

**An Appraisal of Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christianity: An  
Evolving Philosophy of Dialogue As a Tool For Peaceful Co-  
existence in a Pluralistic Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

**T**his paper is an assessment of Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christianity: An Evolving Philosophy of Dialogue as a Tool for Peaceful Co-existence in a Pluralistic Nigerian society. Using qualitative approach, the paper adopted historical, descriptive and analytic methods to examine the problem of religious crisis and dialogue in Nigeria within the framework of Karl Rahner's theory of Anonymous Christian. The theory affirms the fatherhood of God who communicates himself in fullness by sending Jesus Christ, his son into the world; the absolute saviour is the originator of dialogue. The study also found out that, the anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner's gives inclusion to other religions based on the fact that they are pre-Christian channels of grace and therefore contain "rays of lights" and as such, we consider the common values between Muslims and Christians in order to foster a mutual understanding among the adherents of these two religions. The study acknowledged that, dialogue begins with Jesus Christ because, he is the absolute communication of God the father and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ has also made salvation universal and particular because it takes place within a particular time, history and culture. The study recommendation that, the inclusive nature of the father's loves in Jesus Christ means all people of goodwill are included in the salvation brought by Christ and therein lays the need for dialogue irrespective of our

religion, culture and tradition. The write up concluded that, the bond of oneness we shared as members of one God and one nation should be respected. Both Christians and followers of other religions have values that can bring them together and ensure peaceful co-existence. Religious education with particular reference to the proper teaching of religious dialogue in school beginning at the primary to tertiary level should be implemented and encouraged thereby enhancing mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence instead of fighting, killing and destruction.

**Keywords:** Karl Rahner's, Anonymous Christianity, Philosophy of Dialogue, Peaceful Co-existence and Pluralism.

### **Introduction**

The history of the Church has left a lot of examples for us to learn from. There was a time the Church postulated that, outside of the Church there is no salvation. As a result of this development, there was little or no room for dialogue with other faiths. This position however changed and was officially declared null and void in 1949 (Aydin, *Modern-Western Christian Understanding of Muslims since the Vatican 2... 12*). Another equally extreme position has developed in recent times called pluralism. Pluralism posits that, no religion has absolute hold on truth and even maintains that, in order to promote inter-religious dialogue, all religions may have to forget their particular identities and claims of uniqueness since this is a barrier to inter-religious dialogue. (Hick, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness 12*)

Yet no religion can give up its identity and still be a religion. Again there is no such religion as Deism or Theism. Attempts to make Deism or Theism, religions have failed. This is because, there are no revealed philosophies and every religion must have a prophet. Christianity has Jesus Christ, Islam has Mohammed and Buddhism has Buddha. Most importantly, we enter into inter-religious dialogue as Christians or Muslim. If you take away the prophets and Messiahs who give identity to religions, there will be no need for dialogue again because the religions will no longer have identities.

Thus, how do we then conceive of inter-religious dialogue such that it

respects our uniqueness while at the same time recognising the diversity of other religions? It was in answer to this that Karl Rahner proposed the theory of anonymous Christian. This theory which holds that non-Christians who are oriented to Christ in their values can achieve salvation, that is, an attempts to include non-Christian religions within the salvific mission of Christ. This recognises that, there can be no real dialogue if we do not affirm what is good in non-Christian religions. This theory is otherwise called inclusivism and it takes the middle course.

Inclusivism, which is anonymous Christian, affirms Christianity as the absolute religion while Jesus is the universal saviour who is at the centre of theological perspective and through whom God is partially present in non-Christian religions (Grzelak 39). This makes anonymous Christian (inclusivism) a credible channel for the pursuit of inter-religious dialogue in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. The uniqueness of this channel is that, it is all inclusive even though, it is hinged on the person of Christ.

Nigeria is a diverse country with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups each with its culture, language and traditional religion. The country has three main religions: Christianity, Islam and African Religion. Africa religion is the indigenous faith but has been formally overshadowed by Christianity and Islam. The struggle for supremacy has always been between these two religions. Consequently, the country has witnessed a lot of religious crises especially in the Northern region. This study uses the anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner as a framework for inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria today.

Religion everywhere in the world is known as a beacon of peace. Without this peace which enhances social stability, there can be no development. In contemporary Nigerian society, instead of peace, religion has generated a lot of crises and these crises have been a source of social instability and underdevelopment in Nigeria especially in Northern region. The questions that arises in our minds are thus; how then can the adherents of these different religious faiths in Nigeria come together to ensure that religion has regain her lost glory to be a source of peaceful co-existence, social stability and development? How can religion become

true to its spirit as a weapon of peace? Or how can the adherents of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion come together to ensure peaceful co-existence among their followers in Nigeria? It is with the aim of answering the above questions that this study makes an appraisal of Karl Rahner's theory of Anonymous Christian (It is a theory on religions inclusivism) as a benchmark for promoting inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria for peaceful co-existence.

