

Theme: Freedom of Religion: A Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria



Topic: A critical analysis of long years of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria

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Synopsis



- Background/introduction
 - The beginning of religious conflict– It was a family affair
 - Religion as a potential threat to global peace
 - The growing global restiveness

- The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria
 - Effect and consequences

- The many faces of Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria
 - Causes and consequences

- Appraisal of Christian–Muslim Dialogue in Nigeria
 - What works
 - What doesn't work

- Towards a harmonious relationship between Christian and Muslim in Nigeria

The beginning of religious conflict -- It was a family affair



- The two dominant religions in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) have their root in Judaism
- They both recognise Abraham (Ibrahim) as their progenitor
- However the division, which some have predicted could lead to a **3rd World War**, began as a **family problem**.
 - Abraham was a polygamist
 - According to Muslim tradition, Ishmael the Patriarch and his mother Hagar are buried next to the Kaaba in Mecca
- Ishmael and Isaac – the two sons of Abraham – were at the centre of the division

The beginning of religious conflict -- It was a family affair... cont.



- Today, Isaac is seen as the branch from where the twelve tribes of Israel spread out. Indeed, Christians all over the world viewed themselves as **spiritual Israelites**
- The **prophet Muhammad (PBUH)** is **descendant of Ishmael** and the **descendant of Prophet Ibrahim(AS)**. Israelites (Children of Israel) are the generations of Isaac and Jacob.

The beginning of religious conflict -- It was a family affair... cont.



- Abraham
 - Ishmael
 - Arabs
 - Mohammed
 - A prophet and father figure to all Muslim
 - Isaac
 - Jacob (Israel)
 - Twelve tribes of Israel representing the nation of Israel today
- Jesus
 - The unifier
 - (unfortunately both religions do not understand where He stands)

The beginning of religious conflict -- It was a family affair... cont.



Religion as a potential threat to global peace

- Today, the controversy between Christians and Muslims, has heightened the fragile peace and unrest globally
- The path of the cross and the crescent can no longer cross. They cannot initiate any enduring relationship
 - It has become a symbol of conflict, crisis, and chaos



The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria

- Islam was introduced to northern Nigeria in the second half of the 14th century through the agency of about 40 Wangara traders from Mali.
- The effect of Islam was not instantaneous, it was rather gradual. Conversion of the Hausa-speaking people to Islam, for instance, was quickened by the arrival of some Muslim Fulani scholars during the reign of Yaqub of Kano (1452-1463).
- Prior to the coming of Islam, the people practiced paganist doctrines which encouraged certain acts that the new Islamic faith regarded as inimical. Islam brought new moral standards and led to the abolishment of some traditional practices such as human sacrifice.

The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria...

cont.



- Christian missionaries first came to Africa in the early 15th centuries, but their activities failed
 - There was stiff resistance in some places and in places where they were seemingly accepted it was because of liberal attitudes
- In the early 18th century there was a renewed attempt at introducing Christianity to Africa but this time the Portuguese, British took the lead.
- This new phase of evangelisation was more systematic and thorough with missionary activities centred on the establishment of schools and the provision of formal western and religious education.⁵⁷
- Thus by the late 1800s, missionary stations were established along the coast on the western and eastern side
- of the Niger, penetrating into the interior of the Igbo land in Nigeria.⁵⁸

The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria...

cont.



The South

- The success of evangelisation in the southern part of Nigeria was due to the missionary policy which provided free education and health care to the people
- The outcome was an increase in the number of schools throughout the south-east of Nigeria making education the most successful means of Christian evangelisation.

The North

- According to a missionary priest in northern Nigerian, Edward O'Connor (SMA), in 1710 two Franciscan priests set out to visit Borno from Tripoli because they heard of a Christian kingdom in the Kwararafa-Borno state in north-eastern Nigeria.
- In 1846 Fr. Philipo da Segni (OFM) was visiting Kukawa, the then-capital of Borno. By 1890, Christian missionaries had made significant contact with the middle-belt and the northern part of Nigeria.

The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria-- Effect and consequences

- Islam, is viewed by some Christians as inherently intolerant, violent and menacing.



- This view tends to disregard the fact that Islam has been and remains a dynamic tradition which inspires and nurtures the lives of hundreds of millions of Muslims
- Christianity is also viewed by some Muslim as inherently intolerant, manipulative, and discriminatory
- Again, this conflict is inherently rooted in the family issues between Abraham and his sons and has resulted into various ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria

The introduction of Islam and Christianity to Nigeria-- -- Effect and consequences



- Some Christians are not able to understand the danger that Boko Haram poses to Muslims or the environment of fear that some Muslim leaders live in.
- Many Muslim leaders are not aware that the Christian community is running out of patience and that it is difficult for some Christians to distinguish between Boko Haram and Islam.



Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria

Some of the notable religious conflicts in the post-independence era between 1980 and 2010) include;

- **Maitatsine** riots in Bulumkutu (1982);
- Maitatsine riots in Jimeta (1984);
- Kano(Maitatsine1980,1982, 1987, 1990, 1995)
- Maitatsine riots in Gombe (1985,1991);
- Ilorin religious conflict (1986);
- Jalingo (1992, 2009);
- Shagamu (1999); Kafanchan (1987);
- Tafawa Balewa (1991, 1995,2001);
- **Zangon-Kataf** (1992);

Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria.. Cont.

Notable religious conflicts

- Tiv-Jukun and Tiv-Kuteb (1992-93);
- Potiskum (1994, 2009)
- Kuteb-Chamba (1997-1998);
- Igbirra-Bassa (1986-2000);
- Moon-Eclipse crisis in Borno (1996);
- Kaduna (Maitatsine riots in Rigassa 1982, 1992, 2000)
- Tiv and Others in Nassarawa (2001);
- Jos (1994,2000, 2001-2003,2008, 2009,2010);
- Ikulu-Bajju (2001); Yelwa-Shandam (2002,2004);





Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria.. Cont.

Notable religious conflicts

- Mangu-Bokkos (1992-1995); Bukuru-Gyero (1997);
- Maiduguri (2006,2009)
- Iggah-Oyikwa (2002);
- Kano(2004);
- Numan (2004);
- Azare (2001);
- Bauchi (2010);
- Ibadan(2010),
- Wukari (2010)

Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria.. Cont.



- The conflict has taking hold of our educational institutions! The ‘enlightened’ are also embroiled
 - ABU Religious crisis involving Prof. Bandepo in the mid 80s;
 - UI religious crisis involving the chapel and the mosque in the mid 90s;
 - The beheading of a woman in 2016 over what was termed as blasphemous utterances during the fasting period;
 - The recent hijab crisis in law school and the ISI of The University of Ibadan....

Religious conflict/clashes in Nigeria



- At the height of the ethno-religious crisis, the head of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, proposed in 2010 to divide Nigeria into two States -- Christian and Muslim states – in order to end inter-religious violence in the country.
- The Libyan leader called on to divide the country on the model of the separation of Pakistan from India in 1947.
 - Lagos would be the capital of the Christians in southern Nigeria, and Abuja - the capital of Muslims in the North. But in response, the Ministry of foreign Affairs of Nigeria, announced the recall of its Ambassador from Libya

Appraisal of Christian–Muslim Dialogue in Nigeria



- The Christian-Muslim dialogue received a boost from government when it founded the Nigerian Inter-religious Council (NIREC) in 1999
- The Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC) was founded to serve as a platform for high-level dialogue between the leaders of Christians and Muslims in this country, thereby promoting public good.



What has worked



- It is made up of 50 members, 25 from the Christian side and the balance from the side of Muslims.
- The organisation is co-chaired by two eminent Nigerians:
 - The Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, CFR, and
 - The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Dr. John Onaiyekan, CON.

What has worked... cont.



- The Forum has succeeded in the following:
 - Adopting an interreligious action plan focusing on the establishment of Interfaith Networks and the support of social cohesion
 - Encourage Interfaith education
 - The freedom of religion and the protection of holy sites
 - Interfaith exchanges and media sensitisation
 - Countering hate speech



What has not worked



- However, dialogue has only existed among few leaders of the two religions; it has not taken roots among the majority of the adherents of the two religions.
- Inter-religious dialogue has not ensure that leaders of the two religions fully embraced the idea and philosophy of peace across the two religions,



But we can live together as brothers and sisters; from the same family, if we agree

Towards a harmonious relationship between Christian and Muslim in Nigeria



- One of the factors that has heightened the Christian-Muslim relationship between the north and south of Nigeria is the constant killings of southern Christian immigrants
- Historical events in Nigeria and the manipulation of religion for political reasons have continued to influence the relationship of Christians and Muslims for decades
 - Recently, I read about the formation of ‘The Elders’ Forum’
 - they actually are agitating for a Christian party!

Towards a harmonious relationship between Christian and Muslim in Nigeria... cont.



- Belief in God has separated Islam and Christianity far more than it has united them.
- According to Jacques P. Lanfry, past and recent events have left deep feelings of bitterness, doubt, mistrust and even violence towards the other.
- Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is thus very essential if we must build peace across the two divides

Towards a harmonious relationship between Christian and Muslim in Nigeria... cont.



- Dialogue must first embrace a reorientation of adherents of both religions on the need to be tolerant of one another
- Beyond rhetoric, religious leaders must lead by examples that clearly show their commitment to their campaign
 - For example.....

Towards a harmonious relationship between Christian and Muslim in Nigeria... cont.



- We must focus on **what unites** us than on what divides us
- What divides us
 - Politics, Ethnicity, Language, Geography, Education, Religion,
- What unites us
 - Love, Peace, Belief in One God, Geography, Humanity, Brotherhood, Common origin, Common destiny
- A re-discovery of our lost identity
- **A political solution** – Government must show commitment to a deliberate attempt at creating new social values
 - deliberate effort at creating **new value system** to be inculcated in homes, taught in schools and religious centres

Changing Values



Thanks for listening