INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Editorial

A historic event took place in Abuja in June 2003 when the World Conference of Religion for Peace (WCRP) convened a meeting to inaugurate an African Council of Religious Leaders. In his opening address on this occasion, the Most Rev. (Dr.) John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, referred to the deep religious instincts of the Africans as an asset that could be channelled towards the attainment of peace and prosperity for the African peoples. Earlier in September 1999 another landmark action for inter-religious dialogue was undertaken by the Nigerian Church leaders with the formation of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council whose objectives include, among other things, the promotion of dialogue between Christians and Moslems and a better understanding of the two religions.

These developments underscore the awareness not only in Africa, but in the world at large that the religions hold exceptional spiritual, moral and social trump cards for the alleviation of the problems facing the human family and for the accomplishment of the common good.

They are also a direct consequence of the events of September 11th 2001 and the impending “clash of civilizations.” The rising wave of religious intolerance and fundamentalism and the attendant violent religious uprisings all over the globe challenge all of us to sincerely and courageously reflect on the issues of religious freedom, minority rights, communal tensions, co-citizenship and religion and state.

In Nigeria, a country with the world’s largest Islama-Christian population, there is simply no alternative to religious dialogue. Christians and Moslems must learn to live together in peace and harmony and the recent religious riots in Kaduna, Kano and Jos where churches and mosques were burnt down and hundreds of Christians and Moslems lost their lives show that religious violence brings no advantage to any religious group.

Religious freedom and tolerance did not fall from heaven: they are the results of an age-long struggle. Christians today may be
more disposed to religious tolerance, but the inquisition and the crusades of centuries ago tell a different story. The Islamic Jihads and the fact that Mohammed was the only military commander among the founders of the world’s great religions, may point to the violent history of Islam. But, Islamic leaders and their followers have for long advocated the path of peaceful co-existence with non-Moslems.

In spite of their apparent differences, both Christians and Moslems have the same fundamental beliefs, the same spiritual and moral aspirations, preach the love of the neighbour and, above all, abhor violence. All it takes to achieve the desired peace is better understanding of the aspirations of the various religious groups and the appreciation of their fears and anxieties. On the one hand, the Moslems in Nigeria may be justified in their anger over the Christian tendency to embrace destructive liberal views and secular and modernist thinking, but on the other, they must convince the Christians that their vision of Islamic society offers a life of dignity and equality in responsible citizenship to non-Muslim minorities.

The volume of the Bulletin is devoted to the issue of religious dialogue as a contribution to the on-going discussion on the use of religion as an agent of peace and for the transformation of society. The contributors have presented their arguments from the perspective of lived experiences as victims of religions intolerance and violence and from the perspective of experts involved in religious discourse.

The special feature deals with the AIDS/HIV pandemic, arguably the greatest danger ravaging the African continent besides religious violence and civil wars. The author calls on University teachers and the lay public who exercise influence over the youth to wake up to the challenges of the pandemic in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Church for the lay apostolate in the Christian communities.

Nicholas Omenka
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS A TOOL FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF NORTHERN NIGERIA

By

Peter Tanko
(Director, Justice and Peace, Kaduna Diocese, Nigeria)

Introduction

When I got the invitation to present a paper at this occasion, there was a note attached. The note gave me the liberty to adjust the topic to my own taste. I was, however, told to bear in mind, the general theme for the conference and tailor my thoughts toward that.

I was requested to write on Religious Movement in Nigeria, from 1903 – 2003. Since my library, office and house were looted, vandalized and set ablaze on the 21st November 2002 by Muslim Youths, my initial response to the invitation was negative. This was because I wondered where I would get the material to put a paper together. I did some consultation and I was eventually persuaded to accept the invitation and present what was simply within my own competence.

I have therefore decided to talk on “Inter-Religious Dialogue as a tool for the transformation of Northern Nigeria.” This, to me, is a *sine qua non*, if we must make any headway in the transformation of Northern Nigeria, where issues bothering on religion are threats to our growth and to our nascent democracy.

Wherever the politics of monopoly and exclusion exists, nearly all form of participation and sense of belonging by the excluded are destroyed. This type of politics leads to the personalization of power by those who wield it. Such a political atmosphere forces the excluded to retreat to their ethnic, religious, and sectional cocoons, and to emphasize primordial interests and loyalties as the basis for their social and political mobility. In a democracy, these primordial interests and loyalties immediately register themselves in the political spectrum. This explains in part, why the religious
Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Transformation of Northern Nigeria

Primordial platform of organization and expression seems to be dominant in the northern part of the country. This also explains in part, why we have continued to witness repeated violence in the north – for, the politics of monopoly and exclusion breed’s poverty and resentment.

Some countries as we shall see, have been able to successfully use religion for the mobilization of civil society towards the transformation of their societies. In a way, the religious homogeneity of such societies or a rainbow of values such as justice, equality, respect for life and human dignity which cuts across religion and cultures accounted for their successes.

In Northern Nigeria where the population of Christians and Muslims is nearly even, it becomes difficult to talk about the transformation of the north through the effort of members of one religion, to the exclusion of the other. This is so, given the socio-economic and political leanings of the members of both religions and given the fact that some indigenes of Sokoto and Zangari Dafataf have embraced Christianity and Islam respectively.

I wish to propose that inter-religious dialogue towards the transformation of the north should be given serious consideration. The Nigerian Inter-religious Council, which I shall talk about, has therefore taken a step in the right direction. However, more needs to be done.

Inter-religious dialogue could take different forms. For example, the dialogue of specialists could be based on the theologies of the different religions and we can call that “dialogue at the theological level,” where the exchange of ideas and clarifications of concepts such as love, justice, equality, the common good etc could be studied and the results disseminated to what we call the masses.

I wish to start by asking the question where are we coming from and where are we? Then, I will take a look at religion as an instrument for the mobilization of people for a cause, drawing examples from other lands. Are there lessons to be learnt from these lands? What led to the success of such movements? Can inter-religious dialogue in our case, promote our movement towards the transformation of Nigeria and especially the north? I will try to bring out the basic principles for inter-religious
dialogue—especially from a Catholic perspective. Finally, I will share my experiences as a member of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), which has made me more convinced that Christians and Muslims need to work closely on social and other issues.

**Where are We coming from and Where are We?**

Religion has been described as a set of rituals through which human beings relate with a higher being. The word comes from the Latin word *religare*, which means, “to bind”. It implies that the human person is bound to his/her creator. How this relationship with the creator is expressed by people in their cultures differs in most cases. Religion, as we are aware, has been an emotive issue in history over which lives and property have been lost.

When Islam and Christianity arrived Nigeria they sought, as has been claimed, to assert themselves by dislodging the traditional religions of the communities with which they interacted by offering their people new gods as a basis of moral legitimation.

In their search for converts, the relationship between some families and members of some communities became conflictual. Some communities used these conversions as building blocks to assert their hegemony over other communities. Tesemchi Makar is of the opinion that in Northern Nigeria, conversion to Christianity was an attractive option for some of the many minority ethnic groups which had experienced tribulations in the hands of what some people saw as Hausa/Fulani colonialism and imperialism during and after the Jihad.

From which ever angle one chooses to look at it, it is impossible to talk about politics or the religious dimension which politics has assumed in Nigeria without taking into consideration the part played by the North in weaving the politico-economic and religious strands that hold the country together especially since its independence. The North is the focal point of Nigerian politics, whether one defines it in terms of North/South political intrigues or on the basis of Islam and Christianity. Even in what is today called the “North,” there is what one may call “the far North” or “Upper...
For Mrs. Ladi Shehu, a political activist, “People from the Upper North were okay, they were proper Northerners, and if you were a Muslim, well, that improves your position. But if you were from the Middle Belt, you were considered another class of Northerner”. The Middle Belt of Nigeria with its clusters of Christians and “African Traditional Religionists” had gradually become an important nexus to the geopolitical calculation of the ruling class in the North and of politicians in the South. The Muslims in the far North laid claim to the Middle Belt on the basis of geographical contiguity while the Southern Christians laid claims to it on the basis of religious sameness. However, the truth of the situation is that the image of the North as a “united North” is a mirage.

The basis for the establishment of the Caliphate in Northern Nigeria was to promote the hegemony of the Ruling Class prefixed on the veneer of the Islamic religion. The Jihad (Islamic Holy War) of Usman Dan Fodio accelerated the establishment of the Fulani ethnic group and its hegemony over Hausa land in the Northern part of Nigeria. By the time the British left Nigeria, they had set out scions of the ruling classes in Northern Nigeria and this set the machinery for the emergence of a Hausa-Fulani hegemony. When self-government for Northern Nigeria was declared, the celebrations were held in Sokoto rather than in Kaduna, which was the regional capital. The date chosen for the celebration was the anniversary of the conquest of Sokoto, while the date for the national independence of the country coincided with the anniversary of the formal declaration of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) as the official political party for Northern Nigeria.

The impression that was thus created, was that since the NPC was declared as a political party for the North on the anniversary of the national independence of the country, the Hausa-Fulani saw it as a sign that Dan Fodio’s legacy was to remain the reference point of Nigerian polity and his legatees forever the rulers of the Nigerian nation. It is no wonder then that Nigerian politics, especially since independence, has been a consistent effort to preserve this heritage using religion as a scaffold to climb to political power and lord it over those who are outside the Hausa-
Fulani hegemonic blood line and those outside the embrace of the Islamic religion.

Western education was nothing to write home about in the north, compared to the southern part of the country. In the early days of the history of northern Nigeria, *Koranic Schools* were more prevalent while Western education was viewed with suspicion. Dan Agbese, a renowned Nigerian journalist, observed that if the Sardauna of Sokoto had the chance, he would have outlawed Western education in the Northern and even Western parts of Nigeria and promoted Koranic education instead.  

“After all”, said Billy Dudley, “Among the Muslim Ruling Class in Nigeria, it was felt that a line of Arabic in an article, a quotation from a Hadith, or even from a Muslim Sheikh (Arabic scholar), was more effective than any amount of “Western” logic in convincing any Hausa Muslim that the writer’s opinions were sound.”  

It followed that to ensure that they remained in the corridors of power, the Ruling Class evolved a means of political power on the platform of religion in order to compensate for what they lacked through western education.

The Ruling Class persistently kept warding off any attempt at interfering with what it considered its exclusive territory. It dismissed non-Muslims and those from the southern part of the country who were mostly Christians as *Kafirai* (Unbelievers).

As the oppression and the suppression of the Minority Ethnic Groups in the north by the Ruling Class continued to become unbearable, a group, which called itself “the Discussion Circle” emerged. This group was made up of representatives of all the major cities of northern Nigeria. Their composition and the politico-economic and religious issues they raised irked the various emirs that had been imposed on the different ethnic groups by the Ruling Class. The emirs saw this group as bent on destroying their balance of power and economic security. The members of this group most of whom were “commoners” and thus outside the Hausa-Fulani hegemonic embrace, denounced the emirs as bastions of injustice. Frightened by the upsurge and challenge posed by this group, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, though a commoner, but
bolstered by an acquired status, blamed modern politics, and indirectly the group in question, by observing that:

*In pre-British days, it was impossible for a commoner to attack a “natural” ruler directly... now you find even some illiterate people who, for one reason or the other were trained by some evil people not to respect authority... I will even go so far as to say, not to respect religion.*

In 1958, the “Minority’s Commission” was set up ostensibly to collect and collate the grievances of the minorities in the wake of independence. In the north, despite the well argued cases of the non-Muslims against all sorts of discrimination, ranging from various restrictions imposed on Christians such as denial of land to build Churches, restrictions in the circulation of Christian literature, freedom of worship, association and so on, degrading treatment against traditional rulers who were not Muslims and other forms of cultural domination, the commission argued that it had satisfied itself that the grievances of the non-Muslims would be dealt with only within a united North. The Commission’s findings were unrealistic, mainly because they failed to face up to the challenge, which the minorities and southern politicians articulated. The conclusion arrived at by the Commission was no doubt a political eyesore for, by refusing to deal with the problems that had been raised, it not only bottled up the collective frustrations of the minorities, it indeed institutionalised the perceived superiority of the Ruling Class in the region and thus postponed the day of reckoning for the regions. An elated Sardauna noted that neither he nor any of his political cohorts “...has reason to complain about the findings of the Commission.” As time went on, the agitation by the minorities died down into a few infrequent rumblings on the horizons of the Tiv Division and the Beroms of the High Plateau. All this was only a temporary suppression of a mounting lava of frustrations that was bound to explode some day.

The incursions of the military into the political arena further added fuel to these bottled up frustrations. The Buhari and Idiagbong administration (1984-1985) ensured that “Islamic Personal Law” was amended in the 1979 Constitution to “Sharia Law.” Babangida (1985-

The religious factor in the Hausa-Fulani hegemony is the bedrock of the Caliphate as I pointed out earlier. The political significance of the religious factor is paramount. Hassan M. Kukah observed, “the realization of its potency led the ruling elite to cast political opposition in religious terms as departing from God”.

Dudley quoted a saying to bolster this point: “the hand of God is on the community and he who set himself apart from it will be apart in hell fire. He who departs from the community by a handspan, ceases to be a Muslim.”

When the NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union) went into alliance with the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon), which was a southern political party, the Ruling Class saw the members of the NEPU as those who had sold out on their religion. Hiskett in his “History of Hausa” quotes the words of a composer to underscore this point:

\[
O \text{ God, cause Islam to suppress the unbelievers [obviously a reference to non Muslims]. That our children and grand children may preserve their self-respect... God’s hypocrites, their lying has ended, northerners, forestall southerners at heart. Allah (God) for the sake of the Koran makes the NPC supreme...}
\]

The Southerners were seen by the northern Ruling Class as identifiable enemies not only because they were southerners but because they were non-Muslims. The Christians in the north, especially in the Middle Belt, were seen as “Southerners” at heart, dressed in Northern “sheep’s clothing” and were thus targets for the political oppressive machinations of the Ruling Class. On this score, the Ruling Class has been using state apparatus to coerce non-Muslims and non-Fulanis.

The gimmick of the ritualistic initiations of the minority elites into the NPC such as Jolly Tanko Yusuf, Rev. David Lot, Peter
Achimugu, George Ohikere, the chiefs of Jos and Kagoro, the Tor Tiv and a few others, gave the erroneous impression that the north was One North, One People. But the campaign to transform northern Nigeria into a new entity of a Caliphate sought to translate the polity from the NPC’s One North, One People, irrespective of religion, into One North, One People, One Religion. With millions of dollars pouring in from the Arab world for the promotion of Islam in Nigeria, the political and economic costs of this for the non-Muslims in northern Nigeria is difficult to quantify.

In 1962, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, became very active in the meeting of world Muslim leaders. One of those meetings was held in the Royal Palace in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At this meeting, the leaders of Saudi Arabia encouraged spiritual and temporal cooperation among Muslims all over the world, to ensure that the teachings laid down in the Holy Qur’an should be strictly adhered to. They also hoped for the opportunity to hold further meetings in order to foster closer cooperation between Heads of Muslim States. The first person to speak at this meeting was His Excellency, the Premier of Northern Nigeria in the person of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. In his speech, he pointed out that they (Muslim Heads of State) should forget their differences, avoid suspicion and work for the common good of our brother Muslims. He further expressed his hope that His Majesty King Saud, “will visit Muslim countries on the West coast of Africa and... if I may say, this may be regarded as an invitation from my country, Northern Nigeria.”

When Sardauna was made the Vice President of the World Muslim League or Congress, he addressed this body making spurious claims to the effect that “… I have by the grace of Allah been able to convert some 60,000 non-Muslims in my region to Islam within a period of five months… throughout the region, there are over a million Koranic schools scattered about in every corner of town and villages.... I would like to say that this is only the
beginning as there are other areas we have not yet tapped. I hope that when we claim Nigeria, we will go further afield in Africa.”

The impact and challenge of the Sardauna’s statements on Christians in Nigeria awakened in the minds of most Christians the desire to defend their faith and hastened the desire for Christian unity. Major General Joseph Garba (rtd.), a military officer, later recalled that “the Sardauna’s rule had indeed become oppressive...paradoxically because of his preoccupation with the spiritual rather than temporal affairs.”

The Sardauna’s rule was terminated in 1966 in a military coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. For the brevity of this paper, I do not intend to go into an analysis of the events that led to the coup and the subsequent civil war. These have been well documented. The coup and the civil war did not paralyse the power of the Ruling Class as some had thought it would. The ruling class kept on scheming and plotting their political and religious interests under the canopy of Northern interests. These schemings matured with the bringing together of the representatives of the three political power blocs in northern Nigeria to tour the North as a symbol of northern solidarity and as evidence that the north was one and united. The three power blocs were the NPC with Aliyu Makaman Bidda as its leader, the NEPU with Alhaji Aminu Kano as its leader, and the UMBC with Mr. Joseph Tarka as its leader. Thus, like the proverbial Phoenix, the north sprang to life from it ashes.

With the Creation of States during the reign of Yakubu Gowon, the non-Muslims perceived a declaration of independence from the clutches of the Hausa-Fulani hegemonic ruling class. By the time Gowon was overthrown in a coup in 1975 and the governor of Benue Plateau, Joseph Gomwalk killed in 1976, Benue Plateau State had become a symbol of the aspirations of the non-Muslim peoples of the Middle Belt and at the same time a threat to the Ruling Class. It will be recalled that with the flow of money from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, the Sardauna had set up
the JNI as an all purpose umbrella for the channelling and financing of the building of Koranic schools to oversee the propagation and practice of the Islamic religion.\textsuperscript{26} The Christians, seeing the writing on the wall and the signs of the times, reacted by forming their own organization to shield their adherents from the impact of the Islamic campaigns for conversion and to articulate their grievances through this medium.

All that I have said, though not all could be said, probably led to the concept of the manipulation of religion advanced by Dr. Bala Usman.\textsuperscript{27} Bala Usman basically tried to make the point that Nigeria’s progress has been marred by certain individuals and interest groups who have taken recourse to the systematic deployment of religious sentiments by which group antagonisms along religious lines are constantly played out. According to the logic of his argument, the sporadic riots we have been witnessing especially in the northern part of Nigeria are, simply put, the external manifestations or expressions of these invisible hands of manipulation. Kukah has noted that those who engage in this manipulation do so to cover up their lack of a political base and that they neither love their religion nor the people whom they arm to defend these religions. In the end, he claims, it is their personal and class interests that they seek to defend.\textsuperscript{28}

This is where we are, for now. Be that as it may, let me turn to how religion has been used elsewhere in a more positive sense.

**Religion as an Instrument of Nation-Building**

Pope St. Gregory, while talking about religious leaders, once said:

* A religious leader should be careful in deciding when to remain silent and be sure to say something useful when deciding to speak. In this way, he would avoid saying things that would better not be said, or leaving unsaid things that ought to be said....Ill advised silence can leave people in error when they could have been shown where they were wrong. Negligent
religious leaders are often afraid to speak and say what needs to be said for fear of losing favour with people... They are acting like hirelings, because hiding behind the wall of silence is like taking flight at the approach of the wolf. If a religious leader is afraid to say what is right, what else can his silence mean but that he has taken flight? Whereas, if he stands firm in defence of his flock, he is building up a wall for the house against its enemies....

One of our major problems in Nigeria has been the unguarded statements of religious leaders though sometimes, some of them do say something useful. Since the adherents of Christianity and Islam tend to swallow what comes from their religious leaders without questioning, it becomes imperative that religious leaders should be extra careful about their utterances. In Nigeria, religious leaders such as Archbishop Anthony Okojie of Lagos, the late Sheik Abubakar Gumi, Most Rev. Dr. Sunday Mbang, El-Zakzaky and the likes, have made statements that have been open to misinterpretation, depending on who is interpreting the statement(s). However, let us take a look at how religion has been used elsewhere as a tool for the transformation of societies. The details of the examples I am about to present have already been documented.

**Pope John Paul II and the Transformation of Poland**

Pope John Paul II suffered immensely under communist rule in his country, Poland, before becoming a Pope. He knew the pains, the injustice, and the oppression, which his people were going through.

The early conquerors of Poland were the Prussians and the Russians. They belonged to two different Christian denominations (Protestant and Orthodox). The Polish people were Catholic and they maintained their religious identity despite efforts by their conquerors to persuade them to embrace either Protestantism or Orthodoxy. Since many Catholic Priests and Bishops became
involved in the struggle to liberate the people from their conquerors, Catholicism came to have a more special place in the newly independent Poland and Poland wound up being almost religiously homogenous. The role of the Catholic Church in Poland was that of an agent of social consciousness, moral purification and political transformation. There was no ambivalence in playing this role.

When Pope John Paul II visited Poland in 1979, the preparations for his visit were done almost entirely without the official help of state agencies. The success of the visit deepened the confidence of the organizers in its own organizational skills and they recognized that they had the potential for establishing extensive non-official networks of communication. As they became more confident of themselves, a movement by workers known as “Solidarity” started, thanks to the support of the Pope. The movement was a movement for justice and freedom, led by Lech Walesa. They decided that they were not going to live in the past, that they were not going to flounder in misery and regret, and that they were going to face the future and transform Poland into a country where justice, equality and peace will reign. The struggle gained international attention when Walesa visited the Pope and came back to Poland to tell the workers that the Pope had given his blessings to the struggle against injustice and oppression. The struggle led to the establishment of an independent trade union. Solidarity became the Trojan horse of Catholic resistance to communism in Poland with the support of the Catholic hierarchy. The Polish Bishops issued Pastoral letters denouncing injustice and appealing to those in power to respect the dignity of every human person and to ensure that conditions of social life are created to enable the people feel that they are the masters of their own land, given to them by the father of all peoples.

In 1984, precisely on October 19th, the Polish State Security Agents kidnapped and murdered Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko who was an activist. His death only added an extra impetus to the struggle,
which climaxed in 1989 with the overthrow of the communist regime. Other countries within the communist bloc were to follow in ensuring that communism was brought to its knees.

The success of “Solidarity” was as a result of many factors. Some of these factors include: the faith of the Polish people in the Catholic church; a deep sense of Polish nationalism, anchored on human dignity; a strong sense of communitarian and industrial justice; a feeling of spiritual oneness and identity; the primacy of society over the state; the supremacy of law and respect for life. These and many other factors, bound them together until freedom and independence was secured.

**South Africa**

The Dutch arrived South Africa around 1632 and eventually took over the land. And for over 300 years, the blacks in South Africa were reduced to hewers of wood and drawers of water. Among the Dutch, were Christian leaders who found justification in their oppressive acts by twisting the teachings of Scripture and claiming that God had ordained them to lord it over the Blacks. It was an oppressive ideology, based on a crass theology. But no matter how long it takes for evil to thrive, the day of reckoning will always come.

Religious leaders such as Trevor Huddlestone, Denis Hurley, Archbishop Naidoo, Alan Paton etc, struggled for the liberation of the people through their sermons, pastoral letters and visits to the powers that be. The expression of black power in the United States by the civil rights movement led by the late Martin Luther King, led to an awakening of black consciousness in South Africa. Black power in the United States saw the white man’s culture as a culture skewed towards the manipulation of the Christian message to suit their hegemonic stranglehold on the black world. It stressed that unless the black folk rediscovers him/herself, he/she was doomed to remain oppressed.
Steve Bantu Biko was one of those who decided to awaken the blacks to the reality of their situation when he founded the Black Consciousness Movement. Alan Boesak’s book *Farewell to Innocence* questioned, among other things, the role of the Churches in the liberation of their people. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape Town, took the bull by the horns, by openly condemning the authorities of the apartheid regime who were promoting oppression and injustices against the blacks. He called for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and other prisoners. Funerals of those who were being killed were used as opportunities to call on people of good will to denounce apartheid.

On the 19th February 1988, about 150 church men and women marched on the street to protest the evil of apartheid and when they came face to face with the police, they knelt down and started praying and singing. All of these attracted international attention.

Many parties, and Trade Unions were formed to fight against the apartheid system and they found support though the Churches. Eventually, on February 11th 1990, Nelson Mandela walked out of Poolsmoor prison as a free man after 27 years in prison. He later became the first democratically elected President of South Africa. We are told that he spent his first night out of prison sleeping at Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s house. This was symbolic because while in prison, he knew the role which religion was playing in the transformation of South Africa.

It is important to note that Islam played its role in the struggle for freedom in South Africa. The book by Farid Esack, *Quran Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective to Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, tried to show how a radical Islam developed its own type of response to the liberation struggle. He sees inter-religious solidarity as a potent tool for the transformation of a society from its vices.
Algeria
The French conquered Algeria in 1830 and like the Dutch in South Africa, they tried to populate Algeria with its citizens. The indigenous people suffered untold hardship under the French. They were denied their rights. They were treated as underdogs and were considered as slaves.