### **Definition of Terms and Key Concepts**

**Anonymous Christian:** The concept of Anonymous Christian literary means nameless follower of Christ. The namelessness means that, the believer in question is unknown because he does not belong to any particular Church. But as coined and defined by Roman Catholic Jesuit Priest, Karl Rahner, it means that, people of other faiths that have never heard of the Christian Gospel but are oriented in their decisions to Christ might be save through Christ. “Non-Christians could have in their basic orientation and fundamental decision”, Rahner wrote that, “accepted the salvific grace of God, through Christ, although they may never have heard of Christian revelation. They do this by the way they live their life, if their conscience is informed by grace.” (*Theo. Invest. Vol. 5, 118*)

According to the concept of Anonymous Christianity, the mystery of Christ is contained in varying degrees in non-Christian religions. Therefore, salvation is available in those religions. The teaching ostensibly affirms Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation however, it locates Jesus (albeit imperfectly) in religions outside Christianity. They deny Jesus or know nothing about him historically, but may show forth his spirit as they live their lives. Therefore, it is not necessarily the epistemological acceptance of Jesus but the ontological acceptance of Jesus that would make other religious traditions valid.

**Inter-religious Dialogue:** Literary the term dialogue is a spoken or written conversation between two or more people first, conceived in the theatre but eventually turned into a philosophical device for dialectics by Socrates, the Greek philosopher. The term dialogue stems from a Greek word *dia logos* meaning through speech, reason (Jazdzewska 17). Later philosophers such as Martin Buber assigns dialogue a pivotal place in his

theology. Buber cherishes and promotes dialogue not as some purposive attempt to reach some conclusions or express some point of view but as the very prerequisite of genuine relationship between man and man and, man and God. Buber's thoughts centre on genuine dialogue which is characterised by openness, honesty and mutual commitment. (Bergman, *Retrieved 6/5/2023*)

However, as a concept, Dialogue has come to mean many things to different people. It can refer to a meeting and communication between individual, groups and communities to bring about a greater grasp of the truth in order to achieve better human relations in a spirit of sincerity, respect for person and mutual trust. From here, we have religious dialogue which means peaceful conversation between members of different faiths with the aim of developing mutual trust and understanding about each other's religion in order to bring about peace in a community. Dialogue contrary to what some scholars like Mujahid Shitu (*Teaching Interreligious Dialogue as ... 188*) thinks, is not about argument nor disputation because, this too often ends up in argument over words, not generating any meaningful assistance. Dialogue is about persuasion that is borne out of love because of salvation. In dialogue, both parties are ready to be convinced by the truth and to convince the other with truth, not by force or argument or otherwise but by the power of love.

A distinction is often made between inter-religious dialogue and inter-faith dialogue. Mujahid wrongly makes this distinction insisting that inter-religious dialogue is between Christians and Christians while interfaith is the one conducted between one religion to another (Christians and Muslims). Dialogue between Christians and Christians is ecumenism in the technical sense. But inter-religious dialogue is one that goes on between Christians and followers of other religions. (118)

Inter-religious dialogue in the modern usage is the co-operation and positive interaction between people of different faiths and traditions at both individual and institutional levels, with the aim of deriving common ground in belief through concentration on similarities between faiths and the understanding of values and commitment to the world. It seeks to

promote values that are common to religions in order to establish mutual understanding and enhance peace in the society (Chukwlozie 46). The Second Vatican Council places a lot of emphasis on dialogue with the world and cultures. Most of the Councils documents involve some kind of dialogue: dialogue with other religions (*Nostra Aetate*), Dialogue with the modern World (*Gaudium et Spec*), Dialogue with Political Authorities (*Dignitatis Humanae*). The choice of terminologies in these documents is highly influenced by Buber's thoughts.

Inter-religious dialogue as used in this work entails a communication entered into by believers of different faith for the purpose of mutual understanding of their faiths. It is a conversation between believers of different faith with the aim of establishing a relationship based on openness, love, honesty and mutual commitment. In support of this, Ihuah declared that, we hope that this spirit of inter-religious dialogue if adopted could eliminate religious tension we see in Nigeria today because Muslims will then appreciate diversity (56-57). Inter-religious dialogue is a necessity today because of the pluralistic nature of our society (58). Some scholars are even of the opinion that, it should be put in the curriculum as one of the courses to be taught beginning at the secondary school level. (Mujahid 116)

### **Karl Rahner's Theology of Grace**

Karl Rahner's study of the theology of grace convinced him that there is such a thing as pre-existent grace (*Theo. Invest. Vol. 5, 120*). This pre-existent grace is in all cultures and religions, as God's self-communication even before the coming of Christ and the emergence of the sacramental Church. The presence of this pre-existent grace presupposes that even before the advent of Christianity, there were those whose lives corresponds to God's grace yet they lived according to the light of natural religion. Rahner's study of oriental religions, particularly Buddhism and Hindusim helped him to discover inherent good values in these religions. He saw that some followers of these religions lived lives that were oriented towards Christ (121). He concluded that, since Christianity is the absolute religion and Jesus Christ is the absolute saviour, non-Christians could have accepted the salvific grace of God through Christ in their basic orientation and fundamental decision

without knowing it. (123)

Rahner holds that, there are two ways of belonging to Christianity: belonging by objective faith and belonging by orientation. Those who are baptised in a sacramental Church belong by objective faith while those who are members of other religions yet live a life that correspond to the grace of God belong by orientation (*Theol Invest Vol. 14* 283). With regard to belonging by orientation, Rahner raises two basic points which he said are obvious and unquestionable. First, God who desires all men to be saved cannot possibly consign all non-Christians to hell; second Jesus Christ is God's only means of salvation, this means that the non-Christians who end up in heaven must receive the grace of God without their realising it, hence the term Anonymous Christian.

