

THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE WITHIN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY: THE NIGERIA EXAMPLE

¹DEMAS SAM SARKI, ²Kenneth Sunday and ³SAUL JOHN KWANNERI

¹Taraba State University Jalingo, Department of Christian Religious Studies; sarkisammillen@gmail.com, 08062796185

²Taraba State University Jalingo, Department of Christian Religious Studies; Kennethsunday612@gmail.com 08122328881

³Taraba State University Jalingo, Department of Christian Religious Studies; jskwanneri@gmail.com 07067954996

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Abstract: *The dialogue between religious traditions is necessary to foster both a better understanding and more positive relations in Nigeria. It is generally accepted that a free exchange of ideas is needed in order to remove barriers and increase the amount of good in the world. The question is whether religious traditions are genuinely open to dialogue and, if so, what limits, constrains, or determines the shape of those dialogues. Islam and Christianity, as a pluralistic religion, considers dialogue legitimate. The Muslim doctrine of interfaith dialogue is based on its recognition and acknowledgement of truth in other religions, particularly Christianity and Judaism. Islam holds that it is not the particular Abrahamic tradition to which one belongs but the deeds of the adherent that will count on the Day of Judgment. Presently, interfaith dialogue is not effectively done to some challenges that misunderstood and literalist interpretations of the text of al-Qur'an and al-Hadith. Extremism, mistrust, misconceptions, weakness, and a lack of proper representation also create challenges for interfaith dialogue. These problems can be addressed within the framework of tolerance, respect, sincere preparedness, and loyalty to the faith. The success of interfaith dialogue depends greatly on its agenda. The agreement of participants on such common points as universal truth, transcultural values, and spiritual satisfaction can be helpful to achieve the goals toward which interfaith dialogue is initiated. It is on the stated problems above, that this paper will consider the challenges that hamper a peaceful interfaith dialogue among Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, to this end possible remedy and recommendations will be given, in other to appreciate these two Semitic religions tradition.*

Demas Sam Sarki, Kenneth Sunday And Saul John Kwanneri



INTRODUCTION

Today, we all live in a multicultural society. As a result of globalization and migration, our contemporary world has become pluralistic, and monocultures are giving way to multi-cultures. And with the multicultural also comes the multi-religious—a new situation that compels the religion in Africa and its theology to rethink and relate to this rapidly growing phenomenon. All around us, people of various religio-cultural persuasions are coming closer to each other on a global scale and this interaction already serves as an unproclaimed dialogue—an ongoing dialogue of an informal nature.

In such situations, distances are now being narrowed and, in certain areas, compromises are replacing confrontations. In educational institutions for example, halls of residence, lecture rooms, libraries, canteens, buses, offices, faculty common rooms, and playgrounds are all meeting places for adherents of various religious traditions. Dialogue has become a powerful term and form of action in many academic, linguistic, and cultural communities. Over the past few years, several conferences have been convened to examine dialogue, intercultural dialogue, dialogic communication, or dialogic approaches to inquiry. Examples of these groupings are many including the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and the Dialogue Society, as are the conferences convened in the past decade by the European Union, the International Communication Association, and so on. All invite us to reflect upon and develop our notions of 'Dialogue' or 'Intercultural Dialogue.' As a key term 'dialogue' has assumed a prevalence, prominence, and potency in its meanings, and in its frequent declaration as a preferred form for human action. Who, indeed, would be against 'dialogue'? With all these wonderful institution

established to handle crisis or challenges within the society in order to have a peaceful and harmonious living. Today in Nigeria we have religious extremism and fanaticism that have caused so many lives and properties worth billions of naira been destroyed.

It is on this backdrop that this paper want to look at some of these challenges faced among these two Semitic religion that claims the same source of origin, in doing this, the paper is organized into the following subheading for easy comprehension, viz; introduction, conceptual clarification, the imperative of interfaith dialogue, the forms of interfaith dialogue, principles to consider during interfaith dialogue, challenges of interfaith dialogue, anti-dote to the challenges of interfaith dialogue, conclusion and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Considering research of this type, there is no doubt that some concepts need clarification, and to relate the concept to the subject matter, these words includes; dialogue and inter-faith dialogue.