In the 1950s, Algerians under the Front de Liberation National (FNL) started the struggle to regain their land and freedom from the indignities they were going through. There was war and before the French agreed to a cease-fire, about one million of the indigenous Muslim population had been killed.

On July 3rd 1962, Algeria became an independent nation after years of struggle. Many citizens had been arrested, tortured, detained without trial before independence. The struggle was anchored on religion and all that Algerians wanted was an independent Algeria where they can practice their religion without hindrance. Religion was therefore used to mobilize Algerians against the perceived injustices of the French.

It should be noted that when president Chadli Ben Djedid allowed the registration of Political parties in Algeria over fifty of such parties where registered. The registration of these Associations, led to the struggle for power between the associations, leading to competition over power and deaths. Unless love, justice, human dignity etc. are enthroned in Algeria, democracy and Islam will remain as the casualties.

More examples on how religion can be used for the transformation and mobilization of people could be found in Iran, Iraq and the Philippines. In the Philippine for example, Marcos was overthrown by civil society, led by Cardinal Sin.

There is no doubt that in many places where there is some socio-political crises, religion has tended to be a potent factor in mobilizing people towards the transformation of the society. In Nigeria it has not been possible to blend the positive aspects of Christianity and Islam into a force that can ensure the
transformation of the Nigerian state. All that the two religions need is the willingness by the leadership of both religions to begin to dialogue on issues that affect their adherents. This initiative appears to me to be underway as we shall see from the formation of the Nigeria Inter-religious council. Aware of the importance of dialogue as a tool for the transformation of a society, let me turn to inter-religious dialogue and why Muslims and Christians need to dialogue towards the transformation of Northern Nigeria.

**Inter-Religious Dialogue**

*What is Inter-Religious Dialogue?*

*Dialogue* is a word that is often misunderstood and, in some cases, even held suspect. 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. 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.” The purpose of dialogue is attempting or trying to understand one another with a view to dissolving suspicions and prejudices and thus, paving the way for collaboration and mutual respect.

We must note that dialogue is not an easy exercise. 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. Dialogue is therefore the way to mutual understanding. Having said this let me try to explain inter-religious dialogue.

*Inter-religious dialogue* is that part of dialogue which concerns
itself with two persons or groups of different religions. As religiously committed persons or groups, they come together to dialogue with the purpose of enriching, deepening and broadening their own religious life through the mutual understanding of one another's convictions and witness. It is a meeting of hearts and minds between followers of different religions. It is a walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern. It is a religious partnership without complexes and without hidden agendas or motives. It is a relationship at the deepest level that involves all that is human since all men and women form one community from the one stock that God created (cf. Acts 17:26), since all share a common destiny in God. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore concerned with a common witness to God. Each partner thus desires to communicate to the other what is specific and personal in his or her own religious experience, and desires to hear from the other his or her authentic religious experience with respect and sympathy. It is also a dialogue of love, for, where there is no love of God, there can be no inter-religious dialogue. It is this love, which is involved in the dialogue that brings together people of different religious convictions into a meaningful personal relationship. In this relationship it is possible that conversion can take place even though it is not the aim of inter-religious dialogue. On this note, Cardinal F. Arinze, former President of the Secretariat for non-Christian Religions, remarked that:

While interreligious dialogue should never be opposed to conversion, it is necessary to say that dialogue is not the same as the effort to get the interlocutor to be convinced of one's own faith and to persuade him to change his religion. Dialogue does not aim at a conversion in the sense of a change of religious allegiance, but conversion understood as a greater readiness to do God's will, should be one of the aims and fruits of sincere interreligious dialogue. This is another way of saying that every
participant in such dialogue, be he Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist or otherwise, should, through such spiritual meeting with other believers, make greater progress in movement towards God, be more sincere in the search for truth, become more open to divine action, and therefore become more receptive to God’s saving action.\textsuperscript{35}

Inter-religious dialogue does not concern itself with the effort of trying to unite several religions into one in an attempt to compromise on a common denominator acceptable to all. This will be the error of syncretism which is an attempt or an effort to produce a compromise faith. To be fruitful, inter-religious dialogue presupposes that the participant should possess such mental attitudes as respect, listening, sincerity, openness and willingness to receive and work with others. This dialogue presumes that freedom of religion exists, so that individuals can be free to compare their religion with that of others, discuss them in a free atmosphere for mutual enrichment and also to change one’s religion if the person is really convinced that it is God’s will.\textsuperscript{36}

In inter-religious dialogue, the right of everyone to practice their religion should be left intact and unchallenged. It will be out of place for participants in inter-religious dialogue to even temporarily suspend their religious belief. The Second Vatican Council declares that:

\textit{The human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others.}\textsuperscript{37}

From the foregoing, inter-religious dialogue is completely against any coercion to conversion and should be undertaken in a spirit of love and respect for the dignity of the human person.
The Bases for Inter-Religious Dialogue

We can point to three main bases for inter-religious dialogue. These include the unity of the human race, the relation of all human beings to Christ and the universal motivation or human inclination towards God. We shall now examine each and see how each contributes to inter-religious dialogue.

Unity of the human Race

From a Christian perspective, this unity lies in the fact that the entire human family has only one origin—God who is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the mystery of the Most Bless Trinity. Every human being bears in himself or herself something of the divine image of God and is created for the same final goal, which is God himself. The Vatican Council makes this point clear by declaring that:

... all peoples comprise a single community and have a single origin, since God made the whole of men dwell over the entire face of the earth (Cf. Acts 17:26). One also is their final goal: God, His providence, his manifestation of goodness and his saving design extend to all men.38

To further confirm this statement; Pope John Paul II observed that “…there is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world, one single origin and goal... the difference are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive.”39 This unity of the human family is rooted in the spiritual because only the spiritual is the true basis of unity.

Relation of all human Beings to Christ

The Second Vatican Council speaks of Christ as the new man. It declares,
In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (Cf. Rm. 5:14), Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam... by his incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man... Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.40

From the above statement, it is in Christ that people find the fullness of their religious life. It is in him that God has reconciled all things to himself (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:8-19). God wants all men and women to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man (Cf. 1Tim. 2:4-6). He is the only Saviour of all humankind (cf. Jn 4:42). For,

All human beings are included in the great and unique design of God in Jesus Christ, even when they are not aware of it. Through the Holy Spirit the mystery of Christ can be operatively present even in the lives of those who are not Christians, who love other religions and who are not conscious of this link with Christ. All human beings are related to Christ not only as individuals but also with the best of their cultural and religious values.41

Universal Orientation towards God

The soul of every individual is always in search of the divine. This general or universal orientation summons all people to inter-religious dialogue. The Second Vatican Council puts it this way:

All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God, a unity which is a harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all men are called to salvation by the grace of God.42
Nothing less than God can satisfy the human soul for it was made for God. The Holy Spirit, in ways we may not know, moves the human soul in this search and towards contact with the Church. The Holy Spirit also works “outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body”. The Spirit both anticipates and accompanies the path of the Church, which nevertheless feels itself impelled to discern the signs of His presence, to follow Him wherever He leads and to serve Him as a humble and discreet collaborator.

**The Bases For Dialogue Between Christians And Muslim**

Christianity and Islam have a lot in common in the area of belief. Let us first note that the Prophet Mohammad grew up among Arab Christians. If history is anything to go by, we are told that Christian monks were the ones who gave him some of the tunics he wore in his youth. When the followers of Mohammad were attacked in Mecca, it was to Christians that they fled in Abyssinia. The Abyssinian Christians protected them and allowed them to practice their religion without molestation. It is probably in appreciation of this friendly gesture that Sura 5: 85 of the Qur’an says: “You will find the most affectionate friends will be those who say ‘we are Christians’.”

Now, turning to the areas of belief, Christians and Muslims share many things in common. For example:

**Abraham:** Jesus and Mohammad all trace their ancestry to Abraham. This means that Jesus and Mohammad were brothers. Consequently, Christians and Muslims should see each other as brothers and sisters. The Christians call Abraham “Our father in the Faith”. The Muslims see him as “The first Muslim”, that is, the first to demonstrate total submission to God, unconditional surrender to God’s will, which constitutes the essence of Islam.

**God:** Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions. They teach that there is only one God and He alone should be
worshipped. Both religions stress God’s compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. The Qur’an emphasizes the fact that men should rely on the grace and mercy of God for these are better than worldly riches (Sura 10:53). In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 2-32), the Christian Bible makes the same point, namely, God’s infinite mercy and readiness to forgive.

The two religions also teach the transcendence of God and at the same time his immanence. He is all Knowing, Almighty, all Seeing, Just, Infinitely good, Unique, supreme without an equal. The two religions believe in the Holy Spirit (Qur’an Sura 2:81 & Luke 1:35).

If both Christians and Muslims believe that this one God is merciful and forgiving and we find ourselves unable to forgive each other whatever hurt we have caused to ourselves in the past and forge ahead as brothers and sisters, something is deeply wrong with us.

Jesus Christ: The Bible and the Qur’an both talk of Jesus as one who was sent to mankind by God and that He was conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit (see Qur’an Sura 19 & Luke 1:26-38). Sura 21 is more specific for it says in part, “We breathed into her (Mary who was chaste of our Spirit, and we made her and her Son (Jesus) a sign to the world.” The Qur’an in Sura 4:19; 2:81; 3:48 further says that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was fortified with the Holy Spirit and that at the end of His earthly life He was taken up to Heaven.

The Virgin Mary: The Bible and the Qur’an hold the Virgin Mary in high esteem. She is seen as virgin. The Qur’an says that when the Angel Gabriel who was sent to her by God, told her that she would give birth to a Son, she exclaimed: “How shall I bear a child when I am a virgin, untouched by man?” When the angel confirmed to her that God could make what seems impossible, possible, the Qur’an notes, “Such is the will of your Lord... that is no difficult thing for him. He shall be a sign to mankind and a
blessing from ourselves. This is our decree”. (Sura 19:12-22). The Bible says the same in Luke 2:6-38.

Angels and Devils: Both Islam and Christianity believe in the existence of angels and devils. In fact, it is claimed that Angel Gabriel was the one who dictated the content of the Qur’an to Mohammad. The same angel is the one who announced the virgin birth of Jesus.⁴⁸

Day of Judgment, Heaven, Hell and the Resurrection: Christianity and Islam both believe that all people will be judged on the last day and the good ones who did the will of God will go to Heaven while those who did not, will go to Hell fire. On this Day of Judgment the two religions believe that all will rise and come before God to be judged.

Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Pilgrimage: Both religions emphasize the importance of all these as necessary ingredients for salvation. Each of these religions sets a special day a week for communal prayers even though these are done even during the other days of the week. Both religions set aside periods for fasting (Ramadan for the Muslims and Lent for the Christians). Both religions encourage almsgiving and pilgrimages to their respectful Holy Places.

Morality: Islam and Christianity preach love of neighbour. The two religions abhor violence, hatred and the killing of one’s fellow human being. Both religions teach that God hates injustice, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, stealing, corruption etc. They further emphasize that God will punish those who commit such atrocities. The two religions encourage charity to the poor, care of windows, orphans, and the weak.

Individual Salvation: Both Islam and Christianity teach that anyone who follows Gods Law and submits to His will be saved and rewarded on the day of judgment (Sura 2:62).

Islam and Christianity as we can see from the above, share many things in common. We have tended to de-emphasize these
similarities for political and socio-economic reasons and this has been our undoing in the northern part of Nigeria. Certainly, our relationship as Christians and Muslims could be better and we could be more tolerant of each other and work and walk in peace.

**Aims of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Christian-Muslim dialogue should always aim at providing a positive alternative to destructive violence especially in situations of tension and strife. For instance, the situation in Lebanon, the Philippines (Mindanao), the Arab world and in Nigeria calls for dialogue if people must be in peace with one another.

Tension between religions normally occurs where one or the other community lives as a minority group in which societal and political life is dominated by the other. In Nigeria, almost every leader has always insisted on being identified as a religious person to the degree of supporting the activities of one religion to the detriment of the other and thus, sowing the seeds of suspicion, tension and violence.

Wherever Christians and Muslims live in peace, dialogue between them should aim at addressing common problems for the good and peaceful coexistence of their society. For example, in the city of Faisalabad in Pakistan, Christians and Muslims collaborate in the operation of a centre for the treatment of leprosy. In a number of countries, young Muslims belong to Catholic action groups or associations, where they join young Catholics to reflect on problems facing them and what action they can jointly take. How feasible is this in Nigeria?

Another aim of Christian-Muslim dialogue is to discover how God has been lovingly and mercifully active in their lives as believers. The Catholic Church, as I have pointed out, believes that the Holy Spirit works outside the visible boundaries of the Church and thus the same Spirit can stir the hearts of Muslim brothers and sisters into a meaningful spiritual dialogue with their Christian friends.
Since dialogue is also the art of the possible, the possibilities of the fruitfulness of a dialogue are almost always determined by social conditions, particular need; trust and love. When these circumstances are absent, it is difficult to initiate a meaningful dialogue because both parties live in mutual suspicion. Christians and Muslims should therefore aim at creating the suitable conditions that make for peaceful coexistence and trust, if we must transform our society into a peaceful one.

The basis for a Christian-Muslim dialogue and its aims is of great significance to Nigeria’s politico-religious and pluralistic society.

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council: A Step in the Right Direction

On 11 September 1999, a delegation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) visited His Eminence, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido, the Sultan of Sokoto, President General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and also the Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI). The purpose of the visit was to seek the support of His Eminence on the idea of creating a body comprising Muslims and Christians so that dialogue may be initiated towards ensuring sustainable peaceful coexistence and understanding between the members of the two religions in Nigeria.

The Sultan welcomed the idea especially in view of the recurrent disturbances that were flaring up in the country. After extensive deliberations, the following decisions were taken: the organization was to be named “Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC); total number of members of the Council was fixed at fifty, twenty-five members to be named from each side by JNI and CAN respectively. It was also decided that the inaugural meeting of the Council would be held in Abuja on Monday, 29 September 1999. And it was agreed that short position papers embodying the ideas of each of the two groups on how the Council would function
should be presented during the inauguration. Two members, Justice Bashir Sambo and the Most Rev Dr. J. O. Onaiyaken, were mandated to make all necessary arrangements for the inauguration. The President, Olusegun Obasanjo, was contacted and he inaugurated the Council on 29 September 1999.

The objectives of the council are: promoting dialogue, mutual appreciation of each other’s religion and joint action. Areas of concern for the Council are: promoting good relationship, intervening to prevent and/or resolve religious conflicts; undertaking advocacy, mediation and conflict resolution. Activities of the Council involve joint study, discussions, investigations leading to joint resolutions and action plans; projects, publications, mutual interactions and reciprocal hospitality. The hope is that with a common mind and with common action, the resources of the main religions practised in Nigeria can be deployed for the good of all of us.

This Council meets almost on a quarterly basis. Branches of NIREC have been established in some States of the federation, and hopefully, will be established in the various local governments of the country so that dialogue towards peaceful coexistence can be intensified.

To my mind, this is a step in the right direction. That the two great religions in Nigeria are now talking to each other is something we should all support and encourage. In his inaugural address, His Eminence, Sunday Mbang, Prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria and President of CAN, said,

_There are people in this nation who may consider what we are doing today belated. Probably this should have been done many years ago. But God’s time is always the best. My concern is not about our inability or reluctance to start, but the result of what we have started. Almighty God wants this Council to bear fruit that will endure. Nigerians are looking to us to help change the polluted, suspicious and uncertain atmosphere, which has held up_
progress, well-being, peace and prosperity in our land. As religious and opinion leaders of this great nation, our people are waiting anxiously for a new dawn through this Council as we together wage an uncompromising war to eradicate and exterminate corruption, fear, hatred, suspicion and uncertainty wherever they are found without fear or favour. Our people expect us through this Council to bring about a rebirth in our nation, where no one will feel unwanted, where all Nigerians will be a brother’s or a sister’s keeper to all other Nigerians. This, I believe, we can do with the help of God. But as I have argued before, first and foremost, we must allow God to mould us and use us. With God in the boat, we cannot fail.

The Sultan of Sokoto in his address on the same day said that for the Council to succeed, it should:

(i) Honestly and sincerely try to understand the true teaching of the two religions including their special peculiarities and personal mannerisms through seminars, discussions, pamphleteering etc. The special peculiarities should be understood, respected and accepted.

(ii) Try very hard to enlighten their respective followers to understand and abide by what they consider to be the true teaching of their religion-which they should abide by. Both sides should ensure that their followers should desist from uttering provocative and inciting pronouncements likely to cause the breach of peace and breakdown of law and order. Government too should direct the law enforcement agents to promptly enforce existing laws that safeguard such dangerous utterances.

(iii) Form standing committees to very carefully study
all areas of potential social conflicts and try to resolve the issue before they explode. Where the conflicts have already surfaced, the committees should try to nip them in the bud, and in addition, take or recommend necessary measures to thwart future occurrences. The Council should decide the number and membership of such committees.

(iv) Avoid discussing potential explosive matters until such a time that reasonable mutual confidence and trust are clearly seen to have been established. Later, all issues could be brought up for discussion.

(v) Meetings of the Council, and those of its standing committees should be fixed as soon as possible, to cover a whole year. Every effort must be made to ensure that the meeting dates are honoured. Where for any reason a meeting could not be held, all efforts must be made to hold it within one month. This is expected to ensure that the Council and its committee are active at all times.

The Functions of the Council include:

(a) To honestly and sincerely try by themselves and through them, their followership, to understand the true teachings of the two religions—Christianity and Islam—including their peculiarities and personal mannerisms through discussions, workshops, seminars, conferences, pamphleteering, etc.

(b) To create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction, thereby promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria so that the members of both faiths may
have mutual understanding of each other’s religious position, co-existence among all the people of Nigeria irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliations.

(c) To promote and inculcate moral, ethical, social and cultural values of the two faiths for the rebirth and rebuilding of a better society.

(d) To provide a forum for mutual co-operation and promotion of the welfare of all citizens in the nation.

(e) To create fora and channels for the peaceful resolution of any friction or misunderstanding that may arise from time to time.

(f) To serve as an avenue for articulating cordial relationship amongst the various religious groups and between them and the Government.

(g) To assist the Federal, State and Local Government of Nigeria and the populace by emphasizing and accentuating the positive roles religion should play in nation building and development.

(h) To serve as a forum to achieve national goals, economic growth, national unity and promotion of political stability.

(i) To consider and make recommendations to the Federal and other levels of Government on matters that may assist in fostering integral and spiritual development of Nigerians.

(j) To make recommendations on such other matters as the Federal and other levels of Government may from time to time refer to the Council.

(k) To network with organizations of similar aims at home and internationally, for the furtherance of the objectives of the Council.
That we have to dialogue if we must live in peace with one another is non-negotiable. That inter-religious dialogue is an imperative as part of our prophetic calling and mission is not in doubt.

The Federal Government has shown interest in the activities of NIREC right from the day it was inaugurated and this is commendable. The Council is not without its own internal problems. For example, can religious leaders impose certain moral standards of good governance on their different adherents who are working with the government at Federal, State and Local Government levels? Can their adherents be sanctioned and the sanctions made public by the religious leaders? Some Muslim leaders are appointed by the government and can be removed by the Government (a la Dasuki). Can this not affect the objectivity of NIREC?

Whatever the problems that NIREC is facing, it is, as I have said, commendable and a step in the right direction.

**Conclusion**

I wish to conclude by simply observing that from our study of Poland, South Africa and Algeria, religion can be used effectively in the transformation of society. Islam and Christianity can be potent weapons for social transformation if dialogue between the two is anchored on justice, freedom, human dignity and the common good.

I have tried to show that Islam and Christianity have many things in common and this makes dialogue all the more easier. Since God has put us together as Christians and Muslims in this geographical location called Northern Nigeria, we should work together towards the transformation of our society instead of working separately.
As I said, the Nigerian Inter-religious Council has taken a step in the right direction and I do hope that more will be done along these lines. I do hope too, that this Council will set up a task force that will ensure that dialogue between Christians and Muslims on the different aspects of our social life is begun and sustained. If this fails, we shall continue to remain stuck in the mud.
NOTES

4 Ibid.
5 Cf. ibid. for a detailed analysis of this issue.
6 M. Kukah, op. cit.
8 Such prominent full-blooded radicals within this “Discussion Circles” were people like the late Aminu Kano, Abubakar Zukogi and Lawan Dan-Bazzau. These were the founding Fathers of NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union). For further reading, see: Mallam Lawan Danbazzau, “British Colonialists Created NPC”, in the Nigerian Standard, 11th February 1988.
9 “Mr. Prime Minister,” A Selection of the speeches made by Tafawa Balewa (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, n.d.)
10 H. M. Kukah, op. Cit.
12 Ibid.
13 H. M. Kukah, op. Cit.
14 Quoted in Dudley, op. cit.,
15 M. Hiskett, A History of Hausa (London: SOAS, 1975),
16 Northern Region Staff List, No. 4-14, 1957-1966.
17 H. M. Kukah, op. cit.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.


Many people were of the opinion that Gomwalk was such an irritant to the Ruling Class that even if charges of corruption had not been levelled against him, a “pregnancy” would have been arranged to hand him over.

J. N. Paden, op. cit.; See the Sardauna’s speech in Pakistan, in J. N. Paden, op. cit.,


Ibid.

Vatican Council II, *Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae* (DH), n.2.

Vatican Council II, Nostra Aetate, art. 1.
Pope John Paul II, in an address to the Roman Curia on the 22 December 1986, n.3. in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, 10,2 (1986)

GS. n. 22.


RH. n. 6; cf. LG, n. 16; GS, n. 22; AG, n. 15.


Ibid.

Qur’an 5:22.
INTRODUCTION

My letter of invitation requested that I speak on the Church’s vocation to a multidimensional dialogue. To accomplish this objective, and to ensure that we locate our discourse on a *terra firma*, I intend to examine some of the complex issues involved in the use of instruments that facilitate dialogue provided by both the Church and the society. In concrete terms, I will be referring to Church documents such as John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*, and Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, among others. I will also take into account some instruments provided by the international community, such as the United Nation’s Declaration on Human Rights and other conventions and agreements to which Nigeria has appended signature.

The paper is divided into four parts. In the first part, I will examine the theme and focus of mission. In the second part, I will address the nature of mission in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria. In the third part, I will look at the theological and political dimensions of dialogue. Finally, in the third part, I will proffer some suggestions for more effective dialogue.

**Theme and Focus of Mission**

In the last two and a half centuries of intense missionary activities in Africa, the thrust was on bringing the good news of God’s salvation to the dark continent of Africa. The nature of the engagement has been an object of intense debate which we shall
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not enter into here. Suffice it to say, however, that missionary activities centred on providing Africans with all the apparatus that they needed to get themselves out of darkness into light: literacy, social services to improve health and longevity, the Bible, the Sacraments and so on. The life of the white man as missionary was wrapped in mythology. Even when, much later, the doors of seminaries were finally opened and Africans woke up to the fact that they too could become priests, clerical celibacy and the very long period of training a priest added to the myth. Over a hundred years later, with so many African faces within the Church, the mythical dimensions have all vanished and we are on the brink of even wondering whether, local priests, like home made goods are cheaper or can attract the kind of respect that they deserve.

Now, for many reasons, the themes and context of mission are changing. First of all, way back in 1969, Pope Paul VI enjoined us to be our own missionaries. But we did not seem to grasp this so quickly. As a result, in many areas of our lives, we have not been too keen to take initiatives, ostensibly because of the social cost of being independent! Being our own missionaries presents both a dilemma and a promise. It is a dilemma because it is easy for us to consider one another as being ordinary, coming now with nothing to give: no medicines, no schools, no roads, no scholarships, no social services. Since our people got used to these goodies or fruits of mission and defined themselves by them, the inability of the local clergy to meet these expectations is part of the dilemma. As we see from studies of the missionary enterprise in eastern Nigeria, the fight over missionaries was not based on the anxiety to hear the Word of God, but largely on the fruits that the missionaries brought along with them, namely, education and social services. The second dilemma lies in the fact that we could lapse into extant ethnic prejudices. If our communities have traditionally been at war with one another, how can the missionary negotiate his way? Moreover, in Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general, the location of various missionary enterprises coincided with the geopolitical boundaries of the various western interests. Thus, in many parts of Africa, friction between the Irish and the British played themselves
out as well as that between the Germans, Belgians or Dutch. It is important to understand these contexts because just as we cannot understand the history of Africa today without looking at the problems of colonialism, in the same way, we cannot understand the sources of many of our frictions today unless we come to grips with our history. The issue here has very little to do with looking for a scapegoat. It is not a question of right or wrong strategy. It is rather an appreciation of the realities of that period, and it also helps us to understand that very little has changed in real life because we are human.