This is Rahner's philosophical starting point. But can the Christian believe for a movement that the overwhelming mass of his brothers and sisters, to only those before the appearance of Christ right back to the most distant past (whose horizons are constantly extended by palaeontology) but also those of the present and of future before us, are unquestionably and in principle excluded from the fulfillment of their lives, and condemned to eternal meaninglessness? He must reject any suggestion of this kind and his faith in itself is in agreement with his doing so. For the scriptures tell him that God wants everyone to be save (1 Tim., 2:4), the covenant of peace which God himself has sealed it with incontestable authority of his self-sacrificing love embracing all men. (391)

The contribution of this book to our work is its affirmation of pre-existent grace in all cultures. It does admit that there will be salvation for anyone who lives according to the grace of God and the dictates of their conscience. Salvation is no longer merely a matter of religious or church belongingness. The work gives a positive view of other religions thereby opening a way to interreligious dialogue. This means that the old bias of salvation for just those who belong to the church alone or one particular religion is no longer tenable. The weakness of this work is that there is no thermometer for us humans to gauge the human conscience. This implies that the problem of prejudice which Rahner seeks to eliminate

has to be resolved.

Rahner in another work openly aligns himself with mainstream Catholicism that also holds those two starting points mentioned above. He repeatedly affirms the uniqueness of the revelation of Christ and the role of the church. As such his approach strongly opposes the more relativistic approach of John Hick. Rahner said that we cannot afford to take a stand with John Hick who holds that “Christianity is the unique and absolute religion” and yet at the same time that other religions are on equal baiss with it and in the same manner justifiable. According to him it would be difficult to handle the confusion and disorder that will follow (*Theo. Invest. Vol. 10, 31*). Suffice it to say that he confronts the relativism of John Hick and others who already took liberty of his ideas to derail from Catholic teaching (32).

Furthermore, Rahner holds that to reject Christianity does not mean the rejection of Christ. This could happen due to historical and cultural difficulties and the structure of injustice in the world. What is to form the basis of our judgment of people is whether in rejecting Christianity they are still following the provisional path fashioned out for them for their salvation which leads them to an encounter with God or they have now entered upon the way of perdition (48). Rahner continues that until man rejects of his own free will, the salvation which God offers in the form of justifying and sanctifying grace, he still has the potential of entering upon eternal life in future beatific vision. (33-34)

What is particularly important and thus significant in this work for our research is the fact that Rahner rejects relativising the Christian faith on the basis of dialogue. True dialogue demands coming to the discussion table in our full identity. What we should note here is that Rahner is saying no religion should consider itself a closed shop. An era of openness has come. This openness is necessary for dialogue and therefore important for promoting interreligious dialogue. The weakness of the work is that even though Rahner rejects the relativism of John Hick he ended up relativising religion generally. For if revelation is relative to each culture then indeed his teaching on anonymous Christian is a gateway to this relativism.

Rahner responds to the critics of this theory that in fact if God had made himself known to all peoples then indeed that there is no need for missionary work and that as a matter of fact the church should discount with *propaganda fidei* since people of all nationalities, cultures and religions know God. Against this wave of criticisms, Rahner contends that it would be foolish to suppose that precisely because of pre-existent grace, preaching the world, baptising and conversion should be called off. He holds that missionary task of the Church is to bring everyone to explicit faith in Christ. The work of the church is to bring everyone to become a Christian in explicitly ecclesial form of Christianity. (*Theo. Invest, Vol. 12, 161*).

In fact properly understood, his theory would encourage a proper perspective in gospel preaching and make preaching the beginning of dialogue because missionary work could be in itself dialogue with cultures. The evangelist would first engage in dialogue with the people that he intends to reach. This would help to ensure that his proclamations is couched in suitable language and expressed in a way that would not be insulting and offensive to the sensibilities of his hearers and the culture of the people. Second it would discourage haughtiness on the part of those who take part in evangelism or missionary work. He holds that missionary preaching is only possible if we presuppose the grace of faith. (169)

The idea of the Anonymous Christian also frees the evangelizer from unnecessary anxiety. If he fails to convert the non-Christian in a formal explicit sense, his work is still valid because in the end the person may still include in heaven of Christ. It frees the evangelizer from using manipulative language to achieve conversion. "If you do not believe what I say you will go to hell". The important and significance of this work to our research lies in the fact that it encourages respect for people and cultures in the course of dialogue. We can approach parties in dialogue as people who already know the truth even though darkly. The work helps us to be sensitive when in dialogue and thus remove the arrogance and pride that comes when we talk as if we are the originator of reality.

Rahner (*Theo. Invest Vol. 16*, 16, 105) gives reasons why he chose the concept of Anonymous Christian. He acknowledges the inherent weaknesses of the concept and said he would gladly have used another term if one could be found. He says that the first reason why the concept of Anonymous Christian is essential arises from two facts: the first being the possibility of supernatural salvation and of a corresponding faith which must be given to non-Christians even if they never become Christians. The second reason he says is that salvation cannot be gained without reference to God and Christ, since it must in its origin, history and fulfillment be a theistic and Christian salvation.