Dialogue

The working definition of 'dialogue' according to Elsdon-Baker has been framed as follows: "a meaningful interaction and exchange between individuals and/or people of different groups (social, cultural, political and religious), who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding." (23) In a different presentation, from what Elsdon-Baker defined, Kuruvachira state: Dialogue means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment". Dialogue is also described as



walking together with people of other religions in order to seek truth and to work together in projects of common concern. Looking at the word from an online encyclopedia, and considering it etymologically, it states that; "literary work consisting of a conversation between two or more persons," from Old French *dialogue* and directly from Latin *dialogus*, from Greek *dialogos* "conversation, dialogue," related to *dialogesthai* "converse," from *dia* "across, between" *legein* "to speak" (from PIE root *leg-* "to collect, gather," with derivatives meaning "to speak (to 'pick out words')"). Considering the definition above, we will see that the authors, all have a common ground of landing, which is "dialogue has to do with conversation between persons or a group.

Inter-Faith Dialogue

Inter-Faith Dialogue is a word that is often misunderstood and, in some cases, even held suspect, particularly in Nigeria. This is so because there are those who see it as one of those tricks used to seduce someone into accepting the faith position of the dialogue partner. Elochukwu said, "This is far from what dialogue is all about. In very simple terms, dialogue is all about "You talk, I listen, I talk, and you listen" (20).

According to Sandi Fulst, Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a challenging process by which adherents of differing religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the center of most wars. The objective of interreligious dialogue is peace. (<http://EzineArticles.com/?expert>). In a presentation, Aman Andrabi asked; what is Interreligious Dialogue?

Interfaith dialogue, also referred to as interreligious dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual

understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different faiths/religious traditions, at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talks; it includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and at our workplaces both in formal and informal ways (264).

Dialogue is divided into various forms. Ugwoji, as described by Sintang et al. (2012), classifies interreligious dialogue into four kinds, such as "dialogue of life, dialogue of collaboration, dialogue of theological discourse and dialogue of religious experience." Diana Eck as described by Khambali (2015) divided it into six types: "parliamentary dialogue, institutional dialogue, and theological dialogue, dialogue of life, spiritual dialogue and inner dialogue."

Dialogue of life is described as an interaction between the followers of one religion and another in their daily life (Sintang et al., 2012) while working on a common project like a charity organization in a multi-faith community for a common cause is a dialogue of collaborative work (Majid, 2013). Theological dialogue or dialogue of theological discourse includes meetings among the followers of different religions where the issues of theology and philosophy are the central theme of discussion (Khambali, 2015). Arinze, as described by Douglas Pratt (2010), argued that dialogue of religious experience is rooted in



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in many parts of the world. Inter-faith peace building seeks to bridge the divisions that occur between different religious tradition during interfaith dialogue to commonly aiming to facilitate understanding and tolerance between different religious communities or traditions (Bagir, 2008). Hayward writing on interfaith dialogue states:

Interfaith dialogue is increasingly offered as a concrete means to bridge inter-communal divides, build coalitions, and challenges the social psychological dynamics that can be a particularly useful tool for building awareness among majority communities about the experiences and needs of minorities and for bringing simmering tensions to the surface, and addressing them in a potentially constructive manner (21).

To this end, if Nigeria can ever attain peace, then dialogue must not just take place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.

FORMS OR CLASSIFICATION OF DIALOGUE

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a) Dialogue of life

The first form of dialogue is dialogue of life. Dialogue describes it as a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's



behaviour. It implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression and values. It is considered daily life' because everyone is called to live dialogue in his daily life, whether one finds oneself in a majority situation or that of a minority. One ought to bring the spirit of the Gospel into any environment in which one lives and works, be it familial or social or educational or artistic or economic or political. Thus, interreligious dialogue begins with a dialogue of life that is directed towards a friendly co-existence that enriches the partners by living out the human and spiritual values of the respective religions. Fitzgerald says:

Dialogue of life is not something passive or mere co-existence. It requires openness, a desire to enter into relations with others. Its aim is to establish good neighbourly relations to ensure that people live in peace and harmony. This form of dialogue in the neighbourhood, at school, in the work place, concerns everybody and is within the capacity of all. It does not require any special training, but calls on qualities of the heart, such as, sympathy, respect, patience, and it is in this form of dialogue that laypeople have a particular responsibility and a special role to play (75).

