

Religious Conflict and Peace Building in Nigeria: A Case of Christian-Muslim Dialogue Forum in Bussa, Borgu Local Government Area of Niger State, 1967-2017

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Abstract

Religion in Nigeria, other parts of Africa and Middle East permeates the socio-economic and political life of the peoples. This is quite unlike the western world that places it in the compartment of its own, separating it from other aspects of their existence, especially after the fall of the Holy Roman Empire in the age that terminated in 1648. In Nigeria, there are three major religions, the African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. But what makes the issue of religion very important in Nigeria and for this study, is the extent of the involvement of Christianity and Islam in the daily, socio-economic and political life of the peoples. In other words, there is a radical departure of these religious beliefs from the ordinary realm of worship, to active participation in all spheres of human endeavours. Religion therefore, threatens the corporate existence of our nation as a result of frequent religious conflicts that have for a while defiled permanent solution. Hence, the relationship between the three religions can be seen as a triangle of suspicion arising from different ideologies. But one common belief among them is the worship of the Almighty God, which supposed to serve as a nexus of unity, except for the misinterpretation of the Holy Books by some selfish scholars. This research thus, synergizes the need for unity among different religious bodies in Nigeria especially that of Christianity and Islam for peaceful coexistence which will enhance economic growth of Nigeria nation, taking cognizance of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Bussa.

Key words: Religion, misinterpretation, conflict, dialogue, peaceful co-existence.

Introduction

One dominant feature of Nigeria is its intrinsic diversity in almost every sphere of life. The numerous ethnic groups, languages, cultures and religious persuasions, constitute a complex multiplicity which have been of no small challenge to the Nigerian state. These diverse groups cover the thirty-six states of the country and Abuja, the Federal Capital without exception, though there are regions with more diversity than others. Of importance to this study are the different religious traditions in Nigeria which include the indigenous religions, Islam and Christianity, in their various forms. Of these three, Islam and Christianity are the major ones, although each of them is greatly influenced by the indigenous religions. There is no consensus on the Islam and Christian populations in Nigeria as a range of figures is used by various representations, depending on what fits their scheme. While some give Islam a higher percentage of the population, others favour Christianity. Regrettably, census results have been controversial in Nigeria and there are no mutually acceptable demographic data of the adherents of the two dominant religions.

Religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria are: The Jos religious mayhem of September 7-12, 2001 and the February 18, 2006, religious violence in Maiduguri and the impact of dialogue in these entire crisis, using the forum established in New Bussa as a yardstick. It was discovered that while the Jos conflict was perceived to be 'internally' generated, the conflict of Maiduguri was triggered by the 'external' issue of the publication of the contentious cartoon of Holy Prophet Mohammed in Denmark.¹ And while the Jos conflict involved both Muslims and Christians engaging in acts of violence, the Maiduguri conflict was found to be an attack on Christians by Muslims and also on Muslims as well.

In this paper reflections were carried out on an idea of hospitality as a contribution to the search for the transformation of conflict in contemporary Nigerian society and in particular, the impact of Christian-Muslim dialogue forum. This has been suggested as a spirituality and strategy for the Church's involvement in conflict transformation. This is germane for Nigeria in keeping with Karen Armstrong's view concerning the unprecedented eruption of violence in the twentieth century. She says:

Unless there is some kind of spiritual revolution that can keep abreast of our technological genius, it is unlikely that we will save our planet. A purely rational education will not suffice...Auschwitz, Rwanda, Bosnia and the destruction of the World Trade Centre were all dark epiphanies that revealed what can happen when the sense of the sacred inviolability of every single human has been lost.²

¹Col MS Abubakar affirmed: "That there are possible external factors to the growing trends of religious extremism and fundamentalism cannot be easily dismissed", *Religious Extremism as a National Security Problem: Strategies for Sustainable Solutions*, Senior Executive Course No. 28. National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, p.2.

²Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), xi.

Such a spiritual revolution reinforces the need for a practical theology which will inform Nigerian society on the desirability of the sacred in the pursuit of peaceful coexistence.