Rahner goes on to say that the Second Vatican Council has recognised the possibility that even non-Christians, polytheists and atheists can live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin. So the possibility cannot be denied to any other group of man whatever their externally verifiable attitudes and beliefs (202). Rahner points out the role of conscience saying that it is crucial since the same conscience can be influenced by the human environment in which it develops. It could therefore be instrumental in causing the person to reject Christ....the whole of mankind living before Christ as well as non-Christians since the time of Christ and all those who consciously and explicitly believe that they are required by their conscience to refuse the Gospel as it is presented to them. (216)

Rahner holds that the conscience even in its fallen state represents the work of the Holy Spirit which guides every individual. What Rahner's point out in this volume is important because he realises that we grow in time and space and to a large extent we are product of history and culture. Our actions are in part dictated by what we learn at our time and the culture in which we grow. If to a large extent we still obey the dictates of our conscience, we stand to be granted supernatural salvation even if we are not explicitly Christians and have to objectified our faith in a sacramental church (53). For Rahner, the simple act of obedience of the individual to the voice of his conscience is equivalent to a Christian's response in faith to the Gospel....a genuine act of faith ... can be found in an atheist as well given that he is absolutely obedient to the dictates of his conscience and accepts himself and God at least unreflectively, in so far

as he actually realizes his own conscience. (58)

The saving will of God is a continuing reality in the sense that God is always reaching out in love. For the world is drawn to its spiritual fulfillment by the spirit of God who directs the whole of universal history toward its proper goal (204), the grace of responding to faith is granted even to non-Christians who respond to the revelatory work of the spirit. For Rahner refusal to listen to the conscience constitutes unfaith, and therefore accounted for why others will be rejected and that not all will be saved. All men have been included in God's saving plan but there are those who opt out of it. (200-201)

The question of the objective revelation of God in Christ raises at least the question of how redemption understood in this way can apply to those who lived before Christ. Furthermore, "how can this situation be of relevance for free action of those who though living after the time of Christ have either no knowledge of him at all or knowledge of a kind that does not impel their freedom to an ultimate decision" (205). We must admit that we are dealing with God who has foreknowledge of the cross and can include by his atoning mercies those who lived before Christ. Rahner holds that Christ already exists in the non-Christians in "an implicit form" of faith and if he conforms to grace in his situation even without explicit faith or objective knowledge of Christ he can be saved (209). He says implicit faith in the non-Christians is the equivalence of objective, conceptual and verbal saving faith in the Christians.

Rahner recognises that God's grace and God's Spirit are everywhere and in all cultures. This recognition is of course key to suing this work in our research. Christian communities should know that God is not an object that they can find and keep for themselves alone nor is He an animal or a human being to be manipulated by the most privileged group. The conviction that one is driven by the spirit has led to break ups in Christian communities and even among other non-Christian religions. One wonders therefore whether Rahner is right by invoking this phenomenon as reason for inclusive theology and dialogue.

The genera; view of Karl Rahner's work is that is it's a gateway to

interreligious dialogue. It has laid the basic ground work for appreciating other religions as channels of grace and in doing so remove the negative view Christianity used to have of non-Christian religions. This sincerely is good for enriching relations with other religions. But Rahner has made Christianity the starting point and by so doing made it a model of be copied by others. Non-Christians would certainly not like this imperial view of Rahner and the mutual relation of goodwill which Rahner hopes to achieve may be a failure. This research intends to overcome this imperial approach by establishing that every religion has a unique role to play in the attainment of social stability and peace in Nigeria.

### **Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian**

According to Rahner, Anonymous Christianity means that, man lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity; let us say a Buddhist monk, who because he follows his conscience attains salvation and lives in the grace of God, of him I must say that he is an Anonymous Christian; if not I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so I hold if everyone depend upon Jesus Christ for salvation and at the same time and it I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognised Jesus Christ, then, there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of Anonymous Christianity. (*Dialogue* 135)

The above definition is however the private teaching of Karl Rahner. This teaching has been rearticulated by the Church and so, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is stated thus: The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the creator, in the first place amongst whom are Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham and together with us they adore one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day (CCC. No. 848). Those who through no fault of their do not know the faith of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and moved by grace try in their action to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience, those too may achieve eternal salvation. (CCC. 847)

The catechism is citing the 1964 document *Lumen Gentium* which was ratified by the second Vatican Council. Most recently the concept of Anonymous Christian has been reiterated by the papal document *Dominus Jesus* (2000). Nevertheless, God who calls all people to himself in Christ and communicates to them the fullness of revelation and love “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches of which their religions are the main and essential expressions even when they contain “gaps, insufficiencies and errors. Therefore, the sacred books of other religions which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain.” (1, 8)

The document goes on to call on those doing research in theology to explore positive elements (in some of these religions) and historical figures that may fall within the diving plan of salvation. It will have to be guided then by the church's Magisterium which states again that the unique mediation of the redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to manifold co-operation which is but a participation in this one source of salvation. (1111, 14).

St. Augustine holds that the service of God we know today in the church is as old as the world. He divides the history of the church into phases and sees the gradual coming of the church in three phases: the church of the devout heathen, the pre-Christian church in Israel and the emergence of the mature church (cf: *City of God*. Schillebeeckx. 7-10). Rahner urges that, there can be no absolutely godless man; all men have an experience of God as the infinite goal and horizon towards which their being strives. This experience may not be explicitly identified or conceived of as an experience of God, although within the great religions of the world it is so identified (Webster 10).