Dialogue of life, to relate it to the Nigeria situation, it may appear to be spontaneous, but it does require an effort. It is easy to close in on oneself and ignore the other, especially if that other belongs to a rather closed community, which apparently does not want to enter into dialogue. It requires perseverance to overcome the barriers of diffidence and suspicion within this kind of environment tolerance is needed. Hence, this form of dialogue cannot be taken for granted. It has to be worked at all the time. Otherwise, outside influences can come into play and break up the existing harmony. Fitzgerald

adds that, "dialogue of life has a special value of its own." (75). There is a clear indicator for what dialogue of life offers to adherence, one must first discover the uniqueness in one's faith, that has to be personal.

b) Dialogue of works

The second form of dialogue is dialogue of works. It is a dialogue of deeds and collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature, which are directed towards human liberation and advancement. For example, it can be for the defence and promotion of social justice, moral values, peace and liberty. This kind of dialogue often occurs today in the context of international organisations where Christians and followers of other religions work together in order to find solutions to the problems of the world. The field of collaboration can be extremely wide, and the great problems with which humanity is struggling, call on Christians to work together with followers of other religions. To this end, Fitzgerald states that;

The underlying reason for dialogue of works, which he calls 'shared action' is that, good neighbourliness also means giving and receiving, and rendering mutual service. Here again there is a vast field for involvement of lay people. This form of dialogue also has a profound theological value. To work for the integral development of human beings, to strive to liberate people from unjust structures of oppression or poverty, is to share in the building up of the Kingdom of God. Lay people who engage in this form of dialogue are truly instruments of God's love, helping to fulfil the prayer of Jesus, 'your kingdom come' (78).

Besides, work for justice and peace is an integral part of religious institution, and has to be carried out at all levels. A great deal of confidence is needed to be able to work harmoniously



together, and this kind of action can truly be considered a form of dialogue.

c) Dialogue of experts

The third form of dialogue is dialogue of experts, which is of particular interest to specialists of various religions. Here the adherence, without ignoring the differences that exist among religious traditions, recognises the treasures of other religions and enter into theological discussion and exchange. They study, confront, deepen, and enrich their respective religious heritages or apply something of their expertise to the problems which must be faced by humanity in the course of its history. Such a dialogue normally occurs where one's partner already has his own vision of the world, and adheres to a religion which inspires him to action. This is more easily accomplished in pluralistic societies where diverse religious traditions and ideologies coexist and sometimes come in contact. In this type of dialogue, the partners come to a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories, and promote communion and fellowship among people

Dialogue of experts is perhaps the most familiar type of dialogue. According to Fitzgerald, It can be bilateral or trilateral or multilateral with people of many different religions taking part, and each has its own special advantages. Meetings will also differ in the number of participants, ranging from large congresses to groups that can meet in people's homes (80).

kuruvachira says that, in any type of formal discussion, laypeople can take an active part: reading papers, acting as discussants, or simply joining in the exchanges. Today more and more people are studying theology and can therefore, make an informed contribution to theological dialogue. Their presence in such formal meetings

is of great significance. It helps to give a witness to what the religious really is, not just a clerical body, but the people of God. To further buttress Fitzgerald says;

If the dialogue of experts is to succeed, certain conditions need to be fulfilled: preparation should be carried out jointly; it should be a serious preparation while still leaving room for spontaneous discussions. Care must be taken to avoid polemics, but also not to restrict the exchanges to a purely academic approach. Continuity is important because confidence grows when people meet at frequent intervals (79).

Regarding the value of this form of dialogue, it should be understood that, it is best seen, as 'walking together towards the truth'. Through honest presentations of one's views, through discussions, and above all by listening to one another, one can come to a better appreciation of the respective religious traditions. This can help to remove prejudices, and create understanding, and thus encourage both the dialogue of life and the dialogue of works. Nigeria can attain a required peace if only she explore the dialogue of expert; this can be possible if the religious tradition maintain the principles.

d) Dialogue of religious experience

The fourth form of dialogue is dialogue of religious experience. At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their spiritual riches of experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful co-operation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for one's own faith. Sometimes profound differences can



exist between religions, but it does not prevent this form of dialogue.