The problem of this research is that the Christian-Muslim conflicts are due to some other major factors such as cultural, social, ethnic, regional, political and economic issues which complicate itself with religion rather than religious conflict between Muslims in the North and Christians in the South as Wuye and Ashafa, 1999 and other authors have mentioned in their studies. This means that the division of Nigeria into three major regions by the British was based on their cultural, ethnic and religious differences. For example the Northerners are mainly Muslims whereas the Southerners are mainly Christians. Each of these regions have their own religion and cultures. Based on this kind of division, many Nigerians always view any conflict between each region as a religious conflict, thereby implicating adherents of a particular religion in the conflicts. The religious ideas and worldviews in Nigeria are inherited as part of the socialization process. In view of this, that Nigerians are using religion as a tool for disturbance because religion permeates all aspects of life which is played out more in the north because it is considered to be a culture in a different way than it is in the South. Most obvious is the religious division and it is the most potent". This paper is therefore concerned about how to work out harmonious relationships between Christians and Muslims in New Bussa through an approach which combines the socio-scientific methodology and theological reflections. This differs from extant scholarly works that are characterized by the avoidance of an ethical and practical theological ethos. While these scholars have attempted to maintain neutrality in their approach to religious conflicts, the argument of this thesis is that a practical theological approach may engage the issue of religious conflict through novel ways which offer great hopes for a more reconciled living between Christians and Muslims in contemporary Nigerian society. Spiritual efforts have been geared towards solving problems in the lives of people and because of the volatile nature of religious conflict in contemporary Nigeria, it becomes absolutely important to reflect spiritually on how to promote peace, unity and progress.

This study argues that Nigeria as a country is a domain of multiplicity and diversity which threaten its existence through incessant conflicts. Although there are various kinds of multiplicity, the most obvious are in the areas of ethnicity, politics and religion and they all have generated violent conflicts all over the country. Of these three, the most lethal, in my view, is religious conflict, especially as manifested between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. More than anything else, it has become, in my estimation, the plumb line to test the making or breaking of the nation. As a result, the nation has failed to flourish because where there is insecurity of lives and property, there cannot be meaningful development. In this case therefore, the dysfunctional use of religion is at play, leading to the disintegration of the society. Gwamna thus expressed his lament over the situation: "the continuing religious crisis and the brutality exhibited in the face of the slightest provocation, attest to the fact that religion has become a liability rather than an asset in the Nigerian State."³ This deplorable feat of religion in Nigeria has become a major concern of all people.

³Dogara Je'adayibe Gwamma, "Turning the Tides of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria, the External Connections", A Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the Historical Society of Nigeria at the University of Jos, 2006.

Christian-Muslim dialogue in New Bussa

Dialogue is an important activity for fostering community relations. It helps people of different social, cultural, political and a religious institution to come to a better understanding of each other.

Dialogue can be revolutionary when it fosters discipline, planning, continuous, diversity, conflict exploration, decision making, expanding our capacity for attention, awareness, learning with and from each other and exploring what it means to be human in a pluralistic environment.⁴ According to a philosopher and social scientist, Alberto Quattrucci, dialogue is patient listening to one another, understanding and recognising the human and spiritual make-up of the other. He argues that problem solving is leadership.⁵ For interreligious dialogue analyst, Leonard Swidler, Dialogue can be defined as a conversation, a frank discussion between two or more parties with the aim of learning and understanding each other's point of view. It is a conversation on a common subject between two or more people with differing views, so dialogue must transcend the limited world of specialists to involve people in the community.⁶ Moreover, the dynamics of religious encounter demand that dialogue be initiated to achieve cooperation between individuals, groups and communities who may differ in terms of religious, political, social or cultural ideologies. For Muslims and Christians in New Bussa, enjoying relative peaceful environment, it is as a result of the understanding that both parties have reached and it is a well-known fact that without dialogue playing an essential role in the community, there can't be a negotiating peaceful coexistence and religious growth in both faith community.

The Quran explicitly calls on Muslims to engage with believers who are their associates and not dispute with the "people of the book" (Q 29:46-47). The prophet further encouraged Muslims to invite people to the way of the Lord with wisdom and good example and to dialogue with them in the best and most gracious ways. (Q 16:125).

Similarly the Christian Bible (as the word of God) can be described as a dialogue account between God and His people. A critical study of life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel reveals that Jesus was in constant dialogue with the people around him. For Example, Jesus is continuously engaged in dialogue with his disciples and individuals (The Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4: 1-30), the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) and the Syrophenician woman (Markk 7:24-30) and the Pharisees (Matthew 19; Mark 12:13; Lk 20:41). Moreover, in the first letter of Peter, Christians are admonished to be ready always to answer questions with respect, gentleness and reverence, while keeping a clear conscience. (1 Petert 3:15).