According to Rahner, since grace is implicit in nature, there can be no pure nature, no nature from which God is entirely absent. “Our actual nature is never pure nature. It is naturally installed in supernatural order which man can never leave even as a sinner and unbeliever” (Rahner, *Theo. Invet.* Vol. 4, 183), if this is true, Rahner urges, there can be no

absolutely godless man. Accordingly, all man's religions are spheres within which grace is already operative: “until the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion...does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge of God... it contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ” (Rahner, theo). It is on the basis of this that Rahner develops his idea of anonymous Christian.

Since all religions are the sphere of the grace whose focus and culmination is God's presence in the person of Christ, then, all religious believers apart from Christians may be claimed as implicit or anonymous Christians. Implicit or anonymous in the sense that, their experience of grace is not explicitly identified with the name of Christ. This is quite naturally conditions Rahner understands of the nature of the church's missionary activity. Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but someone who can and must be regarded as an anonymous Christian. (Rahner, Theo. Invest 131)

### **Inclusivist Dialogue in The Church**

Christianity's emphasis has varied over the ages. At times, it has stressed the universal view that God loves and saves people and at other times, it has stressed that God who saves humanity through Jesus Christ. For Catholics, this particular view was not only through Jesus but also through the Church. Catholics holds that he real and full encounter with Jesus always took place in the community of believers. As a result, there was insistence on Church and Jesus as means of knowing God and being saved and this view was seen to be more important than the belief that God saves all people on the basis of God's universal love. This however was not the case at the beginning of Christianity. (Knitter 64)

Authors of the New Testament books and the Christian communities, for whom the books were written, did not pay much attention to “other religions”. For them, the existent relationship with Judaism, their mother religion was more important, however, subsequent interactions in the Greco-Roman world which forced Christianity as a minority religion to

face challenges from philosophies and other religions concerning its relationship with these religions and philosophies. (Knitter 64)

The first three centuries were times when the early theologians were forced to discover meanings if any, of God's presence in other religions. In his encounter, Christianity was forced to develop new thinking and vocabularies. Even though some theologians tried to keep Christianity aloof, an over whelming majority sought unity and constructed a central theme of God's word present in the world and developed a new terminology describing this presence of God as Logos *spermatikos*. Theologians argued that, the word of God embodied in Jesus was also scattered in the Greco-Roman world. (Urban 587)

Moreover, they argued that, the seeds of the divine logos were “spread throughout the whole of humanity long before it manifested in Jesus of Nazareth” (Christopher 49). The most prominent theologians of this school were Justin, the Martyr (d. 165) Ireneaus (130-220) and Clement of Alexandria (150-215). Justin acknowledged the operation of God's Word (Logos) among individual non-Christians. Ireneaus building on the former added that divine manifestation (cosmic and historical) took place through the Logos. Thus, God's theophanies applied the Word and became logophanies. Ireneaus believed that, knowing the logos was knowing God at the existential level and that this knowledge was granted to all. (Christopher 49) Clement of Alexandria on the other hand held that Greeks in their philosophies sought God.

Philosophy for Clement came from God and constituted for the Greek world, a divine economy parallel to the Jewish economy of the law. Both economies were designed by God to lead people to Christ. Clement therefore called Greek philosophy a covenant made by God with people, a stepping stone to the good news of Christ (Christopher 50). As we can see, dialogue was mainly at the intellectual level but it nonetheless affected the way Christians related with other religions and cultures. By developing new vocabularies to make it understandable within the Greco-Roman world Christianity enriched itself and its host culture.

Christianity must be the one to penetrate the world of the religion it is

dialoguing with. Anonymous Christian proposes that, we recognise what is good in other religions and try to use it for the good and development of society. In the early Church doctrinal concern had no pre-eminence over the need to make the Christian message understood by the people. This was how things stood until the “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” took over. This view would inhibit the Church until the Second Vatican Council.

### **Rahner's Teaching on Dialogue in The Church**

A radical turn in the Catholic approach to the world religion took place through the theology of Karl Rahner who was a pioneer in exploring new areas in a Christian theology of religion in the twentieth century. Although Rahner had not studied other religions directly he dialogued with numerous Buddhists, Jewish and Muslim thinkers around the world (Christopher, 53). His analysis of Christian doctrine made him believe that God's World is much bigger than the Christian World (Kitter 68). So, in the 1960's, Rahner began to pay attentions to “non-Christian” religions in an essay entitled “Christianity and the non-Christian Religions” published later in his *Theological Investigations*.

The theme of Rahner's theology is that, God is love who wants to reach and embrace people of all nations. In other words, God wants to save the entire human family and to do so he wills to find the necessary means. This is possible for God because God constantly communicates God's self to every human being. At the same time God enables every human person to experience God's self-communication in the world (Knitter 68). God does this by giving his grace to every human being and not just Christians. On this basis Rahner concluded that human nature is not just natural but graced nature which endows the human person with the presence, power, worth and peace of God. He called such nature supernatural or the “Supernatural existential”, the ontological orientation of a person to God. (Christ 114-143)

Apart from the above, Rahner contends that, the world religions might be possible ways of salvation for their adherents. Then Rahner had just overcome the Augustinian pessimism which had hung upon the theology of the church for centuries, insisting that God's grace was also operative

in other religions (Vorgrimler 61). Consequently, God reaches believers of other religions in and through their religious beliefs and practices (Knitter 71). It should be noted that, Rahner was careful to talk of the presence of God in other religions as a “possibility” and not as a “reality”, and so emphasising the possibility of other religions being ways of salvation. But in this way Rahner opened a way and invited Christians to approach other religions in a new way. Members of other religious traditions were no longer people who did not know God before the arrival of missionaries. Missionaries would have to treat with respect people they evangelise because of their prior knowledge of God.