There can be the joint study of religious texts, holding of joint prayer meetings, or simply the presence at one another's worship. All this requires great care, a sense of profound respect for other religions, and avoidance of any semblance of syncretism.

THE IMPERATIVE OF INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Ruhul Amin state that the imperative of inter-faith today in ever-shrinking world that we do not use others' faiths as a criterion to separate them from engaging in our civic arena. We cannot afford to claim ignorance towards other religions. We must not claim to be religious by stating that it is only us, and not others, who matter. We should appreciate that there is dignity in difference. Assimilation and respect for others who are different than us should be an integral part of our faith. These are the central tenets of interfaith dialogue. It is an exercise of learning about other faiths that are different than ours. It is about respectful coexistence with others whose faiths, customs, and worldviews are different than ours (dialogue, Wikipedia).

We are a multicultural and multi-religious society. Interfaith dialogue provides the glue that nourishes and keeps our society together. As we navigate our diversity, we must learn not to drown or suffocate each other, but instead to swim alongside each other. Interfaith work allows us to deepen our own faith by learning about other faiths. We must not forget that harming one faith may harm all faiths and destruct us from the paths leading to God. We may find it beneficial sometimes to read, listen and interpret things through the lenses of others in order to enhance our sensitivity, compassion, and most importantly, our relationship with

God. Regardless of our differences, we must find ways to coexist with others. In our ever-changing world, no religion can exist in isolation by blatantly ignoring the others. We have the obligation of engaging in constructive conversation so that we can teach our children and grandchildren how to build bridges and not walls. We need to create an environment for them so that they can be proud of their own religious tenets, while also learning from those of other faiths (dialogue, Wikipedia).

Dialogue between followers of different faith traditions has become an urgent necessity today in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, in today's Nigeria inter-community harmony is a major need, and the lack of it has emerged as a major challenge. Inter-faith and inter-community harmony must be built on the foundations and concerns that different faith communities share in common. It must also seek to build bridges of understanding between these communities, and to eliminate misunderstandings that are a major source of inter-community conflict. It is also important to highlight the need for interfaith dialogue:

if they are to contribute to peace, religions should give some thought to how they handle manifestations of their own internal diversity, as part of a genuine culture of pluralism It would be engaged in the following activities: raising awareness of and addressing violence against women through workshops, training and counselling; providing chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons; initiating research into interfaith dialogue is necessary to allay such mistrust and to promote social equality between different communities (Hans Kung, 1-2).

Interfaith dialogue should also be initiated to weed out communal politics that rule the roost even in the so called secular political parties. What may emerge from such dialogue is to



pressurize the political parties to give adequate representation to the people belonging to different faith and nurture leaders from different faiths and their organization. This effort would not only strength democracy but also improve social relationship in the country. “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions,” (Hans Kung, 4). The imperative of inter faith dialogue cannot be over emphasized, there is need to consider, each other’s religious tradition and respect areas of divergence maintain peaceful atmosphere in Nigeria.

BASIC PRINCIPLE TO CONSIDER IN INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Leonard Swidler is a highly respected American scholar in the field of interfaith dialogue. Swidler has published these set of ten inter-religious principles which has become a classic model for the present scholars and students who are doing interfaith study. Below are the “dialogue Decalogue.”

First Principle The essential purpose of a dialogue is to learn, which entails change. At the very least, to learn that one’s dialogue partner views the world differently is to effect a change in oneself. Reciprocally, change happens for one’s partner as she/he learns about oneself.

Second Principle Dialogue must be a two-sided project: both between religious/ideological groups (Inter- and Intra-). Intra-religious/ideological dialogue is vital for moving one’s community toward an increasingly perceptive insight into reality.

Third Principle It is imperative that each participant comes to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. This means not only describing the major and minor thrusts as well as

potential future shifts of one’s tradition, but also possible difficulties that she/he has with it.

Fourth Principle One must compare only her/his ideals with their partner’s ideals, and her/his practice with their partner’s practice. Not their ideals with their partner’s practice.