At independence, many of the issues that preoccupied the missionaries were taken over by the state. The nature and the implications of this development have been with us in Nigeria today. An example of such implications is the long and protracted debate over the return of schools which, in my opinion, has been a bit unnecessary. The debate exemplifies our inability to quickly and sufficiently readjust so as to be able to face the same challenges in changing times. It should be clear to us by now that since we are not of the world, the world would always love its own. So, it is too much for the Church to expect too many favours from the state. Here in Nigeria, although we are seldom accused of collaborating with foreign interests—we heard a bit of this during the war, but the Church in some countries experienced these accusations especially under Marxism—we are constantly accused of delaying the project and gospel of patriotism and reverence for the state. But did Jesus not emphasize that He came precisely to overturn our perceptions of what constitutes a Kingdom in human and spiritual terms and thus be a sign of contradiction among us? In the face of similar accusations in antiquity, St. Augustine argued in his *City of God* that nations and states fall more as a result of the contradictions within them than as a result of the betrayal of their ideals by Christians.

Whatever may have been the reasons for the take-over of schools, there were a lot of other alternatives which we should have aggressively pursued rather than staring at a locked door. The result of the endless debate was that the Church wasted much time while a lot of men and women, largely driven by business entrepreneurial
instincts, moved in to offer what they called quality education. What have now flooded every nook and corner are schools that locate their fame in the number of foreign teachers and syllabi that they have. The result, of course, is that the moral content of these schools remains below standard. But then, in fairness to the proprietors and proprietresses they are not in the business of giving what they do not have. For many of them, their projects are set up to achieve economic success for the owners, not to install moral standards. Many dioceses in northern states like Kaduna simply moved on and built new schools with emphasis and concentration on community participation. It is this kind of imagination that we must put to use because it is too much for the Church to expect that she will be without enemies.

The Church needs to realize that she can no longer continue to do what she thought she had to do when the state was very distant from the citizens. Thus, the new thrust of the mission of the Church today is, on the one hand, how to compel the state to respond to the needs of the citizens, and, on the other hand, how to help clarify the role that the citizens must play in struggling for these rights. Thus, the focus on education, health, and other services that the Church offered to her children in the early days should now shift to educating the children of God to fight for their rights and to assume their duties as citizens of a state. It seems that the Church has continued to assume her duty of caring for her flock beyond expectations of the moment. Considering the realities of post-independence politics, the Church ought to change her strategy. This should then free the Church to go into other areas of specialization and pastoral relevance even within the framework of economics, politics and education at a higher level.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the theme of liberation is used to underscore the evangelising mission of the Church in terms more elastic than those which traditional boundaries of missionary Christianity anticipated. Making specific reference to the Third World, Pope Paul II noted:

> Peoples, as we know, engage with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to
remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism sometimes as cruel as old political colonialism. The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of who are her own children, the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete.'

What is most fascinating is the consistency with which the Church captures the dynamic texture of the message of Christ and the imperative of liberation as a dimension of the Gospel of our salvation. The crucial challenge here is what the Church interprets as liberation and also how this liberation is to be achieved. This challenge, which places us at the intersection of religion and politics, is a challenge that the Church in Africa has consistently shied away from. We have often found it convenient to take cover by evoking the principle that religion and politics do not mix, and that there is no relationship between Caesar and God! This is why the Catholic Church has not been able to boldly assert her strength and character even in parts of Africa or Nigeria where a significant percentage of the population is Catholic. Is it not strange that to date, Catholics remain in the background of the political life of our nation? This is where we must locate our major lapse. Although we are always proud to talk about the prophetic mission of the Church, there is need to address the nature and context of this mission against the added backdrop of engagement and involvement. When Fr. George Ehusani published a little book on the Church’s prophetic mission, although he drew extensively from the Catholic Church’s teachings, the official reaction in some quarters was indeed curious. What exactly should the Church be doing in pursuing the theme of liberation?

One needs to emphasise that it is impossible to seek liberation unless one is captive to some higher forces and needs to be helped. Liberation is the action of an external agency. Liberation presupposes that a weaker person is under the spell and capture of a stronger force. Can liberation come about by moral persuasion, preaching, statements and documentations?
Let us take an example that we are all familiar with. Take the story of the image of that lovely personality that we have come to refer to as the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Jesus himself did not call the man good. The word “good” has been inserted by way of an editorial judgment of the man’s action. But I am always compelled to ask, what would this Samaritan have done if he had arrived one or two hours earlier and met the man being attacked and beaten by the armed bandits who pounced on him? What would he have said and how would he have acted? Or, alternatively, had the man who fell among thieves been travelling with our friend the Good Samaritan, would bandits have attacked them since there is security in numbers? But again, back to the Good Samaritan; imagine that he arrived and found the man being physically attacked, would he have spent time castigating the Roman politicians, the Minister of Transport, or the Commissioner of Police for not providing good roads and security for its citizens? Or, would he have blamed the man for travelling that dangerous road alone? Would he have given a long sermon on the threat of armed robbers or would he have wailed and run to find help? We may never know. But from the text itself, I can deduce one thing: I believe that this Samaritan would have physically intervened to stop the armed bandits. He was obviously a man who was keen on taking risk. He was a man ready to share (he shared his donkey and spent money with the victim), he was a man who was not afraid to be considered guilty by association (he took the man to the inn). He said he would come back, not to collect his change, but to pay up if the need arose! This story is important for me because it captures in a very dramatic way the daily realities of our lives here in Nigeria. How many of us on the dangerous Lagos-Ibadan road would be ready to stop to help any one? The more dangerous things become in real life, the less ready we are to do our duty as Christians, and the more we are ready to make excuses: “what will the Police say? They will say I was responsible for the crime or accident. “I no wan police wahala”\(^2\) we would say.

As we can see, a proper understanding of what constitutes the structure of injustice is fundamental to our willingness, readiness
and ability to intervene. If we do not have a proper understanding of the history and culture of our people, the task of evangelisation and mission will remain largely ephemeral. What is more, it is definitely not acceptable that we continue to talk against injustice when we do not seem to be prepared to do something concrete to deal with the issues that perpetrate injustice. The reality is that there is need for us to seriously consider how deep our faith really is in our daily lives. Like the seeds that fell on the edge of the farm or on shallow ground, these seeds are either eaten by birds, trampled afoot or they lack the capacity to withstand the strain and pressure of the weather (Matthew 13:4ff). Agents of mission that wish to engage the structures of the state may have a proper grounding in theology. But without a grounding in the culture, history and arts of its people, they can never critically intervene to effect change. We run the risk of appealing and appeasing the powers that be who can hear without listening. Here, we can see two examples worthy of emulation, that of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) and Communism in Poland, and that of Cardinal Sin and the dictatorship of President Marcos in the Philippines. In both cases, two princes of the Church used their grounding and knowledge of their culture and history to become spark plugs for the changes that terminated dictatorships in their countries.

Karol Wojtyla’s teachings had been translated into concrete political reality with the formation of Solidarity, first as a labour movement, and then as a political party, culminating in the election of Lech Walesa as President of Poland. The Church intervened, throwing her weight behind the movement, nurturing it with Walesa, one of her sons whom she had trained. The result was the transformation of a Labourer to the first President of post Communist Poland. In the Philippines, Cardinal Sin and the Catholic Church led other civil society groups to overthrow Mr. Marcos and in the process, its teaching became the framework for defining People Power. In the end, please permit the pun, an ordinary housewife, because President. In both cases, we know that ordinarily, it is almost inconceivable that a dictatorship would be succeeded by such lowly citizens largely held in contempt
politically such as a labourer and a housewife. But what all this shows is that with the Church’s hierarchy cooperating with God by making the right intervention and training her personnel, politically speaking, most things are possible. Had Cardinal Wojtyla and Cardinal Sin continued their prophetic mission by issuing statements, all the paper mills in the world would not have changed anything in Poland and, by extension, the Soviet Union or the Philippines. Communism and Marcos would still have been in force today.

There is therefore the need for us to understand this dimension of our mission and evangelisation within the context of politics. It is important to note that both countries are predominantly Catholic. So, we can ask: is it possible to replicate the same scenarios in non-Catholic environments? And, how does this address the situation in Nigeria where we have what we have come to refer to as religious and ethnic problems? To this we shall now turn our attention.

The Nature of Dialogue and Mission in a Pluralistic Society

It is always easy to argue, as it has become common in Nigeria, that the reason why we are not very effective in our mission is the problem of Islam or ethnicity. In which case, the question here is: is pluralism an asset or is it an obstacle to our mission and dialogue? It can be argued that indeed, dialogue has become imperative now precisely because of the complexity of our societies. The result is that our discourse on dialogue has tended to focus on dialogue with Islam and Traditional Religions. We have tended to reduce ecumenism to a form of dialogue. To me the issues are far more complex than we often make them to look. We have narrowed dialogue to mean creating platforms for talking and rubbing of minds such as seminars, conferences, meetings, roundtables, or ecumenical prayer sessions. Apart from the regimentation that these initiatives engage in, I feel that they seriously limit the context and content of dialogue. This is because of their artificiality and the fact that they are always more or less state induced. We were summoned to come and pray in Abuja to save Abacha’s life, we tend to be summoned to pray because October 1st is here, or the
Armed Forces Remembrance Day is here and so on. Announcements always tell us that the days for prayers are Friday and Sundays. I feel uncomfortable about all these because I believe that there is need to expand the frontiers of our understanding and see dialogue as the realities that characterise our act of living.

There is the other problem that these initiatives tend to be largely episodic and seemingly limiting. When we read about these initiatives, we hear something like this: Christians and Muslims met in Abuja. At the meeting, the Christian delegation was led by Rev. Sunday Mbang, while the Muslim delegation was led by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Maccido. But we forget that in the market, in the buses, in business, in politics, in economics, everywhere, Nigerians are daily involved in dialogue.

Unless we understand dialogue in its dynamic form, that is, as a process in which we are all involved daily and across the board, we shall continue to see more obstacles everywhere we turn. Apart from the fact that a division of our citizens into Christians and Muslims limits our understanding of our challenges as citizens, we have ended up changing the pattern of these relationships by deepening the tensions as these identities become strategies of struggle for access to resources, political and economic space. For example, if we take ourselves within the framework of the realities on the ground, an ordinary Nigerian is in constant dialogue at many levels. Let me take my humble self as an example so as to avoid causing offence to any one.

I come from an ethnic group called Ikulu in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area of Kaduna State. If I want evidence of my place of birth, I have to ask the Local Government Chairman of my Council, Mrs. Lawrenicia Mallam to provide me with a letter. If she is busy or tries to give me a hard time, I will appeal to her sense of judgment as a member of the Catholic Women’s Organisation. If she does not budge, I will order her as her priest! If, on the other hand, I wanted an endorsement of my citizenship in Kaduna State, I would have to seek the approval of the Governor of my state, Alhaji Muhammadu Makarfi. If, on the other hand, I want a letter of introduction to an embassy so as to be issued a visa, I would have to collect a letter from my local Ordinary, Archbishop Peter
Jatau. If on the other hand, I want an endorsement of my application as a teacher at the University of Ibadan, it will be nice to have a letter from the Warden of St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University where I presently reside. So, here am I, with a gamut of individuals variously feeling responsible to me and for me in many respects. I am answerable to them in various stages and I negotiate my life for now, within this context. And at every twist and turn, I am involved in dialogue without formally thinking about it. The point I want to illustrate is that every day of our lives, we are constantly negotiating, exchanging and interchanging our identities as part of our business, work or daily living. These identities are not fixed. Indeed, in pursuit of all the endeavours above, not a single Ikulu man is involved in the process. Yet, I am supposed to consider that a primary form of my identity. This rich tapestry of identities is fundamental to our existence and we do not necessarily use these identities consciously. They are the realities and indeed, none of them is permanent in any respect. For example, although many of us would have preferred to have a Catholic elected President during the June 12, 1993 elections, how many of us, even in the south eastern states, voted for the ticket of Alhaji Tofa and Dr. Sylvester Ugoh despite Dr. Ugoh being a Catholic? Why did we all so massively vote for Chief Abiola and Alhaji Kingibe? We all knew after all that they were Muslims. We did not get any letter from the Bishops instructing Catholics to vote for two Muslims.

When we look at these realities we see the need to elevate the discourse to a higher level, away from such ethnically induced hegemonic cleavages such as the Arewa Consultative Forum, Afenifere, or Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo. It will then be important to appreciate the fact that our people are far more sophisticated in making their judgment than they are often given credit for. I have consistently argued that for all their posturing, the persistence of these ethnic hegemonies is an antithesis of democracy. They freeze the political space and create ethnic Bantustans, thus limiting the frontiers of national integration. Am I denying the reality of ethnicity? The answer is no. The challenge is to subordinate our various identities to the realization of the common good.
How then might we undertake dialogue in a pluralistic society with a view to achieving the common good? What I have said above are largely unstructured initiatives. How can the Church design strategies for enhancing this dialogue which is already occurring at different levels? The same women may be members of the Catholic Women’s Organisation. But when it comes to membership of their Market Associations, the dynamics change. The same Catholics may be members of a Parish Council, and may be from the same ethnic group. But when it comes to the election of a President of the Nigerian Bar Association or Medical Council, would they prefer to vote for the member of their Church council, or the person who is of their ethnic group, or the one who went to the same medical or law school? Which ties would be stronger? We can only say, well it depends. But that is the reality of our daily lives. We need to return to the Church’s documents.

Official Church Teachings

One of my favourite encyclicals remains *Pacem in terris*. It is here that the notion of the common good is very well articulated. Whereas the encyclical argues that the attainment of the common good is the basis for the legitimacy of the public authorities, it goes on to argue:

*Assuredly, the ethnic characteristics of the various human groups are to be respected as constituent elements of the common good, but these values and characteristics by no means exhaust the content of the common good. For the common good, since it is intimately bound up with human nature, cannot therefore exist fully and completely unless the human person is taken into consideration and the essential nature and realization of the common good be kept in mind.*

How might the Church hammer out the issues that relate to the common good? This should ordinarily not be difficult because if we look essentially, we shall discover that there is a wide range of areas over which we are all in agreement across the lines. Such themes as poverty alleviation, value of human life, threats to the environment, human rights, food security, social security, dignity
of the human person, sanctity of life, justice, etc, all these are themes around which we can find consensus. As John XXIII noted in *Pacem in Terris*:

> Any human society, if it is to be well ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation, this principle, namely, that every human being is a person. Indeed, precisely because he is a person, he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature.

Indeed, it is because the Church has not put these words to practice or tested them on the hammer of daily experience that our membership of the Body of Christ remains largely secondary to other forms of identity. It is when our people cannot find this umbrella of protection and security that they fall back on their ethno-regional hegemonic cleavages. It is a clarification of the ambiguities surrounding these themes that produced the powerful message of Solidarity, and People Power which had the overarching influence of going beyond gender, religion and ideology. How then can we create a social, political and theological economy of these challenges? Facing these challenges means pulling together the various strands of our collective experiences, culture and history. Around these, we can find common values and, in the process, find a platform for speaking one common language when we speak of justice, love, freedom, themes that are common to all. Let us now turn our attention to a practical dimension of these themes.

**A Social, Political and Theological Economy of Dialogue**

How may dialogue take place in a pluralistic society? I have tried to show that the various shades of identities that make up a pluralistic society need not be obstacles to dialogue in themselves. I have also tried to explain that dialogue takes place in our day-to-day encounter with one another. If, as I have tried to argue, poverty, illiteracy and injustice persist in our society, why is dialogue not used towards overcoming them? If we suffer injustice as human beings, why can we not rise above these limitations? In order words, what are the obstacles, factors that stand in the way of
dialogue across these human mini mountains? I think this is where sin and salvation come in. By sin, I mean here straining or breaking relationship with God manifest in straining or breaking relationship with one’s neighbour in prejudices and biases. This is symptomatic of the inner struggle that St. Paul talks about in Romans 7:14-25. In summary, here, St. Paul talks about this conflict between good and evil. He finds himself moving between the two despite his love of the good and his aversion for evil. But he is unable to help himself and, as he finally succumbs, he says: “What a wretched man that I am. Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?” This is all who listen to their conscience experience after any bloodletting, be it Rwanda, Ife-Modakeke, Zangon-Kataf, Ogoni-Anodoni or Aguleri-Umuleri. In the end, whether we locate it as a conflict between religions, or communities, the fact is that we find ourselves asking, the morning after, what happened, what got into us? Then we find ourselves blaming the devil and so on. Despite my earlier statement about our various shades of informal dialogue, I made the point that this form of dialogue, not being structured, is largely a sign that we can make it, but we have to consciously structure the ideas. We must identify factors that make dialogue difficult.

There are many obstacles to interpersonal relationships and, as I have tried to show, we must never reduce dialogue to the merely ceremonial or the merely formal. The things that obstruct relations among friends, families or communities are the same things that will obstruct dialogue at a higher level. Among the many obstacles that come to my mind are: Jealousy, Prejudice, Ignorance, Anger/Frustration, Suspicion, Fear.

Although the list is not exhaustive, the point needs to be made that alone or together with other factors, they make dialogue difficult. For example, when we speak of jealousy, in a pluralistic society we can see that the various communities in Nigeria tend to relate with one another almost like wives in a polygamous household. If one group feels that the other has been favoured, it places obstacles on the path of dialogue. This is when jealousy becomes an issue. Prejudice and ignorance sometimes reinforce one another. They affect the way we think and perceive others and,
more often than not, have no physical basis beyond the imagination. For example, when we speak of knowing the Igbo man, the Yoruba or the Hausa man, the resonance and the meaning these words convey vary. But they are a product of what we have accumulated inside us for a long time. Anger and frustration feed from these too. When we perceive, even if wrongly that we have been unjustly treated or that one party has been better treated, the response could be anger leading to frustration. Suspicion and fear lead to aggression and they restrict dialogue. Briefly, the point here is that although these all function at different levels, we need to take cognisance of them when we are exploring the frontiers of dialogue.

There is, to my mind, a spiritual dimension to many of the issues that we battle with. When we cannot find the connection between the spiritual and other dimensions of our lives, we can ascribe our problems to purely institutional failures. To be sure, there is a problem of structural deficiencies and the persistence of injustice based on certain human structures. But the solution to our problems does not lie necessarily in dealing superficially with these problems. Why and how has dialogue been such a big problem among religions, communities and regions in Nigeria? How is it that the only people who strategically seem to dialogue are businessmen, politicians and members of societies, clubs, cults, and associations? It is to underscore the need to understand these problems that I propose what I call a social, theological, and political economy of dialogue. If we study and reflect very carefully on why and how dialogue succeeds at certain levels and fails at others, then it will help us come to an appreciation of the nature and complexity of the problems. When we mistakenly think that our problems have to do with merely changing visible structures, we miss the point. A good example is the way we have approached the problems of constitution making in Nigeria. As at the last count, post-colonial Nigerians have experimented with at least four attempts at finding a constitutional framework for governance; and we are still searching. Despite falling back on the 1979 Constitution, we still have one of the most uninspiring
constitutions in the world. We have a verbose and rather incoherent constitution that makes sweeping but largely open-ended propositions. Most of the crucial aspects and guarantees of the constitution are not justiciable. But more importantly, despite changing constitutions, we have not come closer to finding a framework for justice. We tried and dropped the Westminster parliamentary system and thought the American presidential system was what we needed. Then, after almost unanimously declaring our political class unfit to rule, the military came and, after over twenty years of recklessness and devastation, we are now on the path to democracy. But even that is already in danger. So what next? We are interested in quick fixes, not sacrifice. This is why we had such dubious and rather superfluous attempts at wrestling with very difficult problems by falling back on rather meaningless expressions such as, power shift, resource control, northern oligarchy, Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo, Afenifere, minorities (North and South), Hausa-Fulani, sovereign national conference, military rule. When we use any of these concepts, we just assume that every Nigerian knows what we are speaking about.

When we say that Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo or the Arewa Consultative Forum are speaking for the Yorubas, Igbos and Northerners, what do we mean? When we say that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) or the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) both speak for Christians and Muslims, what do we mean? The sad thing, and the reason why dialogue is so difficult and complicated or even impossible, is that these organizations are largely self-serving and in many respects obstruct dialogue most of the times. In defending what they consider as the interests of their constituencies, they sometimes delay national integration. If Christians have to defend their interest, then an enemy has to be found. The enemy will have to be some one outside the Christian faith, hence, the tensions between Christians and Muslims. The Muslims now believe that Christians are those behind their own problems. When they struggle with government, each, like wives in a polygamous household, accuse the state of favouring one at the expense of the other. This is why religion has not been able to play the role it ought to play in Nigeria. What is more, in an
unrepresentative State such as we had under the military, the temptation was for the dictatorships to deal with those they claim to represent. The result is that conflicts still persist between Christians and Muslims, or between the various ethnic groups. Sadly, these trends have persisted into our democratic world.

It is interesting to note that these organizations are largely considered as glorified public complaints associations. Thus, their time is mostly taken up with negotiating favourable deals for their constituents whom they consider to be marginalized from contract awards to pilgrimages. Thus, Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo and Arewa spend time ensuring that their sons and daughters get good appointments, what they call juicy appointments, in government. They ensure that, as Ohaneze once said, their sons and daughters, even when they have managed to secure appointments, do not end up with yeye ministries or yeye parastatals. Thus, since self-improvement is the essence of this game, and since human greed is insatiable, if we continue on this path, dialogue will be impossible because what masquerades as dialogue is largely consistent and persistent ambush tactics and a degree of hostage taking. So, the threat of confusion becomes basis for the negotiation. Translated, these organizations tell government: if you do not do well for us, we shall let our people loose, but if you do well for us, we shall ensure that we turn our people over to you.

I believe that there is need for the Church to plough its way through these self-limiting institutions and build bridges across the various divisions that we have. This is the mission of the Church in Nigeria. In this process, the Church can broaden the base of resource generation and allocation. For the path that has been marked out by ethno-regional hegemonies will lead to the perpetuation of family cliques and dynasties as these old men and women will continue to recycle their children and grandchildren on the grounds that they are speaking on our behalf. After crying for their people, when the appointments come, they go to their children or their immediate families and cronies and they turn around to say that their people have been pacified.
How many bishops ever get consulted about the appointment of ministers, special advisers or special assistants or chairmen and members of parastatals? Of course, we need to negotiate ourselves to that position before we come into contention. We keep waiting for people to get appointments and then we turn around to say that they are Catholics and we expect them to defend the Church. There is evidence that we are still way outside the circles of power and policy formulation and design in Nigeria. This is not good for the Church in Nigeria. We cannot continue complaining all the time. Merely changing individuals will only recycle our frustrations. So, all the talk now about who will remain or not remain in government house misses the point if we do not fundamentally address the basis of representation and governance based on the Gospel and the teachings of the Church in terms of the generation and allocation of the resources. This is what I mean when I talk of the social, political and theological economy of dialogue; namely, how do we ensure that our people, across all lines and boundaries, grasp the teachings of the Church and then proceed to engage the state as economists, politicians and good and successful businessmen?

Let us now, by way of summary and conclusion look at the main issues again against the background of the nature of some of our international legal obligations towards the attainment of justice and equality for the children of God.

Towards Effective Mission in Dialogue

We call the family into which Jesus was born the Holy Family. But we must not create the illusion that the Holy Family was crisis free. This will undermine the whole concept of the many dimensions of the incarnation. Even before the family life got started things were nearly marred by suspicion of matrimonial infidelity. As with all who trust in Him, the Lord intervened to restore order in his divine plan (Matthew 1:19-22). Then poverty took its toll as the young bride had to suffer the humiliation of having nowhere to have her baby (Luke 2:6-7). Poverty dogs even his formal presentation in the Temple as the parents presented the least that was demanded by law (Luke 2:240). Then the Baby and the parents became refugees.
As the child grew up, he showed traits of adolescence. His parents could not find him (Luke 2:41-5). Or, think about the good old couple, Zachariah and Elizabeth, the Blessed Mother’s cousin of whom the Holy Scriptures say: “both were upright in the sight of God and impeccably carried out all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless. Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years…” (Luke 1:6-7).