At the same time, Rahner introduced in his theology, the special role of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation. If God's grace is present in history, it is because of Jesus. Jesus is the cause of whatever revelation or salvation present in the world and Jesus is God's clearest and final word spoken to humanity. Subsequently, Jesus is the absolute guarantee or source of strength that enables people to live a worthwhile, graced life and achieve unity with God in this and in the next world. It means Jesus is the “only” and “absolute” savior. This also makes Christianity absolute religion (Christopher 55). Post Conciliar teaching have upheld parts of Rahner's teaching by affirming that there are “rays of truth” in other religions but contended with the phrase that these other religions can be “possible ways of salvation”. But it has generated a lot of interest in the area of interreligious dialogue. It has affected the church's attitude to non-Christian faiths.

### **The Inclusive Nature of Anonymous Christian in Inter-Religious Dialogue**

Rahner's anonymous Christianity is inclusive not just in its appeal but in the very depth of its philosophical and ultimately theological outlook on non-Christian religions. The fact that all religions are within the sphere of grace whose focus and culmination is God's presence in person of Christ means a certain fundamental good underlies all religion. It means that even if a religion does not consciously recognise Christ, yet it does not take away the fact that it still enjoys the grace of God if it recongises in its system the fundamental good that is grace. It means that all religion should be seen as partners in the search for the good and good the

ultimate good of human existence.

In commenting on Karl Rahner's view of salvation, Francise A. Sullivan S. J, in his book, *Salvation outside the Church?* Quotes Rahner that, until non-Christians become convinced of their obligation to accept Christianity that it would be a mortal sin for them not to do so their own religion continues to be the way in which God must intend that they express their relationship with him and arrive at their salvation (172). There are key points which make the Anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner an important tool for inter-religious dialogue. Rahner talks of the non-Christian being oriented towards Christ meaning that he is concerned about values that unite humanity. Such values like love, justice, peace, mercy, life, freedom, unite a society and make society to function can become the key points for dialogue which followers of other religions and Christians can agree to promote in society.

Rahner emphasises the role of the conscience which is in every human person. The church teaches that the conscience is where God communes with man. From there man is able to distinguish the good from the bad. Psychologists too have noted the role of conscience in man. It is therefore a common factor in every human person no matter what culture or religion they belong to. Rahner thought that a return to this primitive faculty can help to bring all men and women of good will together. The fact that Rahner says God is already present in every religion and culture means that, we cannot confront a member of the non-Christian religion as a godless person. He already has a rudimentary idea of who God is and must be respected as such. This respect for the other's religion and person can bring about mutual enrichment in interreligious dialogue.

Again Rahner should be credited with the idea of religious freedom which he promoted at the Second Vatican Council. For if indeed God is in every religion then everybody should be free to practice their faith as they life, not being force against their wish to follow a particular faith. Pope John Paul II (Sherwin et al, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* 12) sees freedom of religion as key to dialogue. These points indicate how inclusive the theory of Anonymous Christian can be in inter-religious dialogue.

## **The Relevance of Anonymous Christian to Religious Dialogue in Nigeria**

Karl Rahner's philosophy of anonymous Christian is a very vital approach to improving religious dialogue in Nigeria today as it encourages religious intolerance in Nigeria: Religious intolerance in Nigeria dates back to the beginning of the country in 1914 when the Northern and the Southern protectorates were thought together as one country. The Northern region (even though this was true of what we call the core-North) saw itself as basically Islamic and more inclined to the Arab world. It was slack to accept Western education, a situation that is true even today.

The Middle Belt and the South however basically Christian saw nothing wrong in embracing the opportunities which Western education, afforded them. Later in the history of the country the suspicion which the Arab world held the West will bring to play out between the core-north and the rest of the country. It is this suspicion which is seen in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the country that will translate into full blooded religious intolerance as one sees in the many religious conflicts that have bedeviled Nigeria. (Mendith 106)

It should be admitted thought, that this intolerance is not confined to Islam or Muslims alone. Fundamentalist Christian groups in reaction to Islamic intolerance and bigotry can be seen toeing the same path of religious intolerance and often becoming violent. Many scholars have tried to rationalise this intolerance depending on whether they are Marxist socialist, communist, capitalist or even secularist. (Meredith 194-6)

We should however not forget the political developments which preceded the amalgamation in 1914 and which came after it. The amalgamation took place immediately after the conquest of Sokoto Caliphate in 1904 and other Islamic states by the British, an area which today constitutes much of the northern Nigeria.

The aftermath of the First World War (WW I) saw Germany losing its colonies to French, Belgian and British mandates one of which was

Cameroon, Cameroon was divided into British and French parts, the former of which was subdivided into Northern and Southern parts. Following a plebiscite in 1961, the southern Cameroon opted to rejoin the French Cameroon, the northern Cameroon decided to join Nigeria, a move which already added to the large northern population (Meredith, 197) whether this was a ploy by the British themselves to increase the population of the North (for the population from this region was basically Muslim) it cannot be said for certain. What we can say here with certainty is that this population has not seen itself as real Nigeria and has continuously pursued its religious agenda and therefore anti-Nigeria agenda.