Fifth Principle Each participant needs to describe her/himself. For example, only a Muslim can describe what it really means to be an authentic member of the Muslim community. At the same time, when one’s partner in dialogue attempts to describe back to them what they have understood of their partner’s self-description, then such a description must be recognizable to the described party.

Sixth Principle Participants must not come to the dialogue with any preconceptions as to where the points of disagreement lie. A process of agreeing with their partner as much as possible, without violating the integrity of their own tradition, will reveal where the real boundaries between the traditions lie; the point where she / he cannot agree without going against the principle of their own tradition.

Seventh Principle Dialogue can only take place between equals, which means that partners learn from each other – *par cum pari* according to the Second Vatican Council – and do not merely seek to teach one another.

Eighth Principle Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust. Because it is persons, and not entire communities, that enter into dialogue, it is essential for personal trust to be established. To encourage this it is important that less controversial matters are discussed before dealing with the more controversial ones.

Ninth Principle Participants in dialogue should have a healthy level of criticism toward their own traditions. A lack of such criticism implies that one’s tradition has all the answers,



thus making dialogue not only unnecessary, but unfeasible. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, which is impossible if one's tradition is seen as having all the answers.

Tenth Principle To truly understand another religion or ideology one must try to experience it from within, which requires a “passing over”, even if only momentarily, into another's religious or ideological experience, (4-5).

CHALLENGES OF INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Though the prospects and possibilities exist for a harmonious and rewarding interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, this can certainly not be made on the bed of roses. Interfaith dialogue is not a remote preparation for conversion to another religion but rather an expression of respect for the other; it also is about making people better human beings. While it leads to better appreciation of one's religious commitments, mutual understanding of believers and to active engagement in the service of “brothers and sisters”, engagement in interfaith dialogue leads to a better horizontal relationship with others, while facing numerous challenges that must be overcome. Few in a Muslim-Christian view are as follows:

1. Unwillingness to Understand Islam/Christian Traditions

That there is a clash of interest between Christians and Muslims in this twenty first century as it were since the sixth century is a fact. Many view Islam as a violent and threatening religion. Many Christians traced world events, which conspired to place Islam and Christianity in a conflicting relationship to the founder of Islam, view violence as a dominant culture in Islam and therefore the greatest danger for Christendom and to its successor the Western world. Many Christians view the claim of Islam

as a peaceful as disingenuous and would not accept the majority view of Muslims that the few terrorists who commit violence in its name are deviants from moral fringes outside the mainstream of Islam incapable of assimilating the virtuous teachings of peace.

Shari'a and jihad have become scary words in the ears of most Christians during dialogue. There has been no balanced approach by Christians to understand both terms and concepts as Islam has it or employing them for their true meanings, so that the two terms are distorted and given a 'Christian' than Islamic meanings. Shari'a simply means “legal reasoning” or even “canonical law” and the Qur'an refers to jihad in twenty four verses, most of which emphasizes the spiritual and non-violent manifestations of struggle in the way to please God.

2. Endemic Islamophobia

Islamophobia is simply fear of Islam and Muslim. The word is used in a diplomatic method to tell Muslims that I didn't agree with your religion. The post-colonial theorist Edward was first to use the word Islamophobia in English, when he wrote in 1985 about “the connection ... between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism” and criticized writers who do not recognize that ‘hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand’ with anti-Semitism and ‘has stemmed from the same source and been nourished at the same stream (theatlantic.com).

(Ashafa, 21-22).

Hardly do most Christians agree that Islam does not support such things as terrorism, human rights infractions and gender bias among others. For this, most Muslims are being forced to view those Western or Westernized African Christians, who spout that Islam is a noble religion of peace as mere parroting deception.



Lots of fortunes are being viewed not by few Muslims to denigrate Islam, not accept its peaceful nature and teachings, but as a religion of bloodletting and world domination, which Christians must resist at all cost. It is possible to infer that there are segments of Muslims as do Christians, who share difficult concepts of both religions, even ignorant of their nature and teachings, so that both Islam and Christianity have people at both sides of the spectrum struggling within and without their belief system respectively, a major scenario that renders interfaith dialogue problematic.