We would expect the family of a holy man like the Prophet Hosea to be a holy family. It did not turn out that way. For God asked him to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2). The nature of the family crisis in the case of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is lost on us if we focus merely on the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). We lose sight of the trials and the strain that the family went through in the months preceding the young man’s departure and his subsequent decision to break with the family by physically leaving home. It is important when we read the Scriptures to reflect not only on what we find in writing, but let our minds wonder a bit outside what is not written. The story does not make mention of the mother of the prodigal son. But we can imagine what she had to go through. We often fail to grasp the import of the silent presence of the woman. But it is a mark of its constancy that it does not get mentioned. Can we imagine the humiliation of a mother and father not knowing where their son is, in a society that placed such a high premium on having a son? With these and related questions in mind we can pause and think of the implications of the image of the Church as family. What are the roles of each member of the family? What does the family do to its strong and weak members? How does the head of the family treat the boys in the family? How does it treat the bright boys in the family or those who have a reputation for excellence, those who bring pride to the family? What of the girls in the family? Are they merely faces with no names who cannot speak when men are speaking, who become important if they happen to be brighter than the boys, or who are a pride to the family? What of those whom the family would rather not talk about openly because they have brought shame to the family? Those drop outs, those who get pregnant, those who are
disabled and cause a strain on the family? Are they in the background? What kind of attention do they get from the family? These are the questions that we should think about when we speak of the Church as family. It is obvious in the Church that some are more gifted than others, some can run faster than others, some are more handsome than others. But as a Church, how do those who are in Lagos, Onitsha, or Abuja see those in Bomadi, Sokoto, Ogoja, Otukpo, Maiduguri, Jalingo or Yola? The Catholic Church falls behind a lot of other organisations such as Muslims and the new ecclesial communities in caring for her weak members. We know so little of one another, whereas the few Muslims in a remote corner of the east are not forgotten by their brethren. This is why even internationally, a small Muslim population in a place like Mindanao in the Philippines can make more noise and enjoy solidarity around the Muslim world in a way that Christians in the Gambia or Senegal for example cannot. These thoughts should occupy our minds when we think of ourselves as being members of one Family.

In a book published some three years ago by the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama titled *The Great Disruption*, the author talked about the collapse of the family and related it to the failure or depletion of what he called human capital. As governments have failed to deliver across Africa, faith communities have become sources of solace. Interestingly, as life is becoming more and more difficult, men and women are looking for security with a greater sense of urgency. They want a God that can deliver the fruits of that security or prosperity now.

In our prisons, detention centres, and hospitals, it is becoming evident that many merchants of generosity are having a field day. Very often, our members in these places are not being well attended to. The priest might visit to anoint the sick, or give communion. But it is clear that our lay organizations must sit up and take up this challenge of presenting the Catholic faith to many of our brethren and those who are in these conditions. Beyond dealing with people’s sacramental needs, it is important for the Catholic community to realise that the needs of our people are now a bit beyond merely the administration of the sacraments. The
Bible has taken on a new dynamism that we must address. It has been proven that it is here that many men and women lose their faith or strengthen it. There has been a very noticeable rise now in the involvement of the Muslim community in works of charity. Interestingly, from all over the world, this new revivalism in charity is in response to what the Muslims consider to be an attempt to rescue their people from the Christians. But I use two examples.

It was interesting to note that one of the initiatives taken by the Sharia proponents in Zamfara was in the area of care, money for the rehabilitation of prostitutes, provision of public transportation, housing and so on. For example, between 1980 and 2000, a study of Non-Governmental Organisations in Africa shows that Islam is moving very quickly in the area of setting up Islamic NGOs at a time we are in recession. In 1980, a sample of a few countries, show the following details: Burkina Faso (55), Gambia (17), Mali (33), Mozambique (14) Nigeria (1350), Senegal (50) and Sierra Leone (65). Now, it is very interesting to see what the changes have become in twenty years. For by 2000, figures for the same countries show the results as follows: Burkina Faso (171), Gambia (81), Mali (74), Mozambique (154), Nigeria (4028), Senegal (112), Sierra-Leone (80). These figures speak for themselves and they should tell us a thing or two. For us in the Catholic Church, we seem to be of the view that our Diocesan, Provincial and National Justice and Peace Commissions are the single platform for dealing with all the problems regarding society and change. This is just not enough in a country that has become so dynamic. What we have of course are what we might call NGOs that are run by Christians but whose agenda have nothing to do with the programme of evangelization and mission as espoused by the Church. In Oxford, I stumbled on a study being undertaken by a young doctoral student on the changing patterns of religious affiliation in South Africa. Now, Islam has hardly been considered a religion of significance in South Africa. The population of Muslims is largely around the Cape Town area and it is almost totally made up of Asian immigrants. Although they have been there for the last two hundred
or so years, they never made any significant inroads among the black population. Now, according to this study and findings, there are significant numbers of young black women who are now converting to Islam and marrying Muslims. Reasons? Those interviewed said they found Muslim men more stable, reliable, sincere, more disciplined and caring!!! They feel a greater sense of security among Muslim families despite their polygamous status! Some of the new converts claimed that Islam does not exert financial pressures on them, as the Churches do with Sunday financial and other obligations. I consider this development very significant and worthy of note.

In the light of all these, how best should the Church redefine her role and design a cutting edge strategy for effective and efficient evangelisation? There are many legal instruments on the ground to ensure the realization of some of the policies the Church has been articulating. With no law courts, Police Force and security agencies of its own, the Church must address herself to the realities of the institutions on the ground by which her children must contest their freedom. With the legal ambiguities enunciated by Sharia Law, it is no longer a matter of whether or not Christians have rights, whether Sharia law is constitutional or not. It is more a matter of how best it approximates our national and international obligations and how we can position ourselves and our people to take advantage of even the provisions that are there. For example, Section 36 (12) of the 1999 Constitution, the extant Law of the land states:

*a person shall not be convicted of a criminal offence unless that offence is defined and the penalty therefore is prescribed in written law, and in this sub-section, a written law refers to an Act of the National Assembly or the Law of a state.*

Secondly, there is the claim that the Sharia does not apply to non-Muslims. But even if we were to accept its applications beyond the boundaries of the Muslim community, how do we square the circle between international laws that we have signed and our duties, rights and obligations under the Constitution, the linchpin of our national unity? I think, more than the laws of the land, it is these international obligations that we should be
focussing on in dealing with the issues under review. For example, Section 34(1) of the Constitution states:

Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly, no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment.

Nigeria is signatory to the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Again, Nigeria has signed although not ratified the Treaty on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Is it possible for Nigeria to live up to her domestic and international obligation and watch an Amina being stoned to death or a Mallam Ahmadu have his limbs cut off at some corner of Zamfara, Sokoto of Kano?

These are the questions that we must reflect upon. We do not need to be told what constitutes degrading or inhuman treatment. As for our right to live beyond some levels of poverty amidst our wealth, Nigeria is a signatory to United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Nigeria has at least ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, Convention Against Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institution and Practices Similar to Slavery, African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Nigeria has signed although not ratified the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment. It is important to note that it is through appeal to some of these conventions that citizens of the world continue to draw international attention to the conditions of their peoples. These are the benefits of globalisation of justice and human rights. When people are faced with a crisis and a state is guilty of gross human rights violations, the United Nations becomes the international voice of reason and the world’s conscience. For example, civil society groups in Nigeria had to fall back on the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Inhuman or
Degrading Treatment or Punishment to intervene in the Ogoni crisis here in our country. Our Nigerian Bar Association and the Law Courts were playing games and looking the other way for political and economic reasons. Again, it was through the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Falana and Dr. Beko Ransome Kuti gained their freedom from Abacha’s gulags.

Conclusion

There is need for us to educate ourselves on the main issues that now regulate our rights and lives because our ignorance is not an excuse. Many individuals and organizations are falling back on the European Parliament to contest rights that their countries do not yet apply. With the transmutation of the Organisation of African Unity, OAU, into the African Union, AU, Africans stand a chance of contesting their rights now beyond their immediate national boundaries. In conclusion, I believe that the Catholic Church is being called upon to face the new millennium in a much more forceful way. This was the thrust by which Pope John Paul II ushered in the new millennium. The thrust of this very beautiful document is summed up in the words that Jesus uttered to His friends who had struggled all night and caught nothing. When He told them to cast their nets again, they did and they netted a big catch. In this document, the Holy Father sent out the message to everyone loud and clear to the effect that all of us are being called to evangelisation with renewed enthusiasm. Said the Holy Father: “Now is the time for each local Church to assess itself and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities by reflecting on what the Spirit has been saying to the people of God.” Christians are encouraged to “Remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm and look forward with confidence.”

For a long time, many of us have been blinded by all forms of prejudice. We must put all these behind us and surge forward. Talking about what prejudice can do, I leave you with the account of an incident which I found very moving. In Scarborough, Canada,
a young couple moved to a new house and they discovered that their neighbour was an elderly man living alone. They noticed that their neighbour was always fond of looking over their fence. They believed that the old man was most probably a paedophile and was staring at their young children with intent to harm them. So they called the Police. The Police arrived and interrogated the old man in the presence of his neighbours who had never spoken to him. After being quizzed about why he was so fond of staring at the neighbours' children, he looked at the Policeman and the strangers standing before him with shock. He answered them:

I have been suffering from diabetes for years and my sight is no longer good. Things have gotten worse for me since my wife died. I am not aware that I have new neighbours and that they have young children. My sight has fallen so badly and I can hardly see beyond a few feet from where I stand!

As I pointed out above, ignorance, fear and prejudice are dangerous combinations. Let us reflect more carefully on how best we can fully appreciate our diversity as members of God's family.

NOTES

2 “I do not want to enter into police trouble”.
3 John XXIII, Pacem in Terris 55.
5 John Paul II. Apostolic Letter, Novo Millenio Inuente, art. 3 and 1.
INTRODUCTION

Since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, Islam has come to the forefront of world attention. There have been, of course, many vigorous denials, both within and outside Islam that the terrorist attacks had anything to do with Islam. These denials may be politically correct, but they are hardly convincing. In any case, many of those who sympathize with the atrocities have often claimed to be inspired by Islam. Whatever may have been the level of involvement of the now famous Osama Bin Laden, one thing is very obvious: his rhetoric is clearly Islamic. It is therefore no wonder that the West is now showing an unprecedented interest in, and perhaps even fear of Islam. We hear that books on Islam are selling like hot cakes in the bookshops of Rome and Milan. We all need to watch with extreme attention where the present trends are leading the world. I am hoping that the moment of truth is approaching, when the world and those who rule the world will no longer be able to continue to play games with reality.

In Nigeria, and other parts of the world where the presence of Islam is a fact to be reckoned with on a daily basis, we have been looking this reality squarely in the face, and have been coping with it.

THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

For the purposes of our discussion, let me mention a few relevant facts about Nigeria. In terms of population, it is the most populous nation in Africa. With its almost 120 million inhabitants, at least one out of every five Africans is a Nigerian. Of particular
significance for our discussion is the fact that this population is about equally divided between Muslims and Christians. We therefore pride ourselves with being “the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world”. By this we mean to draw attention to the fact that there is no nation in the world with the same national frontier. Where there were more Muslims in some countries than in Nigeria, e.g. Indonesia, the Christians would be a weak minority. It is noteworthy too that there are more Muslims in our country than in many of the so-called great Islamic nations, like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, Libya, perhaps with the exception of Egypt. We shall later point out the implication of these statistical facts for Christian/Muslim dialogue in Nigeria.

From the point of view of history, Islam is much older than Christianity in Nigeria. It is said that the Bornu Kingdom, in North Eastern Nigeria, had received Islam as early as the eighth century, barely 200 years after Mohammed. Other Northen cities embraced Islam in subsequent centuries, including the now famous “Sokoto Caliphate“. The European explorers who first visited these lands, and the colonial conquerors who came after them, often met well organised Islamic societies, with long standing trade and diplomatic connections with Islamic centres across the Sahara desert. In many places, the Sharia as the law of the land, now major bone of contention in contemporary Nigeria, dates back to these pre-colonial days.

Christianity, on the other hand is a relatively late arrival on the scene. There are unconfirmed reports of the visit of an Italian migrant Franciscan to Bornu and Kano around the 12th century, with no permanent impact. The first serious presence of Christianity in Nigeria was the brief but significant Portuguese encounter with the Kingdoms of Warri and Benin in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. That enterprise fizzled out with the waning and ultimate collapse of Portuguese influence in the international arena, leaving behind only exotic vestiges and melancholic memories. The present Christian presence in Nigeria can be traced to the missionary endeavours, both Protestant and Catholic, of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the space of about 150 years, Christianity
has made phenomenal progress in our country, catching up with and almost overtaking Islam that has been around for many centuries. This fact partly explains the sense of keen and urgent rivalry that now often characterises Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.

The history briefly outlined above also partly explains the geography of the two regions in Nigeria, with Islam being relatively strong in the North and the South being largely Christian. It should be noted however that it is only by broad approximation that one can speak of “the Muslim North and the Christian South“. There is strong Muslim presence in some parts of the South, especially among the Yorubas, and many parts of the North, e.g. Plateau, Kaduna, Adamawa, have areas of strong Christian presence. The Middle Belt area is largely Muslim towards the West (Ilorin, Borgu) but predominantly Christian towards the East, (Tiv, Idoma, and Jukun).

An important key to understanding much of the present Christian-Muslim interaction and conflict, especially in the middle belt area, is the history of the Fulani expansionist movement, inspired by Islamic fervour, often referred to as “the Fulani Jihad“. This movement was under the military/spiritual leadership of Uthman dan Fodio, in the early part of the 19th century. What started as a movement to purify Islam among the Northern Hausa Muslims, later developed or degenerated into a full-scale war of conquest against non-Muslim peoples further south. This caused major socio-political upheavals in much of the middle belt throughout the second part of the 19th century. This Jihad met stiff opposition among many of the ethnic groups. The arrival of British colonial domination at the turn of the century put an end to the wars. But it also consolidated a situation that was anything but stable at the time. In fact, in line with the perfidious imperialist doctrine of “indirect rule“, the colonial masters confirmed the rule of some Muslim rulers over non-Muslim peoples. Britain is now blamed by both sides: some accuse her of halting the victorious march of Islam to the sea, while others blame her for holding up and delaying the liberation of many ethnic nationalities from Muslim rulers imposed on them by the jihad. These contrasting
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perspectives are very much at play in the political currents which often feed the violent conflicts we have been witnessing in recent times. Southern Kaduna is a case in point, especially the area around Kafanchan, where the sovereignty of a Fulani Emir, who went under the title of the “Emir of Jama‘a”, was forcefully maintained over non-Muslim peoples, not only by the British but also by the Nigerian State until a couple of years ago.

**Peaceful Normality**

Despite the image often projected by the mass media, the fact is that most of the time Christians and Muslims live together in peace in Nigeria. They are together in the markets and business houses, in the offices and work camps, in the armed forces and the police, in the political parties and social clubs. The children and youth study and live together in the same schools and institutes of higher learning. Often members of the same family include adherents of both faiths.

Nigerians are generally fervent in their religious convictions. But they also have a broad-minded attitude to religious differences. It is understood and accepted that people can and should be free to make different choices in this area. Therefore, most of the time, our religious differences are taken for granted. It is more than mere tolerance: it is a mutual acceptance that gladly says “Amen” to one another’s prayers. This comes out in public gatherings and official occasions of the highest order. God must be invoked and the prayers of a Christian and a Muslim religious leader are a regular first item on the programme of events. We celebrate each other’s religious festivals. The Archbishop of Abuja receives the gift of a ram or cow from the Government not only at Christmas but also at the major Islamic feast of *Eid-il-Fitr*.

Perhaps because of this state of generally good relations, there has not been much feeling for the need for formal inter-religious dialogue between Nigerian Christians and Muslims. It is only recently that a Nigerian inter-religious Council (NIREC) was set up by the leaders of the two groups, at the initiative of the Christians, with the firm and generous support of the government. The
motivation for this kind of initiative was precisely because of the frequent occurrence of conflicts with religious colouring.

**When Conflicts Explode**

The general picture of peaceful living together described above is unfortunately often disturbed by occasional outbursts of conflict, sometimes violent and bloody. As these occur more and more often, the nation is gradually deserving the image of a hotbed of Christian-Muslim conflict. This rather recent phenomenon has been agitating the minds of many in our country. Why these senseless and unnecessary conflicts? Why does it seem to be escalating in recent times?

At this point, it is important to note that rarely do these conflicts arise for purely religious reasons. At times, problems break out because of the unguarded public statements of some fanatical preacher, which someone else judges to be provocative and insulting. But these are rather rare. I have often wondered that we have never quarrelled over the religious points of doctrine that most divide us, like the divinity of Christ, or the prophet-hood of Mohammed. And yet, we preach and proclaim these doctrines freely in public. We must therefore look elsewhere for the root cause of these problems.

I believe the root cause should be looked for in the area of politics, in all its expressions: ethnic, social, economic, etc. Because of the long period of bad government, Nigerian society is very unstable and prone to upheavals. Rivalry for access to limited resources, and feelings of exclusion and unjust treatment, cause deep dissatisfaction that build up tension. All that is needed is a little spark to detonate a dangerous social explosion. At times, the spark is some disagreement between contesting ethnic groups or local communities. There are the examples of the Ife-Modakeke war, the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict, both within the same ethnic groups. Sometimes it is religion, whenever the rival parties are identified with the two religions. I will soon give examples to demonstrate this thesis of the nonreligious basis of apparently religious conflicts. Politicians are adept at the game of
manipulation. Religious and ethnic identities generate strong feelings among our people. The political warlords, who lose out in the rough battle for political and economic advantage, do not hesitate to seek cheap allegiance and easy support by rolling out the drums of religious or ethnic war. This is a very insidious dirty game. On the one hand, they try to force one into a partisan pigeonhole, over which one has no choice. On the other hand, many people, out of ignorance, fervently answer the call for a “holy war” unaware of the selfish motives of those calling the faithful or “tribesmen” for battle.

A complementary cause is the utterances and activities of fanatics on both sides. They are easy pawns in the hands of those who manipulate religious sentiment. They are generally honest in their convictions, though misguided in their zeal. The surprising amount of support for the terrorists of 11th September 2001 in some parts of our country should be a cause for great concern for all peace loving Nigerians. It should be clear to government that to encourage such people in any way at all would be the highest degree of political irresponsibility. If there are any such fanatics on the Christian side, they too should be disarmed and disbanded.

It has been noted that we are seeing religious conflicts more often now under democratic rule than when we were under military rule. That is ironically true and logical. The military rulers kept a tight lid on every form of social agitation. They would not tolerate any form of civil protest, for fear it might degenerate into a popular revolt against military rule. They treated religious tensions with extreme care, and no one was allowed to use religion to create any unrest. In fact, the more notorious fanatics were simply put behind bars, under decrees by which the military dictators gave themselves the right to detain "legally" anyone, without trial, for as long as they wished. Now with democracy and freedom, pent-up anger and tensions left long un-addressed are now being let out, with the consequences that we now see around us. In a way, it is part of the price we are having to pay for our democratic freedoms. We hope that government will gradually learn how to democratically maintain law and order, contain irrational eruptions and firmly deal
with troublemakers, even when these are operating under the mask of religion.

**Some areas of contention**

To illustrate the points we have so far been making, I will now give a few examples of areas of apparently religious conflict. In these matters, there is a basic ambiguity as regards the relationship between the State and religion in Nigeria, an ambiguity that is still waiting to be cleared up. On the one hand, the Nigerian constitution takes the clear position that "the government of a State or of the federation shall not adopt any religion as State religion". This formulation was arrived at after very long debate in the constitutional conference of 1977. The draft proposed a clause stating that Nigeria shall be “a secular state”. The Islamic lobby vehemently opposed the concept of "secular State" on the grounds that such a term could be interpreted to turn Nigeria into a godless State. The above formulation was adopted as an explanation of what the original drafters meant by “secular”. Both sides claimed victory, but the deep ambiguity has remained.

Despite the prohibition of State religion, government is involved in religious matters in a variety of ways. The constitution did not specify how far this can go, or what would constitute “adopting a religion as State religion”. Nigerians have been admitting the legitimacy of government involvement in issues like religion in schools, chaplaincies in universities and the armed forces formations, and the financing of pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem. But there is almost always a problem as each side claims it is not getting a fair deal. More problematic are two issues that have been causing disaffection: the membership of Nigeria in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), and the now raging matter of the Sharia as State criminal law.

As regards the OIC, its defenders claim that it does not make Nigeria an Islamic nation. They argue that any nation that has an appreciable number of Muslims is eligible not only for membership, but also for the advantages that they claim go with membership. They cite examples of member nations with a clear
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minority of Muslims, e.g. Uganda, Cameroon and Gabon. This has not convinced its opponents who point out that these nations were dragged into the OIC by dictator rulers, who never consulted their citizens on the matter. They insist we should terminate our membership so as to leave no one in doubt about the "secular nature of the Nigerian State". The other side retort that the concept of "secular" should not be invoked since it was rejected and dropped from the constitution after long debate. The ambiguity continues, while Nigeria remains a member of the OIC. The more problematic issue is the Sharia, and we need to say more about it.

The Sharia Controversy

The issue of the Sharia in Nigeria is very complex, and full of misunderstanding. It is the clearest case of the ambiguity that we mentioned above. Christians, and some Muslims too, insist that it violates the constitution of Nigeria, because it is tantamount to adopting Islam as a State religion in the States where it has become the basis for criminal law. Its proponents claim that what they have done is compatible with the Nigerian constitution. There is no middle ground. In talking about the Sharia in Nigeria, we need to draw attention to a few considerations.

(a) We should recall that the Sharia, as such, is not new to Nigeria. As we have noted the pre-colonial Islamic societies of Northern Nigeria were ruled by some form of the Sharia. The Fulani Empire – the Sokoto Caliphate – had an elaborate legal system based on the Sharia. The British by and large retained it, except for clauses that were considered "inhuman" – e.g. cutting off of hands. At independence, Nigeria retained a form of the Sharia, which was restricted largely to issues of personal law. Criminal offences were handled under a special code, which incorporated certain provisions of the old Sharia code. This arrangement was worked out by the northern political leaders of the day, including the famous Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now say that this was a reasonable compromise which ensured some measure of peace for many years.
(b) The Sharia was a major point of debate during the constitutional conference ushering in civil rule in 1977 as mentioned above. The main problem was not about extending it to include criminal cases, but rather whether, and how far it should be reflected at the Supreme Court of the land. After a mighty show down, and a walkout led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, later president of Nigeria, a compromise was, it seems, forced on the assembly by the military government led by General Obasanjo, who is today our president. Afterwards, there have been attempts by various later military governments to tinker with this aspect of our constitution, by way of amendment decrees, e.g. under Babangida, and last of all under Abubakar. The thrust of all those amendments was to gradually enhance the status of the Sharia in the constitution. But when Zamfara State announced that it was extending the Sharia to include criminal matters, it was a qualitative jump, which could not but provoke a strong reaction. All this is happening because of the rather fluid nature of the Sharia law itself.

(c) In itself, the Sharia is not a definite code that is there to be adopted, like the Code of Canon Law. Rather, every nation has its own version of the Sharia, basing it on some principles of the Islamic legal system. A near parallel could be when Christians speak of "the law of the Gospel". On this point, there is a lot of ignorance among both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. We have already seen in Nigeria different forms of the Sharia.

(d) It is in line with this fact that each of the States that have adopted the Sharia has had to draft its own code, which was passed in the State legislature. The Attorney General of Zamfara State, whose government was the first to take this move, explained that they had made sure that the version of the Sharia that they presented for legislation was designed in such a way that it would not go against the Nigerian constitution. Thus while the provision for the cutting off of the hands of thieves was included, they carefully excluded those relating to apostasy as punishable by death, since the Nigerian constitution clearly guarantees freedom to change one's religion. When challenged on this apparent "picking and choosing". He said: "We did not intend to commit constitutional suicide". Of course, the position that the present
Zamfara Sharia code is compatible with the Nigerian constitution is still an unresolved matter and calls for great legal and constitutional debate.

(e) The Sharia is a perfect example of a political agenda parading as religion. The tragedy is that the ruse has worked with devastating effectiveness. Of course, the Sharia is presented as the religious law of the Muslim community, and many people believe it is so. Christians oppose it saying there is already a legal code for all Nigerians. Muslims insist that it is their "religious right" to have the Sharia. There is no doubt that there is a religious dimension to the problem. But it is quite clear to any discerning mind that the main motivation for the move is political. In the first place, these laws were introduced not by the Mullahs or religious leaders, but by the governors. These are politicians elected by the people on the platform of political parties, none of which however included the Sharia in its manifesto.

(f) But we may ask: why did they embark on this adventure, which has caused so many problems? In my view, the answer is political manipulation. We have to recall the socio-economic climate in Nigeria these days. There is deep economic malaise. Law and order is very poorly maintained, having kicked out the soldiers and their friends. The gap between the rich and the poor keeps widening. Corruption is rife in the highest places. Besides, the politicians have been betraying the hopes and aspirations of the people. The frustrated people are waiting for a messiah, who will put things right. Governor Ahmed Sanni of Zamfara State and his friends have cashed in on this malaise. The people were told that they are in this mess because the Islamic way of life has been abandoned. "Let us have the Sharia, and there will be order, the poor will be relieved, corruption will recede". And the people shout "Allahu Akbar" in acclamation. We are all still waiting for the rulers to keep this promise.