The history of religious violence dates back to 1953 when a religious riot occurred in the northern city of Kano. The 1980s saw the upsurge in violence due to the death of Mohammad Marwa, the then leader of *Maitatsine*. In the same decade the then erstwhile military leader of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida enrolled Nigeria in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). This was the move which aggravated religious tension in the country particularly among the Christians (Homan 11). In 1999 with the return of democracy again religious tensions went high with the Sharia saga started in Zamfara state by the then state governor Ahmad Sani (Ihuah, 56). As of 2012, about nine Northern states had instituted *sharia* law. This was followed by controversy as to the would-be legal status of non-Muslims in such states. In some states that were hesitant to implement Sharia Law there was heavy rioting by Muslims. (Jonah et al BBC 7 June)

The second category of intolerance in Nigerian religious history is one that has to do with blasphemy and apostasy. Twelve out of Nigeria's thirty six states have Sunni Islam as dominant religion. In 1999 those states chose to have Sharia Courts as well as Customary Courts. A *Sharia* Court may treat of blasphemy as deserving of several punishments up to and including death. In many predominantly Muslim states conversion from Islam to any other faith is illegal and deserving of capital punishment. The last issue to be considered here belongs to the camp of those who are totally opposed to Western culture. They oppose immunisation and Western education. This group is called *Boko Haram*

(Cook 21). To make matter worse in Nigeria, this group as extreme as they are, is again used by politicians to further their interest. It is therefore not surprising that this group has become completely intolerant of other people and their religious faith.

### **Inclusion Through Dialogue**

The Anonymous Christian aims at promoting inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and other religions, a dialogue that will ultimately create an inclusive society. This dialogue is based on the fact that preexistent grace has already created in the members of other religions an orientation towards Christian values (Rahner *Theo Invest* Vol. 10,201). What Rahner meant by orientation is that the self-communication of God to the non-Christian has already made him aware of what is good and bad, what is right and what is wrong. This awareness may not be as strong as that of the Christian who has had the fullness of revelation. But it is the foundation upon which interreligious dialogue could develop. Karl Rahner emphasises the role of the human conscience as a place where man recognises the values which orient him to God. (Vol. 4. 23)

If we recognise the good in other religions and include them in interreligious dialogue the crises which divide our country may end. For dialogue may bring about an understanding that will eventually eliminate intolerance. Social stability can develop upon the moral community created by religion when it plays its role in society. We should not seek to eliminate the identity of the non-Christian nor our own has Hick and Knitter have done (*Myth of God Incarnate... 25*) in their works.

Dialogue is truly so when we recognize our differences and yet are able to agree on key issues that bring us together. It is true that a mistaken notion of salvation, one which saw man people who were not Christian not included in God's salvation even when they lived good lives, has caused a lot of disaffection even within the church, but we should not move to another extreme, that is to say that precisely because there are many and different faith group we would simply deny our Christian identity and religion on Kick and Knitter have done (*Myth. of Christian,,,...1079*)

Anonymous Christian understands the historical and cultural difficulties which are often a barrier to dialogue. It is the reason why some people have rejected Christianity, but do not reject the provisional path made for them for their salvation which leads them to an encounter with God. (Rahner, *Theo Invest Vol. 10*, 48)

Christianity can dialogue with non-Christian religion based on the awareness of these historical difference and cultural difficulties. In Nigeria this dialogue is now and again hampered by these differences and difficulties because the relationship between Christianity and Islam has been a vexed one. The heterogeneous nature of the Nigeria society necessitates a theological approach that will respond correspondingly to her situation. (Ihwa, *Pluralism and Dia...* 19, 58)

It means that inclusion within the framework of Anonymous Christianity is a necessity, not an option. Only this method of theologising can hold the different faith commitments to a creative tension (Forbi, *Pluralism of Logical Response to...* 1-2). Anonymus Christianit stresses the ontological necessity of Christ for salvation, not the epistemological necessity. In this way it avoids the crisis that would occur if people were forced to be included in the Church. Karl Rahner ssays everyodu id natrlaly included but this inclusion can become full-blooded whenwe enter into dialogue based on common values. (Vol. 10, 50)

Pursued on the basis of common values, inter-religious dialogue can bring about mutual understanding and good relations, identify causes of tension in Christian and mutual relations, create confidence and understanding, break down barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust suspicion and bigotry (Muahid 106). This is implicated in Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian. Inclusion is in fact the basis for the theory of Anonymous Christian, and interreligious dialogue is aimed at creating an inclusive society that will eliminate the religious crises that bedevil it.

### **Conclusion**

The study deals with approach to interreligious relations in Nigeria within the framework of the Anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner. In the

first place the anonymous Christian is considered within the framework of serving as an anchor to inter-religious relations and dialogue. Inter-religious relation in Nigeria is problematic and is too often bedeviled by crises. Increasingly, there are mutual condemnations and exclusions which further help in worsening the problem.

In this wise, different approaches to inter-religious relations are investigated. These include exclusivism, pluralism and inclusivism. Since the theory of the anonymous Christian itself is about inclusion, inclusivism is then explored in depth in order to see how it can serve as a model for approaching the issue of inter-religious dialogue within the Nigeria religious space. The study therefore takes a look at inter-religious relations and proposes mutual engagement through interreligious dialogue using a model of approach called inclusivism as presupposed in Karl Rahner's theory of Anonymous Christian. This study will help to improve inter-religious relation in Nigeria and bring about peace.