The Second Vatican Council declaration in *Nostra Aetate* (no.2-3) and *Gaudium et Spes* (no.92) urges Christians to dialogue with prudence and charity with members of other religions in an atmosphere of mutual esteem, reverence and harmony.⁷

Islamic history and tradition acknowledges pluralism in culture and religion as an undeniable fact; hence dialogue between Islam and other religions is first and foremost a necessary and vital

⁴Isidore Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, Printed and Published by Free Enterprises Publishers, 2005 P. 503

⁵ibid. P.518

⁶ibid. P.519

⁷http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interlg_doc/McDade,NostraAetate.

re-establishment of contact with the world. Scholars in the field of interreligious dialogue, such as John McDade, Michael Fitzgerald, John Borelli and the Nigerian religious analyst Bauna Peter Tanko, differentiate dialogue into the following typologies:

Information seeking Dialogue: The aim is to transmit information from one party to another in order to ameliorate tension or crises.

Dialogue of Negotiation: The aim is for both parties to strike a deal, come to an agreement or compromise through bargaining over an issue, conceding some interests and insisting on others for attainment of peaceful co-existence.

Dialogue of Inquiry: In this process, the aim is for the participants to collectively prove a particular position according to given standard of proof to ascertain root cause of conflict.

Dialogue of Life: This is where the participants strive to live in an open neighbourly spirit, sharing the challenges of life that come their way and supporting one another to better their life.

Dialogue of Action or Dialogue of Deed: Each participant and the group collaborate to seek the integral liberation and development of all people. Such conversations and action includes, for example, addressing issues of social justice, poverty and community development. The goal of collaboration is humanitarian, social, economic or political in nature, for the benefit of all in the community.

Dialogue of Theological Exchange: This is a forum for specialists to share, draw from each other and seek to deepen their understanding of their own religious perspective and learn to appreciate the spiritual heritage and values of the other.

Dialogue of Religious Experience: Here people of different religious traditions come together to share their spiritual riches, such as prayer, to deepen understanding, friendship and respect for each other. This could also be referred to as interreligious dialogue.⁸ Dialogue for peace building requires Muslims and Christians to embrace their fundamental call to dialogue so that the dynamism and will to interact with each other in dignity and freedom may flourish. This demands genuine interest in another religious tradition, its teachings, ritual-practices and life of faith experience, since the purpose of dialogue includes mutual enrichment and growth in the truth.⁹ Dialogue can facilitate peace building activities, conflict resolution and reconciliation among peoples and communities. It builds trust and sustains confidence among individuals and groups. Dialogue; be it cultural, social, political, or religious, has the potential to build understanding, peace and harmony.¹⁰

To advance this objective, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has challenged Christians in Nigeria to continuous dialogue, especially with the Islamic community, and has established a department for Dialogue and Mission within the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. However, the success of interreligious dialogue is impeded by a number of obstacles; insufficient grounding in one's own religious traditions, results in a lack of appreciation of their significance and misrepresentation. Other impediments are a lack of openness, which leads to defensive or aggressive behavior and suspicion about the motives of others. Intolerance (associated with ethnic, social, economic, political and racial factors), lack of reciprocity, religious indifference,

⁸See Arinze, Christian-Muslim Relations in the 21st Century; Talbi, Islam and Dialogue 143-144

⁹ibid.

¹⁰Cornelius AfebuOmonokhue, *Dialogue in Context: A Nigerian Experience*, Virtual Insignia Press, 2014 P. 72

religious extremism, lack of self-criticism and lack of respect, all create confusion and give rise to new challenges that inhibits dialogue process.

(Personal experience) A typical case was the crisis that emanated from an event that should have brought peace and tranquility to the community but it turned out to be a bloody one. Lives were lost, houses were burnt down and many individuals were displaced. Two communities fighting because a church was built on their piece of land and because of that, the small church was raised down and the other community too retaliated. There was serious chaos in the community. It took the grace of God and intervention of other group to calm the situation.

As Christian-Muslim, we must be ready to tolerate other religion. Our religion should not be seen as the most important and others are not. We should be able to co-exist.