But meanwhile, the popularity of the governor soared high among a predominantly Muslim citizenry. Things have turned out much better than he ever imagined. Even if he wanted to go back, it was no longer politically expedient or even possible. Other
governors saw what was happening in Zamfara and jumped on the bandwagon. Those who tried it in the States with a strong Christian population got their fingers badly burnt, e.g. Kaduna, Bauchi and Gombe States are boiling and burning in tension. Some other States, e.g. Sokoto and Kebbi, seem so far to have got away with it. For how long, we don't know.

(g) But meanwhile, the nation is reeling in crisis. Instead of working towards consolidating national unity across religious lines, the nation is being polarised along those lines. Fanatics are being encouraged to be even more intolerant. After all, they claim, we are now in an Islamic State, or shall soon be. The fanatics and fundamentalists on the other end of the religious spectrum vow that this project of islamisation shall never prevail. Every move and word is interpreted in the light of this confrontation. It is not surprising that incidents of conflict caused by intolerance have increased since the Sharia started.

(h) In the Sharia States, Christians and other non-Muslims complain, and they are told to respect the law of the State. But this is begging the question. Is this the law of the land? Those who cannot stand it have relocated elsewhere. But there are many who cannot relocate to anywhere: those too poor to start life all over again somewhere else; and those who are indigenes of the State and have no other homes. The governments continue to claim that the Sharia would not affect non-Muslims. But we have many reports of harassment by Sharia vigilante groups, especially in the rural areas. There is no visible way of distinguishing on the streets between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. And how many can uphold their rights if unlawfully dragged to an Islamic court? Thus, there is a matter of respecting fundamental human rights here.

(i) As for our image abroad, this has cancelled almost all the respect we gained after military rule. And the recent news about pro-Bin Laden processions in the streets of some Northern cities is hardly a good advertisement for our nation. One wonders when the government will finally realise that this is not a matter to be left to the States to do as they please, at the expense of the whole nation. We hope it will not be too long.
(j) We should not forget, nor overlook the fact that there are some basic principles of the Sharia which are common to both Christians and Muslims. These can form the much-needed bridge for the necessary rapprochement between both sides. For example, both faiths accept the principle that we must be guided in our daily life by the dictates of our faith, and furthermore, that God's will ought to influence and guide public morality. For these principles effectively to promote unity and harmony, there must be, at the same time, a recognition of legitimate freedom in our perception of the dictates of the faith we embrace, and how we discern the will of God in a religiously mixed society. This is the great challenge before us in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few considerations about the way forward. I continue to be optimistic that we shall win the battle for a peaceful and united nation where every Nigerian will be able to practice his or her religion, for the glory of God and the good of all. The fact that we are so many together, and have been together for many years in the same nation means that we really have no other option but to remain together. The option of partition is not practicable: where do you draw the boundary line? Besides, the example of India and Pakistan shows that partition is no easy solution to the problem of living together. What then is the way forward?

We need to resolve as soon as possible our constitutional ambiguities, so as to put an end to mutual misunderstanding. We need to look carefully at our constitution, so as to remove and clarify areas that are vague. In particular, we should seriously return to the principle of one nation, one law. Whatever may have been the advantage of the latest form of the Sharia it is obvious that it has caused a lot of problems for the nation. Do we really have to continue with it? After all, there are many good Muslims in Nigeria who are living happily in the States without the Sharia. Let each religion take care of its own religious laws, and the law of the land will take care of us all.
All Nigerians should imbibe the principle of the equality of all religion before the law, and the freedom of every one in the matters of religion. It is the true way to peaceful living together.

Those who are bent on not respecting the rights of others are troublemakers. Their activities should be carefully monitored. Those who disturb law and order should be dealt with as criminals, even if they fraudulently and blasphemously claim to be acting in the name of God. God is for peace based on justice.

Finally, we should continue to seek avenues and forums for formal and informal dialogue between Christian and Muslim leaders. It makes a lot of difference when we know each other as human beings and fellow citizens of the same nation.

I believe that Nigeria, as the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world has a destiny to show the world how the two greatest religions in the world today can live together in mutual respect and equality. In Nigeria, each group is quite at home. We demand and enjoy our rights, without apologies to anyone. No one is at anybody's mercy. We do not "tolerate" each other: we accept one another, as children and worshippers of God. That is how it should be everywhere – even here one religion happens to be dominant. In a world moving towards ever-greater globalisation, that is the only way to peace and harmony among people of all faiths.
The following story occurs in the life of Muhammad:

Two liars spoke during the lifetime of the Messengers of God. They were Musaylima ibn-Habîb who spoke in al-Yamâma among the Hanîfa tribe, and al-Aswad ibn-ka’b who spoke in San’â’. (Ibn-Hishäm,2:599)

Musaylima had written this letter to the Messenger of God: “From Musaylima, the Messenger of God, to Muhammad, the Messenger of God: Peace be with you. I have been made your partner. Half the land is ours and half belongs to the Quraysh, but the Quraysh are a hostile people.” Two messengers brought this letter.

When the Messenger of God read it he asked the messengers, “What do you say about it?” They answered, “we agree with it”. He said, “By God, if you were not envoys who may not be killed I would cut your heads off.”

Then he wrote to Musaylima, “In the name of God the merciful and compassionate. From Muhammad the Messenger of God to Musaylima the liar. Peace to anyone who follows guidance. God chooses his own servants to inherit the land, and in the end the pious will succeed”.

Muhammad had claimed to be the final and universal prophet, the one who had brought the perfect religion. He was not about to compromise this claim, even though he recognizes partial truth in other religions. In this regard, Muslims like to quote the Qur’ân verse: “Today I have brought your religion to perfection for you, and fulfilled my favour to you” (1:33). No true Muslim would accept that other religions have some truths or values that Islam lacks.
This position may sound absolutist, intransigent and hegemonic, but the same has been said of the Catholic Church for its claim to be the divinely appointed messenger to the world of the full revelation of God in his Word made flesh. Paul VI said, “Neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n. 53).

Many writers view these dogmatic positions as an obstacle to dialogue and peace in the world and an invitation to rivalry and confrontation. They therefore call for theological disarmament as a solution. The voices are many. I wish to examine just a sample.

“Theology of difference” and religious pluralism

In a paper entitled “Pour une théologie de la différence – identité, altérité, dialogue,” the French Dominican, Claude Geffré, states that the first condition of dialogue is not the recognition of what we have in common, but respect for what is different about the other. This statement might seem to echo the very fine study of another Dominican, Jan H. Walgrave, “Socio-ethical principles,” which he lists as solidarity, subsidiarity and tolerance.

Tolerance maintains solidarity and subsidiarity, even where profound differences in conviction and opinion separate human beings from one another... The “otherness” in question does not arise from natural differences, such as race or temperament, nor from unimportant differences in opinion, but is based on more profound differences of conviction concerning the ultimate questions of existence, concerning that which man ultimately accepts as the fundamental truth and value. From such a difference follows a different interpretation of existence, hence a divergent project of life that expresses itself in personal and social activities and conduct.

For Walgrave, “tolerance does not exclude zeal for one’s own conviction, the apostolic, missionary spirit, or a militant defence of one’s faith.” He also rejects “the prejudice that the believer, the man who is absolutely convinced that what he believes about the
ultimate questions of life is true, is incapable of being tolerant,” and maintains that the convinced believer is better disposed to be tolerant than one who is not convinced.

Geffré, however, propounds a different basis for respect for the other’s beliefs. He states:

The truth that for me is the object of absolute adhesion is not necessarily exclusive or even inclusive of every other truth. It is relative, at least because of the historical particularity of its origin... Dialogue leads rather to a rediscovery of my own truth and in search of the truth that is higher and more comprehensive than the partial truth that each person carries as a witness.

In other words, the truth that I adhere to is historically conditioned and limited. Therefore, it leaves room for others to have complementary truths which I do not have, and that is what I should respect, since we are both in quest of a higher, more comprehensive truth than the partial truth which each of us have.

Geffré does raise the problem that the coming of God into history through Jesus Christ is a singular event and a definite revelation that Muslims could not accept. Yet he goes on to make room for religious pluralism. Following Schillebeeckx and Dupuis, he says that diversity of religion is not God’s unfinished business of bringing the whole world into the Catholic Church, but it is a permanent situation directly willed by God “to manifest better the fullness of truth which coincides with his unsearchable mystery”.

While Jesus Christ is the decisive and definitive revelation of God, “Christianity, as a historical religion, does not have a monopoly of the truth about God and man’s relationship with God”. In other religions there are other kinds of authentic religious experience which are not found in Christianity.

The problem remains: If Jesus is the Son of God and his unique mediator with men, then Christianity must be an imperialist religion. Geffré deals with this problem, arguing that the incarnation itself “invites us not to absolutize the historic particularity of Jesus of Nazareth”. A Christianity which is incomplete truth is based on a Jesus who was incomplete truth. But
this Christological position is more clearly stated by Geffré’s American Dominican colleague, Donald Goergen.

“Word that is more than Jesus”

Already in the 1991 third volume of his Christology series, Donald Goergen discussed the relationship between the eternal Word and Jesus. “The Christology of the Fourth Gospel presents clearly a three-stages Christology. To do full justice to Jesus requires a narrative in three parts: the story of the pre-incarnate Word, the incarnate Word or Son, and the risen Lord” (p.32). Later, he goes into detail:

Johannine theology raised for later generations the question of the precise relationship between God and the Word and Jesus. All are intrinsically connected, so one cannot fully define any apart from reference to the others. Jesus is the Word, the Word incarnate or enfleshed, and yet there is “more” to the Word than Jesus alone, more than the Word’s incarnation as Jesus. The Word had a long history prior to its incarnation as Jesus. Also, the Word is God, and yet there is “more” to God than the Word alone. God is both God and Word. Because Jesus truly is the Word, and the Word is God, Jesus truly is God. Yet there is “more” to God than Jesus, though Jesus is God revealed, disclosed, made visible. And there is more to Jesus than his oneness with God. Jesus is also sarx, flesh, human. After Jesus, one cannot talk about God apart from Jesus (God is always the Father of Jesus), nor can one talk about Jesus apart from God (Jesus is God’s uniquely begotten Son). With Jesus, one can begin to speak of the relationship between God and the Word as a relationship between Father and Son. “Son” became one of the richest ways of talking about who Jesus is, and “Father” a way of talking about Jesus’ God. (pp. 258-9)

He goes on to talk about non-Chalcedonian Christologies, saying that to assess them “from the stance of the seeming superiority of one’s own confessional perspective remains a significant theological issue... One cannot separate out a pure essence for Christianity from the history that has shaped it and the diverse historical shapes it has taken. This is not to imply that all historical
developments are of equal value or have equivalent claims on the truth”.

Then, listing significant themes that are helpful in constructing a contemporary Christology, he mentions the distinction between “Word” and “Son”, in that the Word was not revealed to be a Son and God a Father until the incarnation (cf. Symeon the New Theologian), or that the Word is not properly called Son until the incarnation (cf. Marcellus of Ancyra). (271)

Goergen is more explicit ten years later in his “Dialogue and truth”, a paper given at a Bangkok conference”. There, like Geffré who gave an innocuous paper at the same conference, Goergen’s starting point was the “other magnificent and manifold works of God outside the confines of visible Christianity”. He first rightly observes that “the fullness of truth resides in the Catholic tradition, according to Catholic teaching. But this does not mean that it is all already within our grasp... that we have individually or collectively come to a full knowledge of all Truth”.

But he goes on implicitly to deny that the fullness of truth resides in the Catholic tradition when he gives another reason why our grasp of truth is limited. That is because Jesus himself (and therefore the Church) only has part of the truth:

*Christ does not confine God... There is more to the Logos than Jesus alone. The Logos was already present and active in creation and history before Jesus was ever conceived.... Jesus does not exhaust the Word yet fully embodies the Word... So there is more to the Word than its incarnate presence in and self-identification with Jesus, and more to the Spirit than its activity in Jesus and the Church. The Word and the Spirit are present and active in all the major religious traditions of the World – the selfsame Word that is Jesus, the one and only Holy Spirit, source of unity and diversity in the world and in the religions of the world.*

To illustrate how Jesus does not confine the Word, Goergen refers to Thomas Aquinas’ position (*Summa Theologiae* 111:3,7) that the Word could become incarnate in more than one numerically distinct human nature.
"Word that is more than Jesus"

Geffré moves in the same direction as Goergen to relativize Jesus and give the Word free scope to operate independently in non-Christian religions:

And no matter the ulterior explanations of Christology on the substantial identity between Jesus and God (homousios), the Gospel testifies that Jesus is conscious that the fullness of the eschatological Kingdom has come in him. We confess then that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus of Nazareth. But we ought to take seriously the historical contingency of the humanity of Jesus. In other words, we should not identify the historical and contingent element of Jesus and his christic and divine element. We ought to maintain the tension between the identification of God in Jesus and the identification proper to God. We are always sent back indeed to a God that is greater, that escapes every identification. Even the paradox of the incarnation, as the relative manifestation of the unconditional Absolute of God helps us to understand that the unicity of Jesus-Christ is not exclusive of other manifestations of God in history. It is also the best way to de-absolutize Christianity as the religion of incarnation, and to manifest that far from exercising a sort of imperialism towards other religions, it defines itself as essentially a dialogal religion.

Geffré then moves to two ambiguous points. The first is that the kenosis of Jesus in his death was a renouncement not only of what was his due because of his divine stature, but also a renouncement of his Jewish particularity. The risen Christ was universal, for all. From this more or less common point of Biblical theology, we would expect him to go on to say that the risen Christ is operative in all the religions of the world. But he does not go in that direction, and prefers to stay with the above position that the Word is doing that work apart from the human Jesus.

The second ambiguous point is: “I am tempted to say that Christianity that is confronted by different cultures and religions and that could not witness to a certain lack will not encounter the otherness of these cultures and religions and will be unfaithful to its universal vocation”. As evidence of this statement, he cites the undeniable “lack” that everyone has with respect to all the cultural
riches that are to be found in the world. But he confuses these cultural riches with truth or theological insight which he likewise says that non-Christian people have and Christians lack.

To illustrate this position, Geffré turns to the familiar phrase ‘seeds of the Word’. These, he admits, find their fulfilment in Christ, but ‘without losing their originality’:

As the church neither assimilates nor replaces Israel, so also she neither integrates nor replaces the authentic religious truth that another religious tradition could carry. As a historical religion Christianity does have the ambition to totalize all truth disseminated all along the religious history of humanity. If I believe I could speak of religious pluralism in principle, it would mean that there is more religious truth in the very diversified concert of religions than in the one and only Christianity... The coming of Christ coincides with the plenitude of revelation; and as we saw, there lies the origin of the insurmountable difference with Islam. But it is a qualitative rather than a quantitative fullness. Revelation as Word of God in Jesus Christ is definitive and unsurpassable; however, as a content of truth, it is necessarily historical and limited. It is not therefore forbidden to consider other revelations and other sacred Scriptures as ‘rays of truth’, incomplete but precious, which witness in their own way to the unfathomable mystery of God.

He concludes that the “essence of truth is to be in a state of sharing”.

**Summary of these positions**

We have seen how Claude Geffré, in line with Donald Goergen, says that because the humanity of Jesus does not exhaust the eternal Word of God, this Word can be active in the non-Christian world independently of the humanity of Jesus. According to these theologians, there is more to the Word than could be absorbed by the man Jesus, and thus the Word can communicate to prophets of other religions truths and insights that are not merely “seeds of the word”, imperfect reflections of the full revelation embodied in Jesus, but are independent “other” truths that cannot be found in Jesus or Christianity. These authors conclude that by
acknowledging the "otherness" of other religions we will accord them greater respect, and this will foster inter-religious dialogue.

These authors are not saying that there are Incarnations of the Word in these religions, but they argue that if it is possible for there to be a second incarnate Savior, a fortiori it is possible for the Word to operate in non-Christian religions independently of Jesus’ humanity.

**Can one divine person assume two human natures?**

It is now time to review the above positions in the light of the hypothesis of Thomas Aquinas that both Goergen and Geffré use to bolster their position. Are there intelligent creatures living on some planet in outer space? Could there be another Incarnation and Catholic Church out here? That is the hypothesis this question raises to the modern mind. Sixteenth century commentators on Aquinas talked of far-off India as a site for a possible second Incarnation.

This question follows another hypothetical one: “Can two divine persons assume one and the same human nature?” Cajetan explains that these questions are not raised to discuss what is or is not possible for God to do, but to cast more light on the mystery of the actual Incarnation that we know on this earth.

Thomas answers in the affirmative. One divine person can assume two human natures, for the reason that nothing created can exhaust the infinite power of God, and the assumed nature cannot encompass the divine.

**The real point of Summa Theologiae, III:3,7**

This and the preceding article in the Summa serve to give a comprehensive view of what is identical and what is distinct in both the Trinity and the Incarnate Word. In the Trinity there are three persons in one nature. In the Incarnation one divine person has added a human nature to his divine nature. To throw more light on this, Thomas examines the consequences of three combinations:
Thomas maintains that two persons, say the Father and the Son, could have assumed the same human nature, just as they share a single divine nature. They would be one man because they assumed a single human nature, but two persons. (This is similar to the Father and the Son being a single principle of procession of the Holy Spirit). By communication of idioms, the same man would then be un-begotten because of the person of the Father, and begotten because of the person of the Son.

In the case of one person assuming two human natures, Thomas earlier said in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (3:q.1,a.5,ad 2):

*Peter [the other incarnation] and Jesus are not two supposits, but one. So it is true that “Peter is Jesus”. Yet Peter and Jesus are not one man but two, because the singularity or plurality of a substantive term follows the unity or plurality of the nature signified by the term, and not the unity of the supposit. Although the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three supposits, yet because of the one divine nature which the name of God signifies, they are called one God. So it is just the opposite in the case of Jesus and Peter. They are one supposit, but because of the plurality of assumed natures, they are said to be two men. But because of the identity of the supposit, the distinction of the natures does not prevent them from being predicated of one another [i.e. “Peter is Jesus”], because the identity of the supposit suffices to make the statement true.*

In the present article, however, Thomas changes his position to say that if the Word is incarnate as Jesus and the same Word is incarnate as Peter, Jesus and Peter are not two men, but one. That is because we never say anything is two unless there are two supposits. Yet this does not efface the numerical distinction between the two human natures, because the Incarnation does not change the human nature into the divine person, but the divine

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person only subsists in a human nature. “For the Son of God is his divinity, but he is not his humanity”.

In the case of a double incarnation of the Word, communication of idioms would apply. Thus if the man Jesus is crucified, we can say that Jesus and Peter died, even though death affected only the human nature of Jesus, just as we say that when Jesus died, God died, because of the unity of the person.

From the above discussion we can deduce the following rules:

1) Plurality requires distinction of supposits. Thus were one divine person to assume two different human natures, the result would be just one man, even though separate in place.
2) Moreover, to have two distinct things, two numerically distinct natures are also required. This distinction is lacking in the case of the Trinity.
3) Unity, however, is had wherever there is any lack of distinction. Thus there is one God, because of the unity of his nature. Were two persons to assume one human nature, there would be one man.

Soteriological implications

The full humanity of Jesus has its existence through the person of the Word. Because of the adage *actiones sunt suppositorum*, all that Jesus did, such as eating, was done by the Word, even though the action was rooted in his human nature. Similarly, because of communication of idioms, all that the Word does is done by the man Jesus. It is therefore inconceivable that the Word could do anything in isolation from the humanity of Jesus.

This does not apply merely to events after the Incarnation, because the death of Christ, though happening in a moment of time, is the instrument of the eternally present design of God to save people of all time, from Adam to his last descendant to be born. The Incarnation took place by the free choice of God, but this was an eternal unalterable choice. When we say, “through him all things were made”, even at that beginning of time the future humanity of Jesus was included. That is the implication of the title “Alpha and
We therefore hold to the universality of Jesus’ saving work, both in time and in place. The only Christology which would allow the Word to operate independently of the humanity of Jesus is a Nestorian Christology. That makes of Christ a human person on whom the Word descended to use him for a salvific mission, without giving him his own divine existence and personhood.

Could God reveal something to non-Christians which Christ did not know?

If we listen to Thomas Aquinas, the answer is an emphatic “no”. By his divine knowledge, he knew everything that is or ever could be.

His human knowledge is finite, even the beatific knowledge he had because he is the leader of all to the goal of the beatific vision (cf Heb 5:9). Yet this knowledge should extend to all that pertains to him. This includes all that ever exists and all that created things are capable of, since all things are subject to him (1 Cor. 15: 27-28). But his human mind does not know all that God is capable of doing, because that would be to comprehend the divine power and essence. Being united to the Word in person, he is “full of grace and truth” (Jn.1:14) and he sees God more perfectly than any other creature could.

In his earthly life Jesus also enjoyed the gifts of wisdom, prophecy and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit more perfectly and fully than anyone could. Thus we read that after speaking in fragmentary and various ways through the prophets. God finally spoke to us through his Son. He is the reflection of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of the Father’s being (Heb. 1:1-3).

That is why we believe that God could not possibly reveal to us any more than he did in his incarnate Word. And therefore any truth found in non-Christian religions can only be a partial patrimony of what is found fully in Christ.

The only way we could recognize the truth of other religions as “other” is to presuppose a Nestorian Christology, whereby the
Christ, as a human person, had not enough bandwidth to download the immensity of divine revelation descending upon him.

**Does the Church understand the full revelation of Christ?**

Christ said, “All that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:15). Yet the Church’s understanding was limited and had to progress by divine assistance: “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will lead you in the whole truth” (Jn. 16:13).

One thing is sure: the virtue of faith enables us to relate directly with the source of all revelation and communicate with God himself. This does not fully enlighten the understanding. That is why in this life the virtue of charity is superior to faith, in that we can love God far more than we understand him. This prepares us for a greater share in the beatific vision in the next life.

Even though the Church grasps the essentials of Christ’s revelation, and has the guidance of the Spirit to avoid pitfalls and move on to greater and greater understanding, its grasp of the revelation of Christ is limited.

Therefore it is possible for a non-Christian religion to stress a particular truth that certainly is part of Christian revelation, but which may be neglected by segments of the Church at certain times. For instance, Muslim insistence on regular prayer can be a lesson for Christians who are too prone to activity or too ashamed to excuse themselves and take time out for prayer.

**Would the Church gain points by recognizing that other religions have something that it does not have?**

The story quoted at the beginning of this paper already tells us “no”. The same reaction can be seen in Mahmud Aidin’s study of Christian theological attitudes towards Islam since Vatican II. He appreciates gestures such as those made by Vatican II and observes that several theologians subsequently went well beyond Vatican II, some saying that Jesus can well be the saviour of Christians, but other prophets can be mediators of salvation for their own people. Yet for Aidin as a Muslim, anything short of a full recognition of Muhammad as the final prophet is unsatisfactory. Secondly, he sees
the implication that the doctrinal concessions made by these theologians would seem to demand reciprocity on the part of Muslims. And he is in no way prepared to surrender the finality of Islamic revelation.

The same conclusion comes from my concrete dealings with Muslims. In our interaction, it is presupposed that we have conflicting truth claims which are not negotiable. Rather than dwelling on these differences, we explore the unending depths of what we share in common.

Therefore we can conclude that the theological disarmament implied by calling for a recognition of "other" truth in non-Christian religions is counter-productive. The first rule in dialogue is that neither side should be expected to surrender its own beliefs.

NOTES


v Interfaith Dialogue conference, joint project of The University of Santo Thomas, Manila, and The Assumption University, Bangkok, 7-12 February, 2001.

PEACE THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE ACTION:
ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY
IN THE EARLY CHURCH

By

Cletus Madu
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Abstract
Our Lord Jesus Christ bequeathed peace to the disciples before sending them as the Father sent Him (Jn. 20: 21), and through them to the church. Today, the church in different locations seems not to enjoy that peace, as it is faced with conflicts from without and within. Such conflicts generate bad blood among the parties, and tend to divert attention from commitment to evangelization. The aim of this study is to draw attention to how the early church used dialogue to handle conflict situations that came its way at infancy, and thereby urge the church today to adopt discourse as a tool for conflict resolution. This is done by analysing the meeting of the early church in Jerusalem, on the issue of circumcision as a condition for admitting gentiles to Christianity, as contained in Acts. 15: 1-35, vis-à-vis the theory of communicative action. The analysis shows that the early church practised communicative action in conflict situations. The church today may enjoy more peace if all conflicts are handled dialogically.