The work is useful particularly to Christian and Islamic leaders who are working in vexed religious situations. It is also useful as a resource for those doing future studies on inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria and beyond. It will also add to the pool of work on inter-religious Council in Nigeria and the Catholic Church Worldwide.

### **Recommendations**

The anonymous Christian gives inclusion to other religions based on the fact that they are pre-Christian channels of grace and therefore contain “rays of lights”. In other words, they are in some sense oriented towards Christianity. In our study here, we consider the common values between Islam and Christianity in order to foster a mutual understanding between these two major religions in Nigeria. This concept opens the way for Christians to enter into inter-religious dialogue without the feeling of betraying their faith.

Inter-religious dialogue based on values will bring about mutual understanding and eliminate suspicion, crises and ensure peace and unity among members of different religious groups. The inclusive way of

relating with one another will help to remove the suspicion from Muslims that Christians have simply devised inter-religious dialogue as a way of converting its members. Dialogue with Muslims has been problematic in many cases because when previous approaches call them to drop their identity as Muslims they think that they are being called to join Christianity in principle. The Anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner therefore recognises that, Islamic religion is also a channel of God's grace and that its basic orientation is not against Christ and his Church. Because of its inclusive nature, it respects Islam as a religion and indeed any other religion as revealed from God and sees in all religions the historical mediation of God's grace.

The inclusivist approach respects individual conscience and rejects all forms of co-ercion or discrimination with regard to faith. It accepts the freedom to practice one's religion and give witness to it as well as appreciates and esteems all genuine traditions. This kind of engagement in inter-religious dialogue is not in conflict with the proclamation of Christ (Didier 3). This kind of dialogue operates with other forms of dialogue such as comparative religious dialogue, dialogue of life, dialogue of action,

Inter-religious dialogue known as the dialogue of life continues as many young men and women of both faiths live together and intermarry and interact in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect. In many parts of the country, a number of projects are jointly undertaken by Christians and Muslims thought mostly in the southern part of the country (Ehusani 4). There is also the dialogue of action, communion and socio-political life promoted at all levels of society. This could be in form of joint social projects, joint health projects, joint economic ventures that will promote community development and peaceful co-existence. All this can happen within the framework of a dialogue promoted in the spirit of inclusion.

In the dialogue of inclusion, we also do not aim at merely tolerating or trying to achieve tolerance. What we intend to achieve is a brotherly, friendly, peaceful and stable society. It is only that kind of society where there is mutual acceptance and peace that can experience real harmony and proper development. Also, African Religion is not a national religion

but there is also need for dialogue of inclusion with these religions too. This is because, they are also pre-Christian channels of grace and as far as Karl Rahner's anonymous theory is concerned; salvation can only come from Jesus Christ, since he is the absolute saviour. But if it is true that a person who becomes the object of the Church's missionary effort is or may be already on the way towards salvation and if it is at the same time true that this salvation is Christ's salvation since there is no other salvation, then, it must be possible to be consider an anonymous Christian of Karl Rahner (*Theo Invest. Vol. 1 75-76*). Inclusivism therefore opens much more room for religious freedom, inter-religious dialogue and religious integration and consequently peaceful co-existence and harmony in human society.

We trusted that this study will bring mutual engagement through inter-religious dialogue that can help to foster understanding and respects between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria. In order for this to happen, the parties engaged in the dialogue must accept their full identities either as Christians or Muslims and be accepted as such. It is only in this way that they will be able to open up to each other.

There are other approaches such as exclusivism and pluralism but we think that such approaches to inter-religious dialogue may not work within the Nigerian context because they generate suspicion among Muslims who think Christians are trying to convert their members or that, their religion is taken for granted. The approach this research uses therefore is inclusivism as proposed in Karl Rahner's theory called "the anonymous Christian" which we believed to help remove the fear that Muslims have when they are invited to dialogue.

Religious extremists are seriously in operation in our time more than ever. Thus, the need for inter-religious dialogue cannot be overemphasised. Karl Rahner's anonymous Christian gives us the intellectual outline on how we can view and relate with other religions if we must pursue the part of peace. In our country Nigeria, inter-religious dialogue must be undertaken by all religions. The pluralistic nature of our Nigerian society demands this inclusiveness. Each religion should seek to discover what is good in others.

The Roman Catholic Church for instance says it does not reject whatever is holy in any religion and they believe that; world religions provide answers for the fundamental question of human existence. To ease the tension which often characterise the relationship between Muslims and Christians, the Catholic Church has maintained that she looks upon Muslims with esteem (NAS) there should be an understanding that a difference in perception of God does not destroy the unity of the belief in one God (Fitzgerald 183). The era of exclusive brotherhood may be over.

We must seek to understand the concept of brotherhood as it transcending culture and belief. The concept is dear to Muslims, Christians and ATR members (Fitzgerald 184). We can begin to understand the concept of brotherhood as one of unity of humanity in origin and destiny John Paul II kept emphasising that the “various religions rose out of the primordial human openness to God (Christ 244). In this way, one may hold that in the spirit of Karl Rahner's anonymous Christian, we can have a society that is inclusive and generative of peace.

We must not reduce Nigeria to a single religious nation or culture but try to enhance the diversity that we have because it is a gift from God. This religious diversity should serve as a source of strength to the attainment of our collective goal of building a nation of great height (378). Human fulfillment is found in the cultivation of the being of others; living for others and coexisting with others. It is only in this way that our humanity finds its full definition.

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