Impact of the Dialogue in Bussa

In Bussa, the fear of sudden extremist attack has been allayed because of mutual understanding among the Muslim-Christian communities' occasional regular dialogue relations among the two faiths. By this the priests in the two faiths were able to integrate the teachings of do(s) and don't(s) religiously in their congregational worships. These includes the greetings of neighbours on the occasion of their religious feast, extension of foods and drinks in such occasions, avoidance of ungodly act viz aviz; fighting, raping and molestation, the teaching of children to respect people of other religion and to resolve conflict based on the things the two religions have in common as a panacea for unity.

By extension, the Christian-Muslim dialogue in Bussa has tremendously extended peace to the Nigerian nation state at large. This is because when there is religious conflict in a section of the country, it usually extends to other parts in the form of solidarity fight. A good example of this could be seen in Kano religious crisis of 1991 which led to a retaliatory attack on Hausa-Muslim Communities in Onitsha and Umaisha respectively within a couple of days. So the religious peace and harmony enjoyed in Bussa has partial impact in Nigeria and greater impact if other Muslim-Christian Communities in Nigeria can borrow leaf from the Bussa Communities.

As a result of the dialogue hitherto mentioned, the Sharia Court in Bussa is restricted to the Muslim faithfuls only no matter the spiritual crisis between a Christian and Muslim. In this case there is no imposition of belief system on the other person who belongs to another faith. So the secular court melts out justice by redressing injustices in the Bussa communities or society.

Couple with the above peace enjoined as offshoot of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the growth of socio-economic activities in Bussa and agricultural activities that occurred in Bussa society were fishing, weaving, dying, basket making and wood carving. The location factor of the Bussa, made fishing a natural call among the people. The method of fishing was mainly the use of net. The other agricultural production includes cultivation of tubers, and cereals. In the aspect of social activities there were a number of inter-religious marriages among the people. This also foster unity in the Bussa society.

The Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue in New Bussa Today

In this segment, focus would be on the challenges that continue to impede the process of interreligious dialogue in the region under study.

Although remarkable progress has been made in sustaining the process of Christian-Muslim dialogue in New Bussa, Northern Nigeria, evaluating how effective it has been is not an easy exercise, as it involves social, economic, political, ethnic, cultural, historical and religious concerns. However it is believed that success depend very much on how committed religious leaders and participants are willing to explore new ways of addressing these questions.

A major challenge is a missing link: grass roots community participation in the process of dialogue. Dialogue as understood in this work is an invitation for partners to come together to share the wealth of each religious tradition, with the aim of building better understanding and peaceful cooperation. However, in my experience, it seems that interreligious dialogue in New Bussa, Borgu Local Government takes place almost exclusively at the level of the elite – religious leaders and other experts, without participation in the grass roots community level. This means that the experiences, feelings, concerns and aspirations of ordinary people do not feature dialogue sessions. As Islamic philosopher Tariq Ramadan affirms:

To be involved in dialogue between two religions while being completely cut off from the believers of one's own religion is problematic and can be counterproductive. Many 'specialist' in interreligious dialogue move from conference to conference totally disconnected from their religious community as well as the grass root realities.¹¹

I agree with Ramadan, because in such situations there is little or no feedback to and from the grass roots community where all the actions and interactions of day-to-day living takes place. This implies that community dialogue for peace building is more or less non-existent or not strengthened, as is evident, for instance, in the violent conflicts where faith communities attack each other in the name of religion. Consequently, this lack of consistent contact with the grass root communities means that very little progress is recorded as far as interreligious dialogue is concerned. Moreover, it is the duty of those who take part in formal dialogue setting to ensure that there is free flow of information to and from their communities. It is also their responsibility to encourage members of their faith community to dialogue in their day to day interactions, respecting the dignity of all.

Furthermore, very few women take active part in the dialogue process, perhaps due to lack of education, encouragement and the male dominated structure of the society. However, women play an important role in the community, especially in the home. There they have a unique but subtle way of keeping peace in and building mutual understanding in the family. Their almost non participation in the formal dialogue process means a great deal of experience is missing. It is imperative for leaders to explore ways of encouraging women's active participation in the dialogue process.

Other factors that continue to mar the efforts and progress of genuine Christian-Muslim dialogue in New Bussa include misconceptions, mistrust, suspicion, lack of equality among participants, prejudices, stereotypes, ethnicity, anger, selfishness, lack of respect, frustration, fear and political bias. All these counter the honest, open and trusting attitude necessary for interreligious

¹¹Joseph Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion: Christianity and Other World Religions in Dialogue*; Joja Press Limited, 2002 P.53

relations. Politics is greatly influenced by religion, so that relations between the two faith communities are characterized by competition, tension and rivalry.¹⁹⁵ Religious sentiments are employed on both sides to foster political, economic, social and ethnic discrimination. Access to the corridors of power means political and social favours for one's faith community at the expense of common good. For example, public funds are used to build places of worship and to pay for Muslim and Christian pilgrimages.

