other world religions. Such encounters led to the coming together of people of different world religions for an interfaith prayer for peace in Rome at the invitation Pope John Paul II, this have been ingenious (Fitzgerald, 2000). Also, collaborations between the Catholic Church and other Christian organisations like the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Communion and the Lutheran World Federation with the sole aim of encouraging fraternal relationship with those of other faith tradition for world peace remains paramount (Umaru, 2013). For instance, in fraternal joint co-operation, the World Council of Churches (WCC) with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) organised a Conference on "Promoting Peace Together" in Geneva, in May 2019. Participants included representatives of International Organisations as well as the Diplomatic Corps (PCID, 2019).

Other noteworthy events of positive impact are the visits of some post Vatican II Popes to Islamic Countries. For instance, the visit of John Paul II to Morocco 1985, Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey in 2006 and his prayer in the blue Mosque and visit to Jordan, and more recently the visit of Pope Francis to Turkey in 2014, Abu Dhabi, Algeria and Morocco in 2018 are commendable (Spence, 2009). In addition, the consequent visit of the Egyptian Imam of al-Azhar Mosque Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed el-Tayeb to the Vatican (2016) are significant events in

enhancing Christian-Muslim relations (Francis at the Diyanet, 2014 and Pope and top Imam embrace in historic meeting at Vatican, 2014).

There are instances where religions (religious leaders) have had meaningful engagement with governments of some nations to negotiate peace. For instance, in late 1990s, the Vatican was instrumental in negotiating peace which brought an end to a 16-year civil war in Mozambique, and more recently in 2015, Vatican Mediation resulted in bringing about better relations between the USA and Cuba (Gamble, 2019 and Vatican Instrumental in Mediation, 2015), and the on-going negotiations for peace in Syria (Lamb, 2019). Attempts have also been made by Saudi Arabia (whether as a religious or civil State) to facilitate peace talks between the Taliban and the government of Pakistan in 2014 and lately in 2019, mediated between India and Pakistan (Yousaf, 2014 and Ali, 2019).

Other historic events like the gathering of religious leaders for a Day of Prayer for World Peace: Assisi, 24 January 2002 (PCID, 2002), on-going dialogue meetings, consultations, colloquiums, messages for the World Day of Peace, end of Ramadan to our Muslim brethren and the celebrations of religious feasts of the 'other' cannot be undermined. Such must be strengthened as these go a long way to resourcefully cultivate fraternal spirit and better relations in society.

The challenge however, remains the fact that in our contemporary world, religion and politics are slowly drifting apart (Foster, 2019). The political space given to wider cultural, moral or dialogical issues is been squeezed in the name of political correctness (2019). Consequently, religious dialogue and political engagement for world peace has never been more daring. Pastoral, Interreligious and theology of dialogue is flustered by diversity, materialism, liberalism and Philosophies like Secularism, Atheism, Agnostism, and the rebelling against liberal democracy (Populism).

There is need for a new approach, a more dynamic theology that is religiously correlational in approach. Religious Correlational theology of dialogue must seek to dwell on the need for critical dialogical engagement with other fields of endeavour; for instance: Philosophy, Politics, art of good-governance and policy making for enhanced governance, development and peace building (Paul Tillich's Theological Method of Correlation-Assignment, 2018). In this context, theology becomes an art of dynamic understanding of the content of faith and correlatively interpreting our human situation in its widest extent in the light of faith response. This is vital as divine mystery cannot be limited only to the discipline of Systematics but might also be gained through decisive cooperation and strategic hermeneutical interpretation of existential human experience (2018). It is farther enhanced by the mutual acceptance of the

coexistence of both religion and secularisation. Hence an appreciation of the fact that the religious and secular will continue to exist side by side; thence the proactive need for engagement between the two (Dillon, 2019).

Moreover, it is critically essential that religious correlational theology of dialogue aims at delving into every aspect of human life to identify and harness available local resources in collaboration with other disciplines to foster growth in peace. And since for example, our political and social opinions are formed out of life experiences and backgrounds, such cannot be devoid of our religious or lack of such beliefs, as both will continually be part of our human civilization (Foster, 2019). Thus, religion/theology must be innovative and pioneering in interpreting and reinterpreting the signs of our times.

Besides, Correlational Dialogic encounter provides an opportunity and platform, as the most important tasks of religion(s) in a contemporary world of conflicts is to prevent the spread of inhuman and devastating nightmares, dreadful crimes and to establish fraternal peace and harmony in society (Hirose, 2002). But how possible is that if the theology and practice of dialogue is not correlational?

### **Conclusion**

Being religious in a world of diversity is about cooperation and living ever more fully our filiation in fraternity, fostering mutual respect and valuing the worth of each individual (Pope Francis, 2019).

The Catholic Church after a past turbulent violent history of encounter with Islam seeks in the Second Vatican Council to build a future of friendly, tolerant and more humane encounter with Islam and other religions, and over time has taken the necessary steps to achieve that goal. The texts of *A Common Word* and the *Declaration on Human Fraternity* can arguable be characterised as the consequence of such relentless endeavour. I am therefore convinced that, effective dialogue be it interreligious, interactive or intercultural must be correlational and well-off in diversity management if there is to be fraternal peace and harmony for development. It becomes incumbent on religious people, community and societal leaders to engage frankly with political-civil leaders to champion the cause of peace. Peace and growth in society will only come about through genuine mutual respect for specific identities in harmonious coexistence. Providentially, both Islamic and Christian scriptures and traditions give the bases for dialogue that ought to be inter-culturally interactive and religiously correlational. Such should be the outlook and approach, for there to be an in-depth understanding and fraternal mutual cooperation in achieving the desired peace and development in our contemporary society.

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