Introduction
Peace is the absence of violence, a relationship of co-existence and cooperation among and within people. Following the death of Jesus Christ, His disciples locked themselves up in the room out of fear that the Jews might visit them with more violence. They apparently lacked peace and security. Still in this state of fear, Jesus came and stood in their midst and bequeathed peace to them, and showed them his hands and his side. For a second time he said to them,
"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn.20: 21). After the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, and fortified by the Holy Spirit, the disciples and the little group of believers strove to live in that peace while they continued the work of preaching the gospel and making converts.

As the number of believers increased, cases of misunderstanding that nearly rocked the foundation of the infant church became numerous. Prominent among such crises was the attempt to discriminate between Jewish and Gentile believers. While Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch preaching the gospel and making converts, some who had come down Judea to Antioch started instructing the believers, “You cannot be saved unless you are circumcised as the Law of Moses requires” (Acts 15: 1). This teaching led to Paul and Barnabas engaging in a fierce argument with them, but a decision was taken to refer the case to apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas recounted their experiences during their missionary journeys, but some from the party of Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and told to obey the Law of Moses” The Apostles sensed that this “Othering”, on the grounds of birth, would distract them from their goal of preaching the gospel, and summoned all the parties to a discussion where each party had a chance to present its side of the story. At the end of the discourse, a consensus was reached. This looks like what Habermas (1984) calls communicative action, a process of reaching consensus on an issue through dialogue.

The Church today has had to face crises and conflicts in different locations in the world, in stations, parishes and even dioceses. Conflict situations in some places are so poorly managed through high-handedness or neglect arising form an underestimation of the problem and its likely consequences, that some of them have tended to permanently divide the church in such parishes or caused strained relationship among members, or even between the pastor and the parishioners. The primary mission of preaching the gospel often gets compromised in the face of such
unresolved conflicts. The problem that such situations generate in the minds of many believers concerns how to handle crises and conflicts that arise in the church without compromising her primary objective. This is the question that has induced this study.

In this paper, the strategy adopted by the early church to resolve conflicts that came its way will be analysed to see what the church today can learn from it to help it manage conflicts that arise as the gospel is preached to all people. It is hoped that the findings of this study will sensitize Christian churches to the need for promotion of a culture of peace through peaceful resolution of conflicts among themselves. How did the early church manage conflicts, and what messages would that be sending to the church today about the management of conflicts?

Theoretical framework

Peace requires a positive dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are resolved in a spirit of understanding (UN, 1999). Resolving conflicts and promoting peace require persuasion in order to effect cognitive, affective, or behavioural modifications in people (Miller and Levine, 1996). Habermas’ theory of communicative action presents the ideal communication situation as one that stimulates action based on shared agenda through an open and non-coercive process (1984). This theory therefore is part of the theoretical framework for this analysis. Ting-Toomey’s face-negotiation theory (2000) helps to explain cultural differences in response to conflict situations. Face-negotiation theory states that people from collectivistic cultures have different face-work from the face-work of people from individualistic cultures. (Face-work is verbal and non-verbal messages that help maintain and restore face loss/public self-image, and uphold and honor face again). The early church seemed to have had a collectivistic culture manifested in the commitment of every member to the collective goal and welfare of individual members. Face negotiation theory will therefore form part of the framework for this study. Since attitudes guide, direct, shape and predict behaviours (Kraus, 1995), and in conflict situations, the attitude of
the parties toward the other and toward the conflict situation may play an important role in creating and defining the conflict situation, and may serve to resolve or escalate the conflict (Cross and Rosenthal 1999), the theory on attitude and attitude change may also help to provide the framework for this study.

**Culture of Peace**

Culture is defined as an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that characterize members of a society, and which are not the result of biological inheritance (Hoebel, 1996). Culture is human-made and includes ideas, values and codes known to members of a group, and is transmitted from generation to generation, and does not exist until it is shared with other human beings. It influences an individual’s behaviour towards others in the group, as well as the way the individual expects others to behave (Farb, 1978). Culture determines an individual’s or group’s world view (Hall 1997), and describes webs of shared meanings and values (Pearce and Cronen, 2002). Culture is a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, since it mediates and transfers ideas, values, and intellectual refinement between generations and between civilizations. It is a preserving and reproductive force by its ability to transmit the cultural patterns of the past and the present, to the future; and an important innovative influence, by its power to inculcate new attitudes, thoughts, values and norms (Aharoni, 2002).

Peace has been operationally defined by Kieh (1996) as a situation in which a society meets the basic needs of its people, protects and respects their civil liberties, and provides a fair and just legal system for peacefully resolving conflicts. While seeming to agree with Kieh’s definition, Ryan (1999) and Fisk (2000) distinguish between two notions of peace, negative and positive peace, saying that negative peace is the absence of all forms of violence, including war and terrorism; while positive peace is the presence of economic, political, and cultural practices which contribute to the safe, fair, and healthy living of citizens. The way to peace as stated by the United Nations (1999) include a positive
Peace is a dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged, and resolving conflicts in the spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. These definitions agree that peace involves the absence of conflict and (or) ability to dialogically manage conflict, respect for human rights, and providing for the needs of people through economic development. This is why Hettne (2001) says that peace and development are two sides of the same coin.

Culture of peace is defined by the United Nations General Assembly (1999) as a set of values, attitudes, traditions, modes of behaviour and ways of life based on respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation; full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts; respect for and promotion of the right to development; respect for and promotion of equal rights of and opportunities for women and men; respect for and promotion of the rights of every one to freedom of expression, opinion, and information; and, adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue, and understanding at all levels of society and among nations. Peace culture, according to Aharoni (2002), instils recognition of the “other”, respect for its identity, and culture, as well as a commitment to solving conflicts and differences by peaceful means. Culture of peace aims at transforming values, empowering people with peace-building skills and attitudes, encouraging democratic participation, helping women and the marginalized gain equal representation and voice, ensuring transparency, accountability, promoting sustainability and continuity (McGregor, 2001). Culture of peace is therefore linked to conflict management and prevention of conflict since it seeks to solve problems through dialogue, negotiations and mediation.

**Peace communication**

Promoting a culture of peace at all levels would require that awareness be created through communication. Peace communication is therefore a communication process aimed at
achieving peace through a distinct suasory characteristic feature operating within a context composed of cultural warrants that form the basis for justification of actions (Blake, 1998). Cultural warrants are defined as bases on which evidence and actions are grounded, defended, and justified; and understanding of these warrants serve as springboards for negotiations because these cultural warrants serve as grounds for prosecution of the conflict. Cultural warrants are located, according to Blake (1995) in various sources in society, sacred and secular, which include religious documents, beliefs and practices, and other sources such as land tenure system, historic inter-ethnic relations, kinship structure, customs and traditions, constitution, positive laws, the Bible, Sharia, Torah and Talmud. The role of a peace communicator is to locate the cultural warrants in the respective communities or states involved in the conflict. Peace communication therefore is a communication process that forms the basis for the resolution of conflict.

**Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is unavoidable and can occur between two people, between groups, between members of a family, political parties, nations, and even within an individual. It can occur everywhere, and how a conflict is handled greatly determines its outcome (McFarland, 1992; Lan, 1997). Majority of conflicts have a combination of motives, contain both cooperative and competitive interests, and can be both constructive and destructive. Cooperative and competitive interests have two directions of conflict resolution, and distinctive strategies are used to deal with conflict with each orientation. The relative strength of the cooperative and competitive interests within the conflicting parties determines the nature of the conflict process and its outcome (Deutsch, 1994).

Conflict has been viewed in the past as something negative and not beneficial (McClure and Russo, 1992), but more recent studies show that conflict is being perceived to be normal and enhances growth (Mitchell and Mitchell, 1984). Actors in a conflict are of three groups, namely, sympathetic or non-sympathetic observers,
parties to the conflict, and mediators (Deutsch, 1973). Tse, Francis and Walls (1994) did a study on conflict resolution strategies of Canadian and Chinese executives, in which responses to two types of joint project conflicts, task-related and person-related with potential partners from their own culture or from the other culture, were examined. Findings confirm that culture orientation affects executives’ response to conflicts. Executives from countries, which differ in culture, tend to adopt different strategies to resolve conflicts, develop different expectations about possible outcomes, and be motivated by different causes. This finding agrees with Ting-Toomey’s theory (2002) by showing that collective societies tend to avoid open conflict and strive to resolve conflict in the inner circle before it becomes public enough to justify public involvement.

**Communicative Action**

Theory of communicative action, generated by Jurgen Habermas presents a model of ideal communication as one that stimulates action based on shared agenda, open and non-coercive process (Polanyi, 2002). Communicative action is one in which participants are oriented towards reaching a mutual understanding, and each appeals to a like orientation in others who are not primarily geared toward their own individual success, but pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions (Habermas, 1984). According to this theory, in a communicative action situation, participants seek to “coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the inter-subjective recognition of validity claims” (Habermas, 2001 p.58).

Communicative action only takes place “when actors are prepared to harmonize their plans of action through internal means, committing themselves to pursuing their goals only on condition of an agreement – one that already exists or one to be negotiated – about definitions of the situation and prospective outcomes” (Habermas, 2001 p.134). Theory of communicative action is
dialogical, inclusive, non-coercive, and reflective; encourages joint responsibility, leads to consensus, and stimulates action. Effort is made in communicative action towards understanding others’ views; towards making participants accept the validity of one’s or group’s utterances through rational argumentation.

Validity claims, refer to those things that are contested or accepted in a speech act, and different validity claims are resolved through what Habermas calls communicative rationality. Validity claims are given in the form of reasons, and consensus on an issue are evaluated in terms of the reasons agents take to support it (Kelly, 2000). A claim is accepted as valid through discourse or argumentation. Actors can at any time challenge each other to give reasons for the validity of their claims upon one another. Disagreements that arise in a communicative action are passed over to the level of discourse at which reasons are put forth and defended with arguments, and the strength of an argument is evaluated in terms of the soundness of the reason given. Discourse helps antagonists perceive each other with less suspicion and greater trust, and gain a better understanding of the others’ perspective of the conflict, recognize greater compatibility between the interests of the opposing sides so that they are able to perceive the conflict less in zero-sum terms, and be enabled to expand the pie and generate more flexible and creative solution to their mutual problems (Cross & Rosenthal, 1999). It is the force of better argument that motivates participants to accept a particular outcome (Kelly, 2000).

A communicative action situation presents all perspectives while participants work as peers, listening carefully to understand one another’s views and interpret the information generated. The process of communicative action, according to White (1998) requires each actor to participate in the discourse and introduce a proposal or position without hindrances. It relies on the free consent of participants, and aims at reaching a mutually acceptable agreement that will render harmonious the action plans of the actors involved (Kelly, 2000). This agreement is not imposed or brought about by manipulating one’s partner in interaction, “for
something that patently owes its existence to external pressure cannot even be considered an agreement” (Habermas, 2001 p.134). Communicative action promotes the one fundamental principle enunciated by Pope John XXIII (1963)

...that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such, he has rights and duties, which together flow from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and altogether inalienable”.

This literature review shows that conflicts arise in human affairs and require to be efficiently handled to attain its resolution (McFarland, 1992; Lan, 1997); that one of the means to resolving conflicts is communicative action in which all parties give their respective perspectives of the conflict, and through argumentation, reach a consensus; and that peace which follows conflict resolution, if sustained, leads to a culture of peace. The resolution of the conflict that arose in the early church regarding the “Othering” of gentile members will now be analysed to see whether it was a communicative action, or was merely crushed through high-handedness.

Analysis of Data

The data for this study is the record of the meeting of the early church in Jerusalem as contained in Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 15, verses 1-35. Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journey had taken the Gospel as far as Perga and Attalia, and on their return trip, stopped over in Antioch to spend some time with the converts they had made there. While they were there, some men came from Judea to Antioch and started teaching the believers, “you cannot be saved unless you are circumcised as the Law of Moses requires” (Acts.15: 1). This teaching seemed counter-productive in the face of the efforts and experiences of Paul and Barnabas among the gentiles, and led to a fierce argument between these teachers and Paul and Barnabas. As neither of the two parties was ready to yield an inch of its ground, the case was referred to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.
At this meeting in Jerusalem, each party had the chance of presenting its perspective on the issue. Paul and Barnabas, the pro-circumcision party, and Peter, each had the chance of arguing in favour of their stand while the other parties listened. The apostles and elders who acted as mediators kept the discussion focused probably on the ‘missio’ from Jesus Christ. At the end, James summarized the discussion, suggesting that instead of troubling gentile converts with circumcision, they should be urged to observe certain rules of conduct, including abstention from sexual promiscuity and some dietary rules. There was a consensus on that, and a document was issued to that effect. Gentile converts found this document acceptable and were filled with joy by the message of encouragement that accompanied it (Acts. 15:31).

The controversy about circumcision posed a potential danger to the growth of the infant church, and this probably prompted the meeting in Jerusalem. In summoning the meeting in Jerusalem, the church was reacting like a unit with a collectivistic tendency. Collectivistic societies use self-effacing strategies to proactively deflect potential face threats – threats to public self-image, for both themselves and others; tend to privilege other-face or mutual face over self-face; and employs “some face-work strategy to defend and support another person’s need for inclusion” (Ting-Toomey, 2000 p.438).

During the meeting in Jerusalem, the mediators allowed the opposing parties to freely present their perspective on the controversy while the other party listened, and in giving their views, all parties were geared toward resolving the conflict. The dialogue proceeded with neither party using coercion or threat to steer the discussion to its favour. The mediators, apostles and elders, moderated the discourse, and at the end, a consensus was reached. It was a communicative action, which stimulated action based on shared agenda through an open and non-coercive process (Habermas, 1984).

In adopting a dialogical approach to the issue and recognizing and respecting each actor as a person endowed with intelligence and free will, the church changed the attitude of the participants to the conflict as well as paved the way for its outcome (Cross and
Rosenthal, 1999). By sending Judas, called Barsabbas and Silas, “two men who were highly respected by the believers” to personally deliver the communiqué of the meeting to the converts in Antioch, the early church was not merely advocating a change of attitude of Jews towards gentiles on paper, but was putting it into practice, effecting cognitive, affective and behavioural modification (Miller and Levine, 1996) in the believers.

The document issued after the meeting served not only to solve the problem in Antioch but in the entire church. By issuing this document, the church was continuing the culture of peace bequeathed to it by its founder (Jn. 20: 21), a culture of non-discrimination and non-Othering among believers of all generations and locations, a culture of recognizing the other, respecting his identity, and of commitment to solving conflicts and differences through peaceful means (UN, 1999; Aharoni, 2002).

Jewish converts to Christianity probably perceived this community of believers as an extension of Judaism, the traditional religion of the Jews. This probably explains their demand for gentile converts to be circumcised in order to be saved. But the apostles and elders, by the way they managed the conflict, made a clear distinction between Christianity and Judaism, perceiving Christianity as a universal community, membership into which was open to all who profess belief in the Lord Jesus. By perfectly managing the circumcision controversy, the early church paved the way for conversion and expansion. But if circumcision had been adopted as a condition for membership, the Christian church could probably not have spread to all the ends of the earth.

The early church has thus left an example for all Christians of all generations and locations to adopt discourse as a tool for conflict resolution. High-handedness from any segment of the church in the stations, parishes or dioceses may not be fruitful in resolving conflicts, but can be counter-productive. The unity in diversity with which the church in different locations is endowed has to be maintained by adopting a dialogical approach to conflicts, and as Pope John XXIII (1963) says, by recognizing and respecting the rights of each individual. The practice of culture of peace through discourse is one that has to be handed down to posterity through appropriate catechesis.


FEATURES

MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE AFRICAN CHURCH: SOME TASKS AHEAD OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

By

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Abstract

This paper discusses the tasks ahead of Catholic teachers in the execution of their professional duties in the African Universities systems. The focus of the article is the Ecclesia Africana in which the role of the Teaching Laity is to be understood in the mission of the Church as Family in contemporary Africa. The specific context of interpretation is the spirit of the Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Christifideles Laici and the pronouncements of some local ordinaries in Nigeria: The documents were studied to help re-formulate the role of the laity in the mission of the Church in modern Africa. In the earlier part of the paper, the notion, lay apostolate has theologically become nuanced to mean a sanctifying apostolate in all secular affairs in which the laity execute the duties of their professions. A statistical report on the growth of the Church in contemporary Africa is provided. It attests to the rosy future of African Catholicism. However, in spite of numbers, the HIV/AIDS scourge is shown as a monster in contemporary Africa. It is discovered that the youth are the most vulnerable class being affected by the pandemic. Since there is no known cure yet, the teaching laity is challenged to initiate home-grown approaches that can help transmit adequate knowledge on youth sexual morality. Youth career guidance and counselling on the value of abstinence and chastity are identified as major tasks of today’s University teachers. The paper draws attention of the teachers to their singular
position as leaven in the *teaching apostolate* and in the health of the African Church and society.

**Introduction**

An increasing awareness of the role of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church; especially in contemporary Africa has come to light. If no where else in the African Church, at least, the history of the Nigerian Catholic Church knows great titans like Professor Gabriel Afolabi Ojo, late Raymond Amanze Njoku, formerly Federal Minister of Transport and Honourable Member of the House of Parliament in the First Republic and their teeming contemporaries who had spent much of their talents during the early seventies to establish the National Laity Council of Nigeria (NLCN), one of the earliest laity movements in Black Africa. Impeccable historical records reveal that the organization that was inaugurated on the 15th of March 1973 at St. Gregory’s College Hall, Ikoyi, Lagos quickly metamorphosed into the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) (Ojo 1998:1-31). The examples of Ojo, Nwadike and others show how academicians had served and worked in the NLCN. But today, in spite of the increase in the number of Catholics engaged in tertiary education sector, many African academics appear not to be fascinated by the idea of the *mission of the Church* in the modern world, talk of their own role in mission as lay professors in their institutions in post-modern Africa. The problem lies in the fact that many Catholic academicians have not taken time out to share discussions and views on how the *Teaching Laity*, namely the University Professors, Lecturers and their Assistants, indeed, a large group of the pilgrim church in Africa can participate meaningfully in the vocation and mission of the Church whose task, among other things, is the provision, prosecution and the promotion of the divine economy of salvation in the context of the history of the contemporary African Church.

As a contemporary African Catholic theologian, one widely travelled and experienced in cross-cultural education of youth in African Universities, I will, in this paper, firstly attempt to focus on
some recent developments in the theology of the vocation and mission of the laity as it is being addressed in some regions of Africa. I wish to make the teaching of the Fathers of Vatican II my starting-point. In what follows thereafter, I will attempt to proffer a theological definition of the role of the laity in the context of an “action programme” that suits the Church’s view of the mission of the laity as an integral component of the Church as Family in Africa. The context of my interpretation is the *Ecclesia Africana*, the Church especially the Church that is confronted with contemporary vicissitudes in life in modern Africa. I will try, as much as possible, to offer a clearer and a non-technical definition by briefly highlighting the interface between the teaching of the *Lumen Gentium* and that of the *Gaudium et Spes*, two historic documents in which the Council Fathers had propounded the *diakonia* (service) properly expected of the laity in the contemporary world as the CLCN defines it “the full incorporation of laypersons in the mystery, communion and mission of the Church” (CLCN 1989). The Professor’s mission cannot but reach out to the devastating consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. A section is devoted to a discussion on the level of the pandemic in some African nations. The role of the teaching laity in manufacturing and transmitting knowledge that could halt the prevalence and spread of the deadly disease is offered. Finally, I will attempt a contextualization of the findings of my theological interpretation in order to respond to the implications of the mission of the teaching laity towards the search for self-identity of the youth in Colleges and Universities in Africa.

**The Vocation of the Laity**

According to Vatican II, all baptized members of the Church are called to holiness. They are enjoined to fully participate as members of the People of the Covenant who are called to live in union with God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. By her/his baptism, every lay faithful is inserted into the membership of the Church as Family and thus acquires the missionary status. She/he, together with other faithful, exists in communion and exercises
his/her charisms, ministries and different aspects of service in the one Family of Christ. She/he is called to share in the missionary mandate to extend the Reign of God in the world where she/he is normally most engaged and active. In an address to some representatives of the laity at Antananarivo, Madagascar, the largest Island in the west of the Indian Ocean and ecclesiastically a constituent part of the African Church, the Holy Father said,

*The Lord not only calls you personally to holiness, he also sends you out to bear witness. Baptism and Confirmation have enabled and enlisted you to do the work of evangelization, and the same is true of marriage. In the Church you participate in everything that assures her vitality her sanctification, her material support, her fraternal life, and especially her witness to the Gospel (Christifideles Laici, No.33)*

Here, the Holy Father draws attention to the laity’s co-responsibility in the Church as communion as well as her/his mission in the post-modern Church. It therefore becomes the obligation of the baptized lay faithful to bear witness to her/his Christian faith in her/his chosen career in life. She/he is “empowered” to challenge and to confront the wrongdoings in our “broken world”, if I may use a phrase recently coined by contemporary Missiologists (IAMS 2000). This marching order is issued by and based on the prophetic mission of every baptized faithful. A note in the sermon of Archbishop P.Y Jatau, then Co-adjutor Bishop of Kaduna given in 1973 on the occasion of a Thanksgiving Mass celebrated to mark the inauguration of the National Laity Council of Nigeria is still relevant:

*Baptism and Confirmation make the Christian a commissioned officer in Christ’s Church – to bear witness by his life and so spread the faith to others indirectly by a sincere Christian life, which could be infectious so to say (Ojo: 27).*

In fulfilling this baptismal role, she/he executes a priestly ministry. Thus both the prophetic and priestly responsibilities complement the functionality of the laity in the universal and the contemporary African Church. In this teaching, the Council Fathers had made the
laity become aware of their responsibilities to bear witness to Christ in the present-day realities of the world and to play out their God-given mission of the sanctification of the world “in which we live, move and have our being” (cf. Acts 17: 28). Thus by the baptism of any laywoman or man, she or he is entrusted with a specific vocation and mission within the global mission of the Church. This perception of the calling and diakonia of the laity in the contemporary Church is the result of the dogmatic teaching on the status of the laity vis à vis the dogmatic explanation of her/his secularity. Secularity does not only refer to the profane and the non-sacred domain of life and services that are normatively regarded as the preserve of the lay people but it also draws attention to a specific constitution of the Church as a living Family that is both in and yet outside of the world.

Further Amplification of the Role of the Laity

In recent times the Church has further amplified the role of the laity in her mission. The post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Mission of the Laity in the Church and the world, Christifideles Laici (CL), Rome, 1987) affirms that “the lay faithful’s position in the Church is fundamentally defined by their secular character” (CL. No.15). The notion of the laity’s newness in Christian life can really be ambiguous for ordinary churchwomen and men in all Africa, but it is a theological way of stating a simple reality. It is a call to participate in “an action programme for the realization of the continuous Pentecost of the Church and the establishment of a new era of evangelization in our time” (CLCN 1989). The laity’s “newness in Christian life” refers to an active and animated life conferred by baptism on each and every baptized Christian; similar to the “born again” rhetoric being jostled by many preachers in the New Religious Movements. Yves Congar in his study, Lay People in the Church (1985) has further attempted a theological definition of the laity and her/his mission within the corporate mission of the Church. For him, the mission of the laity should be geared towards the promotion of active communal life of the Church.
The secular character of the laywoman or man is the fact of her or his being an individual who shares her or his being and existence in communal or corporate affairs with others in the secular world. In a recent study, a Nigerian theologian, Fr. Oliver Onwubiko has attempted to define "secularity" theologically and ecclesiologically in the context of the mission of the whole Church in which the lay faithful are called to participate (Onwubiko 2001:148-149). It is also gratifying to note that recent ecclesiology has come to acknowledge the place of the laywoman and man in the secular sphere in which she or he operates. There is now an emerging consensus of opinion that the secular sphere is the locale where the laywoman or the layman has to attain her or his sanctification and holiness. In the execution of the processes necessary for the realization of the lay person's sanctification, the secularity of the laity translates into the secularity of the Church. The implication of this two-dimensional aspect of secularity is that all baptized faithful are bound to face the temporal order with a spirituality of aggression and warfare and not one of passivity. The secularity of the laity therefore imposes a sense of duty on her or him. While engaged in the provision of services to the state and in her/his secular concerns, her/his baptismal status challenges her/him to assert her/his right to engage in mission.