Often, dialogue takes place between participants who know little about the other faith. Although participants (religious leaders) share with each other, their understanding remains very shallow and ways of expression and perception differ. This sometimes leads to anger, frustration and lack of interest.

Past historical events and experiences continue to influence the image and perception of the other. Violent conflicts over the years have soured relationships between the two faith communities; past hurts and pains affect the trust building process. Christians and Muslims judge each other in the light of their experiences and form opinions which in turn affect sincere commitment to explore ways to forgive and be reconciled. Each group thinks and feels that the issues discussed remain at the dialogue stage and do not affect general life in society. This becomes evident in times of conflict when issues quickly degenerate into violence and the perceived hurt is avenged by one group on the other. These deep wounds of the past hinder the efforts to build trust, making it difficult for the two to accept each other as equals.

In addition, the lack of sustained dialogue between adherents of the same faith tradition and their leaders who participate in the dialogue process impedes progress. Sustained information sharing, catechesis and interaction between members of the same faith tradition and their leaders is necessary to enhance better understanding of their own faith and encourage good relations with those of other faith traditions. Intra-faith dialogue provides an opportunity to teach the faith and provide and receive feedback to the dialogue session.¹² Furthermore, sometimes valuable support and cooperation of religious, political and social leaders is not constant making it difficult to access the resources needed to enhance dialogue. This stifles the effort of those who mobilise people for interreligious dialogue.¹³ However, amidst all these challenges, is there any hope for sustainable peace, building through interreligious dialogue in New Bussa, Borgu Local Government Area? The following section evaluates the prospect of progress.

The Prospect of Interreligious Dialogue in New Bussa

This section discusses the potential for interreligious dialogue for future peace in the region and the need for faith communities to collaborate if this vision is to come to fruition. The hope for Christian - Muslim dialogue in Borgu Local Government Area of Niger State depends on the willingness of the two faith communities to concede sincerely that the love of providence of God extends to all human beings equally, irrespective of religious, cultural and ethnic identity. Both must strive to accept each other's faith on their own terms and recognize that there is truth in both the Quran and the Bible. Hence the ultimate goal and hope of religious dialogue is in the ability of Christians and Muslims to hear God speaking to them within their own faith experience

¹²Op. cit. Afebu "Dialogue in Context" P. 86

¹³John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan, "Seeking Common Grounds: Inter-Religious Dialogue in African". *The Collected Writings Vol 1(1978-2013)*. Pauline Publications 2013

and humbly listen to the same voice speaking to both faith traditions in the process of dialogue (Q 5:48 and 1Jn 3:2). Accordingly, accepting and respecting the religious freedom of others means being involved in a mutual dialogue of understanding and cooperation, one that seeks to respect the religious beliefs of others and the freedom to choose and practice their faith. Such dialogue demands, as Quattrucci puts it, patient listening to one another in order to understand each other. The future of building peaceful coexistence in same community consists of extending the hand of friendship to the other and opening sustained channels of communication, such as visits and support in times of need. The long history of mistrust and violence must not be a barrier to reconciliation.

Religions leaders have to, at all times, preach the basis of the truth on which both religions, Christianity and Islam stand, which is love and peace. Jesus preached love. When asked about the greatest commandment, He answered:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Jesus also tied the issue of good neighborliness to love when on another occasion He told a parable about the Good Samaritan to demonstrate His message. The Samaritans and the Jews were not of the same culture and religion though they co-existed. In fact, prior to the time of Jesus, the Jews were not to have anything with the Samaritans. Yet Jesus taught otherwise, to love all men. On peace and neighborliness, Apostle Paul admonished Christians to live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18). The Bible and the Qur'an are filled with such injunctions.

Islam teaches tolerance, accommodation, hospitality, justice in treatment of others, promotion of peace with non-Muslims, equality of all mankind in the world, and above all seeking for inter-faith dialogue. To summarize the above: Islam is a religion of love and peace. Islam pursues cordial co-existence among peoples of different cultures and faith. On inter faith dialogue, Allah instructed Prophet Mohammed: "O people of the scripture come to an agreement between us and you..." (Quran, 3:64) The people of the scripture are the Christians with whom Muslims co-existed. There was therefore mutual trust, dialogue and co-existence between both parties.