Christians believe that Muslim are terrorist and are of no positive use. It has been noted that the Jihad of Shyakh Uthan Bin Fodio in the 18th Century and the long lasting Islamic Empire of Kanem Borno had left many northern citizens as pagan and non-Muslim. This could have been due to their ego of pooling the streams of their concubines and slaves. With advent of colonial rule in 1904, and in their plight to escape the tyranny of those emirs, these communities have converted to Christianity to gain freedom as equal citizen (Falola,1998).

3. The challenge of Clash of Provocation by the West

The insensitivity of some elements from the West in their mockery insensitive exercise of religious and cultural freedom put to test and most cases trigger Muslims into violent acts in response. In this manner, and on the surface, each side blames or accuses the other for religious hostilities and intolerance. For example, “The Innocence of Muslims” was a bizarre movie trailer that was privately funded, which depicts the revered Prophet Muhammad as a fraud, whose violent and sexual acts inspire a religion (Islam) bent on persecuting Christians as well as opposing science and therefore progress. The

YouTube video, which ascended from obscurity to incite deadly protests across the Arab and wider Muslims world, offended by its blasphemous depictions of the Prophet and Islam was suspiciously timed to coincide with the anniversary of the September 11 attacks and the Libyan incident when the US ambassador to Libya was killed.

The issue is that unless religious and cultural relations in the West are reset, which play in the hands of too many vested interests all too keen to exploit existing prejudices, Muslims-Christian relations in SSA will continue to be influenced by events in the West. Already, we have noted that SSA Muslims and Christians have become more aware of the bigger Islamic Ummah and Christian communities respectively in a manner that religious consciousness and sentiments come to transcend the nations they live to affect their commitment to one another as being determined by events outside their shores.

4. Politicians

Another factor is the dubious attitude of some Nigerian Politicians and political leaders who uses religion to divide and gets what they want. Nigeria is a multi-religious country both Muslims and Christians rule the country. Ironically the Muslim is sanctioned to take an oath of office while holding glorious Quran, so does the Christian hold the Holy Bible, but not sooner as they assume their respective offices they start to dribble and divide their citizens across the line of ethnicity, religion, region, class, race etc. this guarantees them benefit of support to looting public funds and other indecent activities while in the offices. For instances, whenever a Muslim candidate aspire to a political office he will be often subjected to be calling unspeakable names, such as religious bigot, terror, etc since 2013 when Muhammad



Buhari the current Nigeria President indicated his interest to vying for presidency he suffered all those backlashes likewise Goodluck Jonathan.

This become even clearer when he run in 2015. Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the northern part of the country, was the presidential candidate the national chairman of his party is a Christian, while the vice-presidential candidate, is not only a Christian but an active pastor in a prominent church in the country. Despite this, the party is supposedly termed as an Islamist party, and the presidential candidate is seen as a fundamentalist who was ready to impose Shari'ah on the people of Nigeria! Worst still, the media officer of the ruling party went to link the Muslim candidate to terrorist groups like ISIS regarding them as his sponsor and financier. (Abdul Hameed, 15)

5. The Challenge of language and communication

One of the major problems with dialogue has to do with language and communication. Whereas we sometimes find ourselves using the same words, we often mean different things and thus we sometimes speak without communicating. Words such as prophet, revelation, and inspiration of the Scripture, are sometimes grossly misunderstood by others and we have therefore tended to judge and misjudge others on the basis of our understanding of some of these key religious concepts. When dialogue on, area want did not understand, it is good to ask politely not using derogatory words, such as, this things you are saying are not true, or your so called religion.

6. The Challenges of Lack of social Amenities

Some of the main agent fueling the intolerance is socio-economic problems that bedeviled the suffering of young generation. The dubious

character of some political leaders who catered away public funds meant to revitalize the economy and build basic amenities to the society have been among many other factors causing the intolerance of the citizens. These moneys were meant to build schools, hospitals, roads, markets etc but are stolen and kept at private accounts outside the country level of poverty and lack of amenities. Many graduates of several professions are jobless, the menace of youth restiveness in southern Nigeria and Almajiri saga are still lingering to be analyzed. It became easy for any spark of trouble to ignite these minds to chaos and turbulences in the name of religion with this kind of compounded problem, dialogue will never take place.