In the light of the discussion above, the secularity of Catholic teachers, lecturers and professors can be said to be firmly anchored on a definite theological ground with special significance. University dons are challenged "to insert themselves fully into the realities of the temporal order where, as witnesses of Christ, will re-orient and renew the values and activities of the nation and the world" (CLCN 1989). The secularity of the laity must be let to resonate the Christ of the Gospels (imitatio Christi) in the affairs of men and women. In human history, God acts as both Creator and Redeemer who has delegated women and men to be co-creators. As God's delegates, the laity is called to continue to renew the face of the earth and to be good stewards of the things of this world; especially those things entrusted to her or his management and
administration in her or his chosen profession and in various other engagements in society.

In pre-Vatican II ecclesiology, the life, vocation and mission of laywomen and men were considered merely as lay apostolate and were then regarded as participation in the mission and ministry of the hierarchy (Congar 1985). But today, it is no longer so. In a post-Reformation and Enlightenment theological thinking, the Catholic Church had assigned a second fiddle role to the laity as a re-action to the theology of the Reformers who rejected the ministerial priesthood as they held the view that all laymen were priests because they share in the priesthood of Christ. In the Catholic Church, this reaction grew into the tendency to impose a limitation on the role of the laity. However Vatican II has re-visited the situation and on the basis of a theology of the activities of the laity in the Church, it has come to accord a positive role to the laity in the Church (Dulles 1977:10). The lay apostolate has now become recognized as a sanctifying apostolate, firstly for the lay faithful themselves and secondly, for the people with whom they interact in the secular arena where they discharge their civil obligations to the state. This presupposes an interactive process of the “give and take” type, indeed, a sharing evangelization. Within the church context and orientation, the process enhances intra-ecclesial relationship that promotes intra-ecclesial diakonia (service), the sort of mutual ministration and love-based mission St Paul enjoins on all members of the congregations he converted to the Church of Christ. In reality, such a mission is characterized by the spirit of community and communion (koinonia) typical of the Mother Church in Jerusalem in the Apostolic era (Lk. 2,41-47; Manus 1990:19-24). With this lens of looking at the apostolate of the laity, one can see that both the ecclesiological and theological dimensions of the mission of the laity in the modern world have, in recent times, come to be emphasized.

Following the history of ideas in the Church, this emphasis is not without cause. The laity have come of age and should now fully know their esteemed duties in the mission of the Church. They should come to accept their mission as participation in the “sacred
order" of the mission of the Church. In great African Archdioceses like Owerri, Onitsha, Lagos, Accra, Abidjan, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Cape Town, etc, the laity enthusiastically spend their resources in church buildings and work in various fields of evangelization. They thus hold the recognition of their mission in the Church as the best thing that has happened to the laity, in fact, as a laicisation of the ministry introduced by the Church to give space to the initiatives of the laity. There is no doubt that this development is due partly to influences occasioned by post-modernism, drop in the number clerical candidates in the North and recent theological ideas. Post-modern theology no longer makes a sharp distinction between the "sacred and the profane". And in contemporary African theological thinking, it is maintained that authentic theology is no longer only interpretative but transformative and reconstructive (Mugambi 1995). Even the laity in the First Worlds Church have come to agree with the pragmatic Roman Catholic theologian, David Tracy that for theology to be effective today, it has to become missionary and take interest in the topical issues of the day by playing active transforming role in the modern world (Tracy 1970:190). In that light, the laity in those countries have come to believe that as they discharge their duties in a particular world, they have a right to fulfil a transforming mission in that world. This layman's conception of the Church-World relationship had further been strengthened by Vatican II's ecclesiology when viewed from the vintage point of the dogmatic essence of the Church. This recent theology finds its echo in the Lumen Gentium, No 33 that auspiciously states:

The laity are gathered in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head. Whoever they are, they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer. The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their Baptism and Confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and
circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself....

This text amply declares that the mission of the laity is no longer a participation in the apostolate of the clergy which had for so long eclipsed the initiative of the layman in the Church. Now the mission of the laity is in its full right a participation in the saving mission of the Church. This mission is predicated on the fact that the integral mission of the Church has become rooted in a holistic ecclesiology, a conception of the Church where she is acknowledged as one People of God. And in the perspective of a growing African ecclesiological re-interpretation of this reality, the Church is conceived as Family patterned on the African model where the family is the basic unit of the extended family (Orobator 2000).

The Church in Contemporary Africa

Like a typical African family that expands in leaps and bounds, the Church in present-day Africa has a rosy future as its robust statistics show. While world population stands at a staggering 5.9bn, Roman Catholic population has maintained a steady rise in the past ten years reaching a record high of 1,033,129,000 by the end of 1999 (The Year Book of Statistics, 1999). In Africa, the Catholic Church membership increased by 7,606,000 while it dropped by 1,319,000 in Europe and 83,000 in Oceania. While the number of Catholic Bishops worldwide stands at 4,482, Africa, as young as its Church is, has 592 Bishops. The number of priests in the world was 405,009 at the end of 1999. Out of this, Diocesan priests totalled 265,012 while 139,997 were religious priests. In Africa, the number of priests reached 26,547 in 1999. The number of Brothers in the world was 55,428; in Africa, they increased by 274. Since 1997, the number of Sisters has drastically dropped in the world church except in Africa and Asia. The number of catechists in the world stands at 2,449,659 of which Africa has 356,259. Since 1997, the number of seminarians has been on the
increase the world-over. In Africa, both the minor and major seminarians are on a steady increase with 162 major seminarians and 561 minor seminarians respectively in 1999. Out of 173 Archdioceses in the world as at October 17, 2001, Africa topped the list with 82 and out of 750 Dioceses in the same world, 365 are found in Africa.

Given this remarkable growth in numbers, how may one measure the mission of the laity and evangelization in the contemporary African Church? In order words, what is the task of the laity in such a “fat” Church? In spite of some achievements being recorded by way of indigenisation and inculturation of the Church in some parts of Africa (Ndiokwere 1994; McGarry-Ryan 2001, Ryan 2002), historical and social political upheavals of the apparently insurmountable type daily rock the peace of Africa. Africa is a continent where ethnic and inter-religious conflicts afflict virtually most of her nation-states and make nonsense of their fledgling democratic experiments. Nigeria and Kenya stand out prominently as nations on the opposite sides of the continent that have, for a long time, known no internal peace as a result of constant ethnic clashes and inter-religious conflicts with odious hate crimes, gory tales of human carnage during border skirmishes and cattle rustling. Corruption in high and low places, especially among the political class, is subjecting Africans to perpetual economic enslavement and indebtedness to foreign financial cartels. Human and peoples’ rights are regularly violated with impunity (Muyebe 2001). The fear of God is thrown overboard.

The Reality of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Africa

Despite the apparent prosperous future of the African Church, the HIV/AIDS scourge is causing much consternation. The UNAIDS most recent report informs us that of 40m infected people in the world, 28m live in Africa. African Governments are failing to checkmate the rapid spread of AIDS because Africa is spending much of her money, a whooping US $15bn per year on debt servicing; odious debts often taken by illegitimate governments and corruptly squandered on un-prioritised projects. That Africa should
be subsidizing the rich world in spite of the harsh realities of the AIDS pandemic that has hit Africa hardest has both mental and psychological consequences on Africans; especially when one sees the number of children and youth who die from AIDS and its related illnesses. Debt servicing has been declared one of the obstacles for Africa to draw from the Global Fund for AIDS and tuberculosis. The effect of this will be the wiping out of whole a generation, the productive generation; as Saidi correctly observes “and by so doing is continually perpetrating the already damaged economy” (Saidi 1999:43). Further, advising, Saidi, opines that “due to the scourge of AIDS, Africa is disproportionately being robbed of its leadership in both civil and religious circles” (Saidi:43) If care is not taken, in the next 20 years, Africa shall lack the productive generation whose labour produces the raw materials that feed the industries of the Western world. The ravages are indeed building a time bomb which, when it explodes, will affect both Africa and the West. A few statistical survey will vindicate claims being urged above.

In the West African sub-region, Nigeria, with its vast population of nearly 140m, is leading in the HIV/AIDS invasion. The rate has increased from 5.4% to an explosive phase reaching to a point of state emergency. A staggering 4.9% - 8.1% prevalence rate has been reported among the youth population in Nigeria. According to a recent publication by Mrs. Joyce Uche, Assistant Director of Youth Development in the Federal Ministry of Women and Youth Development (Weekend Vanguard, December 29,2001, p.4), the figure translates to mean that about 2.5m people face death by the disease by the year 2010. Ghana is not spared. Its own statistics is quite alarming. In the coastal cities and the capital, Accra, 8 per cent tested have already full-blown AIDS.

In the East African area, the scourge is reaching epidemic proportions. The high incidence and impact of HIV/AIDS in Kenya alone poses a major public health hazard that is retarding development processes with terrible negative socio-economic consequences. The statistics on the death rate from the disease puts it at a staggering ratio of 700 deaths per day. This has made the
Mission of the Laity in the African Church

Government to pronounce HIV/AIDS a national disaster. Over one million sufferers have been deceased since 1984 leaving behind some one million AIDS orphans in Kenya who are struggling to survive, begging and scavenging for food, sleeping in the open or make-shift shelters. Kenya National AIDS Control Council (NACC) had, in its strategic plan 2000, indicated that more than 300,000 new infections had occurred in the country within a year. Eight million Kenyans, in other words, a third of the population are projected to die of AIDS before the 2000 year-end. The startling discovery is that the great number of those infected are youth between 15-49 years of age, all in their productive years. The socio-economic consequences include wasted working hours and the deepening of the poverty level of a nation whose population is already gravely impoverished (Nyamongo 2001:86-87). Such countries as Kenya cannot strategically develop as they are on the brink of a national crisis. Zakaria Samita, Kenyan himself, argued that the primary cause of the disease is due to “permissive sexual behaviour through tourist industry, through cultural practices and through sexual promiscuity among many young people due to moral degeneration” (Samita 1999:173). By the end of last year (November 2001), it was reported in a National Daily that about 30,000 people have been infected in Nakuru and 50,000 in Mombasa, two important tourist Kenyan towns. While the figures may have been over-exaggerated, the fact remains that the sad news is not only known for Nigeria and Kenya alone.¹

It has recently become established that southern African countries have the largest and fastest growing HIV/AIDS record in the world (Delius & Walter 2002:5). It is on record that the HIV/AIDS menace in Southern Africa is nothing less than a calamity in progress. Today, an estimated 6 million Southern African Development Community (SADC) citizens are HIV positive and may develop fully blown AIDS complications and die in the next few years. Life expectancy in many countries in the southern African region has been cut by 15 to 20 years as a result of AIDS pandemic (http://www.who/Int). The situation is certainly going to alter the population structure in that region. Since the first
cases of HIV/AIDS were isolated in the late 1980s, close to 4 million deaths from AIDS-related diseases have been recorded (Zondi 2001:3-4). In 2000, it was estimated that 4.7 million South Africans (2.5 million women and 2.2 million men) between the ages of 15 and 49 were HIV infected. As the trend is going, by 2010 these figures could reach 7.5 million; hence life expectancy in South Africa will have fallen to 43 years. Chilling data on adult mortality suggest that between 2000 and 2010 up to 7 million South Africans will die of AIDS. According to recent studies, the number of AIDS deaths will be considerably larger than that from any other single cause of Death and will be almost double the number of deaths from all other causes combined over that period (Dorrington et al 2001).

There is no doubt that the challenge this bleak information poses to university men and women in Africa is immense. They must devise and facilitate HIV/AIDS prevention programmes and conscientization campaigns through hostel-based counselling care, social ministry and education at classroom and Christian groups levels in order to minister adequate response to the youth in the universities and other tertiary institutions. University Professors and lecturers must become actively involved in the promotion of AIDS Awareness Programmes as the disease is fast spreading among university students. The battle against AIDS must be fought with their wits and strength. As educated elites, they should join forces with and complement Government efforts. I seize the opportunity offered by this publication to summon our peers to come to a recognition of the moral dimension of the disease. I invite all academics working in Africa to engage in a coordinated effort between the university authorities, the youth in our Colleges, Catholic Federation of Students, other Christian Fellowships, NGOs, the media, nurses and all workers in University Health Centres in African campuses to brain-storm and find out practical solutions to the ravages of the pandemic.

This survey indicates that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is decimating Africans in millions and surely the Church is not unaffected. As Catholic educationists, it is our responsibility to re-
emphasize traditional Catholic Moral Teachings and Values with special reference to sexual behaviour and fidelity in marriage. As members of the university community, the teaching laity should work hand in hand with the university chaplains, ministers and pastors to launch strategic plans of action on (a) prevention strategies, (b) care and succour to people living with HIV/AIDS and down-to-earth pastoral counselling. While the mounting of Signboards and Bill Boards are useful, I call for a commitment to regular *HIV/AIDS Evangelising Crusade* in all African campuses which the regional executives of the Association of African Universities (AAU) should initiate and lead in their regions. Abstinence should be encouraged as the antidote against AIDS for the sale of sex is a poor cash earner. Committed Christian University staff who are imbued with the Christian philosophy of their institutions should enhance the value in abstaining from sex before marriage in order to preserve the sanctity of sex. Abstinence before marriage and chastity within marriage are African cherished values that honour the institution of marriage. Such values must be taught as ethical imperatives for Christian discipleship in the universities, especially in the many Christian Universities now springing up in Africa. The staff should do well to be role models on healthy sexuality in and out of the campuses.

**The Mission of the Teaching Laity in the Pandemic**

A good case example of laity involvement as a pressure-group intervention is that of Kenya where a three-year strategic plan of action intended to reduce the HIV/AIDS prevalence, at least, by ten per cent has been launched. The plan is aimed at saving some 30,000 people from being infected with the AIDS virus every year. The strategy is to be executed through the Church’s Health and Wholeness Project targeted at the population aged between 15-24 by 20-30 per cent reduction within the plan period of 2002-2005 (*Daily Nation, August 27, 2002, p.6*). Worthy of adaptation and emulation is also the Home Based Care launched by Malawian Catholic Dioceses aimed at AIDS education at the grassroots level (Saidi: 44). To borrow a leaf from these examples, the teaching
corps in our tertiary institutions should engage in lobbying relevant Government Ministries, especially the Ministries of Women Affairs and Youth Development, and Church leaders to aggressively commence the creation of conducive environment for anti-HIV/AIDS sufferers in their respective institutions. The professors, as a body of respectable professionals, should come together in a club or association aimed, among other things, to pressure the Ministries of Education in Africa to set up, where there are yet none, teaching modules on HIV/AIDS in the Schools Curriculum. Professors and Church leaders should set up Scholarships Committees to help educate numerous AIDS orphans at school and to train widows in small-scale economy sharing business management.

In many regions of Africa, church leadership is exercised in autocratic styles to the chagrin of majority of the clergy and church workers. More often than not, apostolic office-bearers vitiate the evangelical sense of koinonia (fellowship) and so diminish their charism to authentically witness to and echo Christ, the Good Shepherd; as a result, the teaching laity becomes rather cynical and apathetic. The education sector is manifestly bastardised to a stultifying level and the teaching profession, once a noble career is degraded and the African teacher is mentally derailed and materially impoverished. Globalisation and its ugly tentacles of encroachment, marginalization, pauperisation and destabilization in the so-called global village is thoughtlessly thrust onto the socio-economic and political landscape of unsuspecting African leaders. Even the proliferation of Christianities through globalisation in Africa; especially in Nigeria where research into the proclivities of the New Religious Movements (NRM)s show that many “church-planters” put money and material prosperity first before the gospel, traditional faith in the efficacy of suffering and the cross is grossly being caricatured.

In the midst of these contemporary and worrisome signposts of instability and insecurity, the enormity of the task that confronts the Church in Africa and her professional laity in mission cannot but be imagined. Where are the laity and their role in this messy
situation? Many of the lay faithful do not know their part in the Church’s work of evangelization. For many, what is essential in life is to acquire good education, get a good job, marry, “make” children and closely look inward and be responsible only to their children and the extended family. *Lumen Gentium* in its Chapter IV further stresses: “By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will”. Besides, most Catholic laypersons do not read the Bible enough and even if they do, they do not know that the majority of Jesus’ disciples were laypersons, erstwhile fishermen and simple folk and rural villagers of Galilee. I believe that the majority of the laity in the African Catholic Church ought to be re-directed to come to appreciate their missionary right and to re-capture their creative role in the life of the Church. They should evangelise their peers, their places of work, and society through good example; for, as teachers, they should remember that ‘example is the best teacher’.

Surely the Church is founded to spread the Good News of the Reign of God and to make all women and men partakers in her work of salvation. It is also in the social political contexts that the voice of the laity must be let to echo the authentic gospel message of Christ to the members of the Church-family, and *ad extra*, to the rest of the people in the African world. The Christian vocation is a familial one from the very start. The individual is born into the Church-family by baptism. As worthy members of this family, the laity must exercise their right to mission-ize. They are called to bear witness to Christ in word and deed. They must sanctify and bring to holiness all persons; especially the African youth whose surrogate parents they are in the lecture halls and off-class activities on campuses.

**Youth Career Guidance and the Teaching Laity**

How will university dons minister to the African youth who are rendered so vulnerable by the HIV/AIDS pandemic? The question usually asked when people discuss the youth is, who is a youth? To attempt a response to this question, let me borrow an idea from a
Kenyan social psychologist and Director of the Institute of Social Ministry, Tangaza College, Nairobi who has claimed with others that “the youth are said to be those between 15-25 years” (Ojore 2001:27). Aylward Shorter reports that more than half of the world’s population is below age 25 and that 29% are between the ages of 10 and 25. He confirms that eighty per cent of the youth are natives of the developing regions of the world (Shorter 1996:103). In modern Africa, recent statistics reveal that the youth constitute about 50% of the total population of Africans. Given this figure, Ojore asserts:

_The fact, therefore, is that the youth ensure the continuity of a country, of a church, and of a particular community. They are the bearers of culture, traditions, customs and values of their people into the next generation_ (Ojore:28).

It is generally agreed that the youth are neither children nor adults. But in their own way of seeing things, they want to be treated as mature persons. In _Gaudium et Spes_, No. 7, we are informed that the youth, aware of their own influence in the life of the society, “want to assume a role in it sooner”. What is said of the United States of America may be true of Africa, where many of the youth “are very much on the fringe of the church, often struggling to find connection between their faith and their ideals of love and justice and the church as they experience it” (Appleby 1993:256). Because of their exuberance and enthusiasm, the youth want to do things that are relevant to their lives and as such feel the need for participation. Really they need to be welcomed, to be listened to, ready to be used and to feel that they belong (Appleby:258). A close watch during church harvests and bazaars in some Nigerian churches reveals that they want to feel at home in the parish community. Some of them who belong to the Young Christian Students, the Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement and other pious associations as St Jude’s Society, St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary are doing their best to mobilize for their future ministry in the church and the society. According to Ojore,
They abhor dictatorship. They want to be consulted on issues that affect their lives, needs and interest. They want to be trained to be helpful to their community. Very often, we adults are not receptive and attentive to them (Ojore:28).

In fact, looking at the history of education today, it is noticed that the African child stands in need not of more expertise but of more education. African education systems have become examination-oriented and are not given much opportunity for career guidance and vocation choice. How can the students we teach be helped to choose vocations prospective enough for their future; especially in the wake of the emerging Internet Super Highway? Absence of good guidance and counselling has combined with other forces to make the campuses potential markets for drugs and handguns. The campuses have become insecure by the prevalence of cultists’ activities and all sorts of group-fighting. Many a female student are seen as sex objects by both teachers and the moneybags in the adjacent townships. A University of Nairobi philosopher-theologian, Professor Jesse Mugambi has observed that “many of our students are left unattended with the result that other agencies have preyed on them with alarming consequences” (Mugambi 1995:182). Many students have been left to transform into sceptics, cynics, fundamentalists of all sorts of persuasions, and hoodlums. Many African Universities have stifling bureaucracies that do not allow for healthy dialogue between management and students. Many of the Vice-Chancellors are political appointees who must accompany their Heads of States to public rallies in order to impress their bosses instead of finding ways and means to improve conditions of understanding and dialogue in their local universities. The situation is so bad that Ojore has this to inform us:

Strikes leading to uncalled–for closures of institutions follow. Today, an undergraduate course can last up to six years instead of the normal four! These institutions prepare young men and women who appear to be sensitive to be sensitive to justice and transparency, but who forget such virtues soon after their graduation. Once in the private sector
These chaotic situations impose a duty on teachers in tertiary institutions in modern Africa. They are challenged to see to it that the students are helped to find their identity. Creating a personal identity has been identified by Adolescent psychologists as one of the mysteries of the human phenomenon. In African universities, many of our youth are confronted with the challenge of finding really who they are, what they are about and to where they are headed. The great Greek philosopher, Socrates (470-399 BC) once taught the youth of Athens who clustered around him to hear his words of wisdom, “Man know yourself”. As university dons, the Socratic tradition might have freely been imbibed in our formative years and as such it is important that teachers should help the youth to know who they are before they choose a career for themselves. And again, it is the duty of university dons to know who the students are before they can opt to help them settle to a vocation in life. Students must be aided to come to a self introspection and a soul-searching needed to form a positive identity in life, for once they know themselves, then can they learn to take care of themselves even in the age of the HIV/AIDS pandemic to which they are most vulnerable. There is no greater mission for the laity in institutions of high learning in Africa today than to assist young people to construct their own identity in a Christ-like manner. This is an option necessary for them to “sustain their commitment to the values of the Kingdom in whatever work they choose” (Ojore:29). They need the help, the guidance and the assistance of elders that the teachers represent. Noteworthy is, once again, the advice of Adolescent psychologists that one’s self image comes from the feedback of those role models around one; especially the response to the various initiatives being made by the people one comes in contact with. And I dare say the teachers are most contactable people to the students.

**Conclusion**

The paper takes its point of departure from a brief history of the establishment of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria in the 1970s. In the context of that history, it progresses to discuss the
vocation of the laity in terms of official Church pronouncements and documents such as *Christifideles laici*. Attempt is made to re-awaken the consciousness of the African Catholic laity especially those involved in the *teaching profession* in tertiary institutions. It demonstrates that the secular nature of the vocation of laywomen and men is a share in the Church’s mission and evangelization in a growing robust Church in the African world. University Professors are challenged to become aware that their vocation is a special charism, indeed a sanctifying apostolate that must be put at the service of the youth in Africa’s Colleges and Universities. The HIV/AIDS is shown as a real scourge that is causing great desperation and consternation for the African future. The staggering statistics of the victims in various regions of Africa demands that Catholic University teachers tackle the problem head on. In this light, the paper proposes the urgency of an HIV/AIDS Evangelizing Crusade in all African Universities to be aimed at checkmating the spread of the pandemic among Africa’s youth – the leaders of tomorrow’s church and society. The professional care of Catholic Teachers for youth morality, guidance and career counseling calls for further investigations and research in order to propose relevant policies. Without focused peer research breakthroughs, a holistic program of action cannot be put in place on a Continental level. The paper therefore admonishes African professors to urgently recognize this demand as a missiological task ahead of the Church’s mission in contemporary Africa in which they, as real stakeholders, are obligated to act as a leaven in the dough.

**WORKS CITED**


Ecclesiastical Documents

GS Gaudium et Spes, 7 December, 1965.
LG Lumen gentium, 21 November, 1964

References

1 It is noteworthy to report that during the 2002 World AIDS Day Celebration in Nairobi, Kenya, it was announced that the infection rate in Kenya has dropped from 13% to 10% due to behavioural change and the use of sex masks

2 For further information on HIV/AIDS and the Churches’ role in Africa, see, Musa Dube, 2001, “Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church”, in Ministerial Formation, No. 93, April, pp.38-50.
REVIEW ARTICLE

IS AFRICAN THEOLOGY STILL ALIVE?

by

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Introduction

African theology seems to be at the point of losing its dynamism for which it was known since the last 30 years. Some people declare that Africain theology is dead, others even go to the extent of saying that it never existed. However one thing is sure: African theology is in search of new epistemological landmarks for the interpretation of religious experiences in a world that is becoming more and more global. This issue is addressed in two recent books published in French last year. The first, Théologie africaine au XXIe siècle. Quelques figures, Vol. 1, (Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, Suisse, 2002, 190 pages) is edited by Bénézet Bujo and Juvénal Illunga Muya. The other, Vers une théologie africaine. La théologie et les théologiens au Congo: projets et défis dans la période de l’après indépendance 1960 - 1990 (Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, Suisse, 2002, 361 pages) is a thesis written by Emmanuel Ntakarutimana.

The aim of this review article is to present these two books by pointing out their contributions to a new self awareness of African Theology and the questions they pose to contemporary research in this field.