Lessons on tolerance in the Quran are presented in various ways, and they range from the practice of the rule of non-isolation to respect for the practitioners of other belief systems in their own rights as human beings, created by Allah. This stands also on justice and equality. To this the Glorious Qur'an says: "And do not let the hatred of people prevent you from being just. Be just that is nearer to righteousness." (Quran 5:8)

Jesus Christ also preached peace and non-violence saying in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." On this the Quran also teaches: "The faithful servants of the beneficent are those who walk upon the earth modestly, and when the foolish address them, they say peace." (Quran 25:63) Jesus as well talked about non-violence when He said that no more shall it be an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth but "Whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also ..." (Matthew 5:39). This does not imply that, one should continue to smite the same cheek repeatedly.

From the above we glean that both Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed admonished their followers to practice non-violence and promote love and peace; accommodation and hospitality.

“Among His signs is the creation of the heavens. And the earth and the variations in your languages and your other colors, verily in that are signs for those who know.” (Quran 30:22)

When people understand the power of God in creating the earth and variations in His creation - a power that they do not have; they would fully be humbled to appreciate one another and know they serve and worship God better when they have hospitality for the next person and accommodate him. Consider also what the Glorious Quran says: “O mankind; reverence your Guardian Lord who created you from a single person, created of like nature, his mate and ...” (Quran 4:1)

This passage explains the purpose for Allah creating variations in peoples and species of His creatures – simply to serve His glory. (Qur’an 30:22) All men, therefore, coming from one source should respect one another and live in the harmony deserved of them.

The quest for peace and peaceful co-existence (in Busa, Borgu Local Government Area of Niger State) is one that must be pursued with vigor and understanding by all concerned religious groups.

Conclusion

Muslims and Christians in the area must commit to paving the way to harmony by mutual respect in order for peace to flourish. Religion must be the platform for building good and enduring friendships by exploring in dialogue the common ground between Islam and Christianity. There has to be a conscious and creative effort on the part of religious leaders and those who participate in interreligious dialogue to build sound relationship in their own faith communities and have a sound theological knowledge of their faith. Without this effort there is a danger that those involved in interreligious dialogue may slip away from their own faith communities to become a closed circle of intellectuals who speak mostly to and for themselves and do not promote the concerns of the faith community in the peace building process.

The future of interreligious dialogue presupposes religious education about the other. Basic knowledge of the other fosters openness, understanding, respect for the truth and sincerity of purpose. Religious dialogue in the area must encourage the education of the younger generation, so that they grow with the basic knowledge and understanding of the religious other. Furthermore, religious organizations must work in collaboration with each other, that is, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Muslims Students Society (MSS), Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN).

Much could be achieved in peace building at the grass root community level. Moreover, what is needed is not simply religious tolerance, but something much more positive and proactive, a conscious mutual respect, dialogue and solidarity among peoples. This may be achieved through creative cooperation, a common project that brings people together to address a particular need in society, for example, digging a well for the provision of portable water. Such steady efforts towards social harmony and genuine acts of love and support for each other are necessary for the future peace in the environment. Religious leaders, politicians and government must do everything within their power to encourage interreligious dialogue for peace. To abandon such

ventures would mean giving new impetus to the formation of ghettos, ethnic and religious violence and development of various new expressions of religious fanaticism and chaos. This is not what Nigeria needs at this time.

From the foregoing, it is imperative to note that unity is for the living and not for the dead. Thus, unity can only be achieved through dialogue among leaders of various faiths and also through focus group discussion dialogue or town meetings as two wrongs they say, cannot make a right. Therefore, all violent religious people should be seen as bad messengers with good message. In other words, they use religion to justify their socio-political and economic interests at the detriment of other members of the society. This is an evil tendency contrary to the peace of others. Islam means total submission to the will of Allah (God). Whereas, Christianity is also total submission to the will of God through Jesus Christ. Both are religions of peace. For instance, Islam came to Igalaland and other parts of north central Nigeria through peaceful trading activities, preaching and harmonious co-existence. In the same vein Christianity came through peaceful propagation of the gospel under the leadership of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. What is important is that we are all descendants of Adam and we worship the same God. No one has right to take the life of others, except God the Creator. Dialogue is thus a panacea for peace building among Muslims and Christians.