Perhaps the most severing category of people suffering are the Almajiri. Although in olden days, the system of Almajiri education yielded many results, as Imams, sheikhs and responsible men were linked to these schools. But with the coming of colonial officers the system has dramatically changed to worst, as many parents send their wards under the façade of Qura'nic education but the truth of the matter is to reduce the economic burden off their shoulders. The Almajiri roam around the street begging and have no decent place to sleep as a result some are consumed by necessity to cause mayhem by politicians and other domestic violence. Others were lost due to diseases and other natural afflictions; quite very few would scale through and became responsible citizens.

The Niger Delta youth who are mostly restive and have no farms to cultivate or schools to attend is another nucleus problem at the Centre of igniting social upheavals; they are quite often used by politicians and other religious leaders.

Therefore, the deterioration of relations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria was not only



as a result of religious differences but also the absence of effective social facilities by the administrators

7. The Challenge of Devine texts with Human interpretation

Generally, religions are understood and thought differently, which human history has well illustrates. We have earlier noted that Islam means unconditional submission to God but what one does with the submission is always a matter of interpretation. It is easy to placate Islam and Christianity as contradictory in proclaiming being peaceful, non-violent and even opposed to violence; but at the same time having traditions in which violence, war and aggression not only exist and permitted, but sanctified and which makes it “holy”. In this manner, violence or war is being equated an act of devotion. This suggests a contradiction between theory (proclamations of peace) and practice (violent behavior), so that again there is a conflict between two important and fundamental aspects of religious theory: one part, which treats peace as holy and another that also sees violence as holy. (Ashafa, 25).

Unlike the Catholics who have the Pope that can claim to speak on behalf of a significant population of Christians and exist as an embodied denomination, there is no ‘embodied’ Islam, where a unified, homogenous and unchanging tradition exists. Islam has a democratized knowledge, preaches, cajoles, enjoins and even recommends a great many deeds, many of which can be found and debated in texts and traditions of Islam. The five classical school of the Shari’a for example differ significantly in their relationship to both sources and interpretive methods. In this manner, while the texts undoubtedly remain divine, the interpretation of the text is human and therefore

fraught with all the human exigencies, (U. Bugaje, 21-25).

If therefore a group from deviant fringes makes argument that a text or tradition is calling for violence, what is meant is their own interpretation of that text or tradition. The challenge this has in interfaith dialogue is that it always provide a leeway for some to interpret texts and traditions irresponsibly to suit certain sectarian, doctrinaire and dogmatic leaning, which majority of Muslims do not share and which not a few in Christendom are willing to understand, perhaps for which reason the concept of “Good Muslim and Bad Muslim” was invented.

This irresponsible acts is not only limited to Muslims. For example, on one hand, for whatever reason, some clergies during the Rwandan civil war, lured some people into the church for the purpose of been slaughtered; on the other, in Nigeria, the renegade Boko Haram much as they are being condemned as un-Islamic by mainstream Muslim, their activities remain unchangingly graphic as is also the case with the Christian anti-Baleka in Central African Republic in their engagement with the minority Muslims. It is important to seek help went trying to interpret a text in another religious tradition which one is not familiar with, to avoid rankle during, after and before interfaith dialogue.

THE ANTI-DOTE TO THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Dialogue between Muslim and Christian is feasible and could be achieved in an easy manner. However, the political will must also be maintained. Muslim leaders were honest in dialoguing with their Christian counterparts, they would use several leverages enshrined in Quran to befriend them in a mutual and friendly manner. For instance, In February 12-14th,



1982, President Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari a Muslim from the North invited Pope John Paul II, the Christian Leader of the world to visit Nigeria and ordain 94 priests drawn from across the country at an open Mass in Kaduna on the 14th of February 1982. This visit was momentous because it was the first time a Pope would visit Nigeria and with the President himself being a Muslim, this was considered a boost for Christian-Muslim relations.

However, the fear of Muslims and the penchant attitudes of the politicians must also be dealt with decisively. The socio-economic problems must be attended to. The Member of mosques and the podiums of churches must come closer together as doing this is a fulfilment of their religious duties. It is the finding of this research that employing foreign Muslim Organization such as Ufuq Dialogue and Nusret Educational co, from the Muslim side and other non-biased Christian dialogue organization would assist in shaping a good and better way forward.