Pioneers of African theology

In their book, Bénézet Bujo and Juvénal Illunga, theologians from the Democratic Republic of Congo, reaffirm a strong conviction: African theology is not dead, it is alive and dynamic. This
dynamism can be shown through the presentation of some “figures” of African theology: nine theologians from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic and Nigeria. The second book by Emmanuel Ntakarutimana is an analysis centred on the beginning of quest for theology as an organised scientific discipline, in Congo Kinshasa. The author highlights the sources of this theology, its methods and different stages of development, and questions its capacity to produce a Christian community open to questions posed by a global world.

**African Theology through Representative Figures**

In the first book, it could be interesting for the reader to start from the documents in the last chapter of the book about the famous debate in 1960 between Tharcisse Tshibangu and Alfred Vanneste, on the possibility or not of an African theology which takes its bearing from elements of African cultures. From these documents, one can measure the work done by African theologians who no longer ask the question of the “possibility” of but rather practice African theology, in different ramifications, systematic, biblical, moral, fundamental, pastoral theology, and ecclesiology.

The reader then turns to the nine theologians presented in this first volume, according to their ages, from the eldest to the youngest.

The first is the Congolese Vincent Mulago (1924-). In order to produce an African theology, this disciple of Placide Tempels had to develop first of all an African philosophy. His theology establishes a connection between Neo-Scholastic philosophy and ethnological study of the Bantu cultures.

The Cameroonian, Engelbert Mveng (1930-1995) was the first to develop the concept of “anthropological poverty”. He forced African theologians to ask the following question: where was the Christian God when the West was subduing Africans to slavery and colonisation? These inhuman treatments, according Mveng, are responsible for the pauperisation of the African.
Tharcisse Tshibangu (1933-) and Alphonse Ngindu Mushete (1937-) from the Democratic Republic of Congo, were among the first to sustain the thesis of the possibility of a theology of “African colour”. They both contributed to the reflection on theology as a critical science in dialogue with other epistemologies.

The contributions of Sidibe Semporé (1938-) to African theology are centred on the field of ecclesiology. This Dominican from Burkina Faso wants to renew religious life and the priestly ministry. This entails going beyond the hierarchical conception of the ecclesial community. Semporé’s work also draws the attention of African theologians towards the interpretation of the impact of Africain Christian indigenous churches, a domain that has not been well developed. His work comes close to that of Bathélemy Adokounou (1940-), from Benin Republic, who founded the “sillon noir”, for the inculturation of Christian faith in Africa.

The work of the Congolese, Oscar Bimwenyi Kweshi (1938-) is indispensable for one who wants to study the fundamentals of African theology. He seeks to formulate a theological discourse that will be truly African and grounded on the African religious heritage, in dialogue with the Christian heritage. His theology has connections with that of another Congolese Bénézet Bujo (1940-) who seeks to create a link between African and Christian ethics. Most of Bujo’s research has been centred on the concept of Christ as the Proto-Ancestor, mediator and model for moral life in African societies.

The youngest in the list is Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu (1945). This Nigerian Spiritan is presented as one of the most productive liturgists. His numerous works develop the concept and practice of inculturation from different angles, especially, liturgy and ecclesiology. However his approach is original. It is centred on the synthesis of a socio-political interpretation of African traditions on the one hand and the contributions of modernity on the other. From there he proposes to renew the ministry in the Church from the African conception of authority as “listening”. He also advocates for the autonomy of African Churches while maintaining the relationship of communion in the universal Church. Finally, Uzukwu believes that living the “Church as the Family of God”
will be a significant contribution to the project for the reconstruction of African theology.

The advantage of this presentation is that it avoids the classical presentation of African theologians according to three currents: inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction. In African theology the boundaries among these currents are very porous. Even when certain theologians identify with a particular current, a meticulous analysis of their works shows that they all bear the same missiological preoccupation: the inculturation of Christian faith in Africa. This objective is well analysed by the second book that we now propose to examine.

**The Example of Congo Kinshasa: The Question of Method**

As indicated above, Ntakarutimana’s analysis is centred on theology in Congo during the period from 1960-1990. The book comprises of two parts. The first part is a synthesis of the historical evolution of theological movement in the Congo. The second part analyses the methods adopted by Congolese theologians, shows their limits, and prepares the way for what the author calls “integrative inculturation”.

Ntakarutimana notes that from the famous debate between Tharcisse Tshibangu and Alfred Vanneste on the possibility of an African theology, to the Christology of Christ as Proto-Ancestor (Bénézet Bujo), through the theandric structure of revelation (Oscar Bimwenyi Kweshi), Congolese theologians agree on one point: African religious experience is not only the condition of possibility of access to revelation, but also, forms an integral part of the process of revelation. There is circularity between God’s revelation of God’s-self and the reception of this revelation by a given community.

According to the author, the pertinence of this theology lies in the fact that it has fostered the rooting of Christian faith in Congo under the episcopacy of Cardinal Malula: the Roman Missal for the church in Zaire (Zairan rite), the institution of the laity as Bakamb (parish leaders), and the production of new rites for religious profession.
However the author notes that the danger facing the theology of inculturation is the fixation on the question of African identity. Moreover the inflation of the Ancestor Metaphor may give the impression that African theologians reduce God to the limits of their culture. This is where another Congolese, Kä Mana, proposes to ground the theology on the Word of God. From his Lutheran background, Pastor Kä Mana, asks African theologians to think of Christ under the mode of the Messiah whose force is not in the past but in the future to come (p. 32-33).

In the second part of his book Ntakarutimana questions the methods adopted by Congolese theologians. Here the author underlines an important point that has not really received adequate attention till date: theological movements in Africa have always borrowed their methods from Western theologies which themselves, depend on western philosophies (p.97). Hence the crisis of African theologies reveals the internal crisis of Western theologies. The heart of Western philosophical enterprise is the question about truth. The first crystallisation of the question is the crisis of metaphysic, that is, the displacement of the conception of being as essence and of truth as the correspondence of the intellect and the object by Heidegger’s existentialism. After Heidegger, Western philosophy discovered a particular interest in language and hermeneutics. Historicity then became the criterion of truth. However, none of these epistemologies has been able to resolve definitively the question of truth. Though hermeneutics seems to dominate contemporary theological discourse it is obliged to more and more modesty.

This debate continues in African Theology. The Christology of Christ as Ancestor borrows from the essentialist discourse of scholastic metaphysics and from ethnology. Oscar Bimwenyi Kweshi needed the epistemologies of contemporary philosophies of language and hermeneutics under the influence of Heidegger and Bultmann in order to defend African religious experience as condition of possibility of revelation. When Kä Mana asks Africans to turn resolutely to the future given by the Word of God, he is borrowing from evangelical theology enrobed in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. If the limit of inculturation is its inability to
emphasise the rupture produced by the coming of God to a particular culture, that of evangelical theology is its inability to integrate the socio-historical conditions in which Africans receive and live their faith.

This is where Ntakarutimana calls for an integrative hermeneutics: how can man welcome the God who comes to join man in his human condition, without being determined by the historical conditions of man? An hermeneutics which will take care of this question, says the author, has to take seriously both African holistic vision of the universe, and the Western vision of the world that are deeply rooted in contemporary Africa. At the same time, this hermeneutics should show how we can welcome gratuitously, the God of love who comes to us in Jesus Christ, whose Spirit cannot be domesticated by any culture.

**Challenges to be faced**

These two books are thought provoking. I just want to point out three issues that require more research in African theology. This I hope will help to prolong the debate opened by pioneer African theologians.

**Christian God and African Cultures**

It is important for the new generation of theologians to know that African theology has come a long way and that pioneers of this theology have built a strong background for African theology. From them we learn a theological truth: every theology is culturally determined. Hence African theology cannot avoid questioning the significance of African cultures and traditions for the Christian faith. However, theology has to handle the cultural issue with care. One must understand the reserve of young theologians towards the cultural project of the pioneers of African theology. The younger generation is born in a period that is marked by culture crises, suffice it to name, Rwanda, Congo Kinshasa, Côte d’Ivoire. God must not be determined by any culture. If God is culturally determined, then God’s truth is destroyed and Christians will not be able to announce God as the One who comes towards man and who
invites the African to conversion. Ntakarutimana’s integrative inculturation is a good move, but does not offer satisfactory elements for a solution. African theology is yet to develop a Christian theology that draws its bearing from the Trinitarian revelation which as far as I know is the specificity of the God of the Crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

**Christian missionary Enterprise in Africa: tabula rasa?**

It has become vulgar in African theology to reduce the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa to the famous “tabula rasa”. This thesis holds that western missionaries destroyed pre-Christian African cultures in collaboration with western colonisation, hence the fight for the rehabilitation of African identity. Ntakarutimana’s book rightly critiqued the fixation on the question of identity but did not escape the “tabula rasa” trap. Even the good works done by missionaries are relegated to the sphere of personal ambitions of certain missionaries (p. 24, note 13).

African theologians need to go back to history and take note of what contemporary historians discover in the archives. That the first Western missionaries did not know a lot about other cultures is true. That they destroyed African cultures is partially true. Researches done by contemporary historians permit to affirm that the first missionaries did more to conserve African cultures than the destructions we attribute to them. Lamiri Sanneh notes that contrary to the colonizers who had no respect for African cultures, missionaries especially Protestants, had the courage to adopt vernacular languages for the translation of the Bible. On adopting vernacular languages, they recognised cultural differences as well as the transлатability of the gospel.

For this enterprise, missionaries collected and documented the customs and rituals of the people; they built up the grammar and dictionaries for their languages. Even if the goal was the diffusion of the Christian faith, the possibility of naming God in their mother tongues was for Africans catalyst for a new awareness of their identity. On personal basis, children, women, men were happy to have access to knowledge despite their economic and social status.
in the traditional society. They were happy to forge an auto-reflective link that linked the past and the present together in one memory. On the general level, a new awareness of their identity through the Christian faith gave Africans the courage to forge nationalism strong enough to bring colonial governments into question. In many countries, the missionaries had to pay the prize of this work because the colonial governments accused them of creating African nationalism.

**Did the North African Church collapse because of lack of inculturation?**

Another widely admitted thesis, reasserted by Ntakarutimana, is that the Church in North Africa collapsed because of lack of inculturation. This is partially true. Here again we have to go back to history. A recent research conducted by Maureen A. Tilley of the University of Daton, Ohio, shows that the Church in North Africa was a contextualised church. It was characterized by an episcopate whose collegial structure corresponded to the mentality of the epoch. Bishops were very close to villages and gathered regularly to resolve issues concerning their churches. They only sent a delegation to Rome when a problem could not be resolved among them. The problem is that from 429 to 647 CE, this episcopate suffered attacks respectively from the Vandals, the Byzantine Empire, and the Roman imperialism up till the pontificate of Gregory the Great. These attacks weakened the internal organisation of the Church, to the extent that when Islam arrived in North Africa, it met a Church whose force was already sapped. More research needs to be done on this question. The collegial structure of the episcopate of the defunct North African Church could be a model for new exercise of authority in African churches today.

**Conclusion**

From the above reflections, there is no doubt that African theology is still alive. The problem is that there is a gap between the pioneers and the younger generation. The major reason is the culture crisis
in contemporary Africa. However, one must not neglect the fact that the new generation is trained in universities suspicious of the qualities of African theology. This then means that there is need for more and intense dialogue between the two generations. The pioneers need to explain to the younger generation that the respect for the dignity of African cultures and traditions does not endanger the identity of the God of Jesus Christ as well as the missionary mandate of the Church. On the contrary, it is a condition of the possibility of the enrooting of the Christian faith in Africa. This can revive the interest of the younger generation in the history of African theology which remains a lacuna in their formation. The two books we have just analysed are good steps towards this dialogue.

NOTES

2 This assertion came out clearly in the Lineamenta for African Synod 1994.
BOOK REVIEWS


In August 2000, IPCA organised its Fourth Worldwide Conference in Kroonstad, South Africa on the theme: "Creating Hope for Africa". In that conference, Obiora F. Ike and Ndidi Nnoh Edozien, the authors of the book under review, led some work sessions on the topic “Understanding Africa”. Inspired by this very topic and the questions that were discussed in the conference, they both agreed to co-author a book on the subject. *Understanding Africa* is, therefore, the product of that agreement and resolve to "make a modest, but meaningful, contribution to the great ocean of oral and pre-literary tradition" in Africa (p. 6).

Indeed, *Understanding Africa* is an attempt to define the complex reality of this continent and its people; it is an important introduction to the rich cultural heritage the African continent is known to have. By using the Igbo people of Nigeria (West Africa) as their point of reference, the authors have shown throughout the book that Africa is "a treasure house for authentic human values" such as solidarity, peace, generosity, education, love, forgiveness and reconciliation (p. 5). *Understanding Africa* thus illustrates how traditional social, cultural, political and economic values; religious beliefs and practices; and traditional moral and legal reasoning, can be a basis for sustainable development.

The book is divided into three parts and contains eight chapters. It has a brief conclusion, but a long preface that serves as an introduction. Except for chapters one and four, the authors have used traditional methods of communication and teaching, that is, by the use of proverbs, stories, prayers, names and myths. In fact, the book begins with a traditional prayer over the Kola-nut. Case analysis of judicial proceedings is also used, especially in chapter seven.
In the first part entitled "Traditional Legal Reasoning", the authors sketch the history of the Igbo people, their philosophy, the origins of justice, ethics and religion in the Igbo culture. Chapter one, therefore, is an introduction to the Igbo people. It is a presentation of the meaning of Igbo art, religion; property and ownership, and of their social structures, the values inherent in their culture and why these things are now falling apart. According to the authors, these features "characterise the Igbo people and seem to distinguish them from other socio-cultural groupings". This implies therefore that there is no universal African culture but shared values and features present in the many different African societies.

The authors argue that "Igbo art is a manifestation of the aesthetic, the philosophical, the historical, the human and the divine milieu in the midst of human creativity" (p. 21). Religion is thus embodied in this art and woven into daily communal living based on a conception of a Supreme Spirit called Chukwu: the all powerful, merciful and just creator of all and provider of all that mankind needs, who can be reached through other deities and the "living dead" or ancestors.

The communal sense of living, according to the authors, manifests "interconnectedness" and is expressed in two basic ways. First, in the "sense of family" in which polygamy was viewed as a means of extending this unity and of establishing greater solidarity with society. It is not clear why the authors define the family as "large and extended", for if the African family is a manifestation of a sense of communal living or of unity and solidarity, then the use of such words as extended may be misplaced. Second, the communal sense of living is manifested in communal ownership of property. The authors believe that "whatever property was acquired by the individual was based on the individual's right of access and use, in a proximate but not ultimate sense" (p. 24). And this was true especially with land which was considered as a bond between the living and the dead, held in trust by each generation on behalf of those yet unborn (p. 24).
Women, according to the authors, occupied a special position and played important roles in traditional Africa. Respect for womanhood is thus one of the values inherent in Igbo culture. The basis of this respect is to be found in the female deity: the earth (mother earth). They maintain that although there seem to be a separation of roles between men and women, interdependence amongst them ensured the fulfillment of both gender needs and roles.

The authors are, however, pessimistic about the future of African traditional values because of modernisation and disintegration of traditional social structures. They are troubled by the fact that family uprooting has affected African morality and identity with many attempts by some Africans to renounce their own identity. The chapter is, therefore, concluded with a call to Africans to look back to their history in order not only to understand it but also to look forward to prosperity.

In chapter two, the authors seek to explore the notion of justice as rooted in the language and culture of the Igbo. They see the notion of Justice among the Igbo, to be contained in the word "oto", which means straight, fair, and just. They argue that justice is the work of culture and not nature and its practice among the Igbo was to be found in respect for human rights and property, distribution of goods, fair dealing and inter-human relationships, good judgement, and coexistence. Furthermore, such practices of justice expressed the continuous search for "balance and harmony, equality, reciprocity, "proportionality and exchange"and peace (p. 33). Thus by the proverbs, folktales, myths, and names used in this chapter, the authors explain both the meaning and importance of justice in Igbo society.

Chapter three is an analysis of the foundation of ethics, religion and justice in Igbo culture. In the thought of the authors, the central reality of Igbo existence is the soil, hence, the foundation of morality, religion and justice is the earth - "Ala"or "Ani. "Ala" is both earth and the earth deity: the most prominent deity, the "source and judge of human morality" (p. 49). She is regarded, according to the authors, as the giver and custodian of the moral
law - the "Omenala", and respect and fear for the laws or customs make people fair in their dealings. This is why laws and judgements are made in her name and punishments administered to maintain social harmony and justice.

Comparing the "Omenala" with the Jewish Torah, the Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law, and the British constitution, the authors argue that the "omenala" is "a generic term for the body of Igbo socio religious laws, customs and traditions" (p. 61) that has been handed down from one generation to another. The "omenala is, therefore, the law of the land embedded in the myths, songs, taboos, proverbs, language, prayers and all practices of the people. However, the authors think that the ultimate source of this law is Chukwu (God). And since this law has been passed from one generation to another orally, it is dynamic, while maintaining a static truth.

In concluding this chapter, the authors assert that the purpose of the "Omenala", like that of any other law, is "to protect life and property, promote communal harmony, social justice and ethical decorum" among the Igbo (p. 62). Thus, the law is claimed to guide people in four main areas: life, economy, harmony in the community, and respect for ancestors.

Part two, entitled "Philosophy, justice and law", is a somewhat isolated part of the book presented in only one chapter (chapter four). This part is a presentation of the concept of justice in the history of western philosophy. It is an endeavour to analyse the meaning of justice in diverse traditions: ancient Greece, Jewish tradition, classical and modern. Looking at pro-literary Greece, the authors want to emphasise that the oral tradition used by Greek poets Homer and Hesiod is an effective conveyor of traditional values and customs from one generation to the next (p. 71). Charting the different traditions, the authors establish more the unity rather than the differences between diverse thoughts and perspectives. They establish, for instance, that the ancient Greek idea that all men are equally citizens of the world because they all share in the one reason of God is the foundation for the classic
theory of natural law, which has had a continuous impact upon western thought and political practices (p. 69).

The authors argue that the notion of justice interpreted to mean "an eye for an eye" cannot resolve the dilemma of distributive justice. They propose instead social responsibility and communal reverence to divine powers as an alternative. But a critical look at the concept of social responsibility and its application reveals that certain people (especially hard-working people) in society have to carry heavier burdens in order to meet social obligations. Thus, the notion of justice as "to each according to his rights, desires, and needs", has remained as problematic as the notion "to each according to his social responsibility" that the authors propose.

Part three of the book, entitled "Jurisprudence", is an analysis of land issues, notions of individualism and communalism, alternative dispute resolution methods, and political and social life in traditional Igboland. In the course of their analysis, the authors find that the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and democratic participation are central in Igbo social and political practices.

In chapter five, they consider one of the most fundamental cultural, social, and economic realities of African societies, that is, property. Central to this discussion is the question of ownership, rights and duties. According to them, property in traditional Igboland has a "social function" and private property is understood to have a "social mortgage" for the security, life, and survival of the family (p. 106).

They argue that property ownership is determined by the interplay between the individual and the community and the attitude of sharing. They insist that "the attitude of sharing with others in the community what one possessed, without relinquishing ownership, control and rights over one's property, determined the spirit behind all ownership" (p. 114). This is because property accumulation was not considered an end, but rather a means to serve community and build relationships. Thus, property had symbolic functions according to these authors.

Apart from the attitude of sharing, social laws such as inheritance laws determined property ownership, rights and duties.
But even if inheritance laws placed the right to ownership with an individual in a family, this individual held the property in trust for the entire family members: the living, dead and the unborn. Hence, one inherited not only property rights but also duties, many of which are social in nature, while others are divine.

Land is the most valuable type of communal property in Igbo culture. Therefore, "family ownership of land thus expressed in a very profound way the communal ownership" (p. 126). However, individuals have the right to "access and use" any communal land except for forbidden or sacred land. This is true for foreigners too, although the authors suggest that the general rule governing land transfer is that land is inalienable.

Chapter six is a consideration of the relationship between the individual and community in traditional African society. It traces the concept of individualism etymologically and historically from ancient Greek philosophy through to English society. In considering the place of the individual in traditional Africa, the authors argue that the individual cannot be understood outside the corporate group and thus one's "individuality can be understood in and through his social relations" (p. 151). They argue however, that the individual is accorded rights and duties and has the opportunity for self-development within the context of the community. For every person is esteemed for himself or herself and for his/her achievements.

Underlying this communal spirit is, according to the authors, the philosophy articulated by John Mbiti as “I am because we are; and we are, therefore I am”. They argue that what guides individual responsibility within the community are "social expectations" as well as the shared values that are enshrined in the social ethos for the promotion of the common good.

Chapter seven is an interesting presentation of traditional law practice and alternative dispute resolution methods. The chapter describes the Igbo sense of justice, especially legal, social, personal and distributive justice. Employing a completely different methodology from the other chapters, the authors analyse cases to describe the different aspects of justice in Igboland. Although the
Igbo have a developed sense of justice, it can be observed from the analysis of the cases that the balance of justice seems to tilt more to the side of men than of women. For instance, in the case of marital disputes between Mgabafo and her husband Uzowulu, the woman does not feature in the proceedings. In fact, her brother Odukwe takes her place and the compensation is to be given to him.

The last chapter of the book is a description of the social and political structures of the Igbo people and the process of consensus building. Distinguishing clearly between centralised and decentralised systems of government, the authors observe that the Igbo, like many other African societies, have a decentralised system of administration. The clan stands at the highest level of the social and political structure. Further down the ladder is the village and then the family. Whereas the village assemblies play an important role in consensus building, authority is in the hands of a council of elders chosen for their experience.

The book concludes with a re-affirmation of the fact that Africa is a continent with great cultural heritage. The authors call all the children of Africa, friends of the continent and researchers alike to rediscover and retrieve the authentic values stored in this continent for the promotion of justice, peace, human dignity and development.

In general, Understanding Africa has many good points, especially as regards the presentation of African values. Reading the book is a good initiation into the rich and diverse cultural wealth that Africa has. Understanding traditional legal reasoning, jurisprudence and justice can be a good basis for understanding Africa and its values. But it is not clear why a full chapter on the history of western philosophy had to be included, since it does not seem to be written to encourage cultural dialogue. Perhaps it is more of an apology for the hard words in the introduction against people who see Africa as a "hot" country full of "dark-skinned" people.

No wonder, then, that the theme of chapter four did not form part of the questions that the authors asked (p. 8) and the main purpose for preparing this "modest but meaningful contribution" to
the understanding of Africa. It must be mentioned as a limitation of the book that some contradictions are apparent, especially regarding the definition of the African family as an "extended family". This definition seems to run contrary to the very analysis of the family as a unity of people with a common ancestor and social ties, manifesting communal living. And the authors' insistence on the use of this term "extended" in the last chapter depicts this contradiction as they give no better alternative word to describe the Igbo family of "Umunne" and "Umunna"

Nevertheless, *Understanding Africa* is but the stories, myths, prayers, proverbs, names and cases that contain the very treasure of African values and traditions; its philosophy, religion, politics, economics and land. There is not much that one would miss in reading *Understanding Africa* from what one would have heard from the African sages or "living libraries" at the fire place.

**Michael Mawa**

Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor demonstrates in this book a firm grasp of the foundational issues of the Catholic moral tradition; he displays competence, ability and especially openness to converse or argue with diverse experts in the field including the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

Odozor narrates in a style accessible to both specialists and the general reader the enormous impact of Vatican II on the Catholic moral tradition, and especially the positioning of *Humanae Vitae* as watershed in the overall development of postconciliar Roman Catholic moral theological discourse.

This book has the fundamental merit of underlining the shared good that is the energy behind Catholic moral theological discourse, a shared good that in the Post-Vatican II era is best expressed in Thomistic-Aristotelian language.

This book is well written, synthetic, courageous, clear, careful and even cautious in its style of argument, but altogether thought provoking giving the reader the feel of being participant in a fair discussion of the Catholic moral tradition.

The author competently navigates through the minefield of official Church teaching, especially *Humanae Vitae*, and discusses with aplomb autonomous and faith ethics, biblical hermeneutics, Thomistic-Aristotelian ethics, feminist ethical discourse, and the positions of conservative Catholic moralists as well as those of revisionists or proportionalists. Agreeing and disagreeing, but always optimistically leading discussants to admit that diversity or difference testifies to fundamental strength of shared values and the pertinence of the one Catholic moral tradition.

This second major book of Odozor, who hails from Nigeria in West Africa, prepares him for the book everyone will be expecting: a book that will draw from the profound and complex West African
moral imagination to address in fresh terms the foundational issues in Catholic moral theology.

Flowing and captivating style; one does not drop this stimulating book without finishing a chapter, nay without finishing a section.

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