In case of Ufuq Dialogue foundation since its inception, it had made Muslim and Christians much closer than ever before, through organizing Interfaith Dialogue, and dining at the same table during Ramadhan Iftar and other festivities. In one of the interactions some of the Christian faithful admit to fearing close Muslim residences or neighborhood. Peace building through dialogue is very fundamental in Islam because, it is the basis of Islamic law (Shari'ah). The primary function of Shari'ah is the protection of life, property, progeny, intellect, religion and honour, any act that threatens the security of any of these, is seriously condemned in Islam Allah says: And do not kill the soul which God has made sacred, except in the course of justice. If someone is killed unjustly, We have given his

next of kin certain authority. But he should not be excessive in killing, for he will be supported.

It is always being ascertained that Islam is a holistic religion dealing with all facet of life and is bound on every Muslim to encourage any necessary acts that will enhance peaceful and meaningful co-existence of a given society.

CONCLUSION

The paper had earlier noted that in spite of the vigorous efforts being made across the divides towards dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, it hardly seems to bring the desirable peace, understanding and harmony it deserves. On the whole, interfaith dialogue, which is also an inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims, is so important that cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.

The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. We appreciate that global concern over Muslims and Christian's tensions and violence and the desire for dialogue is being stressed now more than ever before to address the issues causing this growing division. The fact that Muslims and Christians make up over 50-60% of the world's population makes dialogue and cooperation even more imperative. Therefore, there is a sense of urgency, a need to build upon the good relations that we have, and to provide an example of understanding, trust and cooperation that can be followed by Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Dialogue is of great importance as it makes a major contribution in helping to create an integrated and cohesive community at ease with diversity and secure in a sense of common purpose. But are we succeeding? To me, it has been dialogue without communication where



people pretend to bury their differences for progress to be archived.

This means we need to explore more creative and resort to active the forms of dialogue earlier presented above, more robust means of communication across religions and cultures is needed. Such inter-faith gathering here is perhaps one avenue.

The question however is how much communication takes place in such interfaith dialogues in such nice but often closed environments, where like a meeting of in-laws, everybody is eager to be nice to the other? Apart from that, the caliber of people that attend such meetings in Nigeria and elsewhere are the least of the problem. People conducting interfaith dialogue must ensure that they take into consideration the religious, cultural and ideological peculiarities of the people they are communicating with; otherwise the challenges can't be subsumed.

Frank and constant communication breaks down barriers, challenges and stereotypes and builds confidence across the wider society. Dialogues must go beyond mere demonstration of half-hearted handshakes and exchanges among elite groups anchored in conferences and Round Tables, towards the true and frank teachings of Islam and Christianity where real word of love, peace, understanding, co-operation with one another and where human beings are being human should be the basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. A change in approach to social services: Librarians should take library services beyond the walls of the library through corporate and social responsibilities. Librarians must change their approach and begin to see library services

as not restricted to the walls of the library. Ensuring sustainable delivery of inter-religious dialogue campaign will help in changing the low perception about libraries and librarians in the society.

ii. Than just coming every day and talking about dialogue, there is every need to consider the forms of dialogues discussed above, particularly dialogue by action let those things be put to reality, than just mere words.

iii. Review of library science curriculum: It is imperative that library science curriculum should be intensively reviewed to include courses centered on social services, community services and corporate social responsibilities. It is believed that if this is done, it will help in educating the upcoming generation the need for peaceful co-existence.

iv. Establishment of centres for inter-religious dialogue initiatives (CIDI): Libraries and information science practitioners can liaise with other stakeholders in the information service industry and allied sectors to establish Centres for Inter-Religious Dialogue Initiative (CIDI). This can be achieved through sustainable collaboration with stakeholder such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, educationist, and ministry of education among others.

v. Religious studies should be introduced into the curriculum, and should be offered as a compulsory course (GSS) in all Nigeria higher institution of learning. To inculcate religious moral, in the society, to up root this evil seed of discord that is planted in the society.

vi. Muslim and Christian should celebrate each other, during festive period, like Ramadan, Christians. A good example is what the CAN chairman of Kaduna did on 8/5/2021, he distributed; cloths and food items to the IDP



Muslim community during the Ramadan fasting. Likewise Muslim should do same.

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