

# FOSTERING INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Upon being confronted by the mystery of his being and those of other creatures around him, man realizes that there must be a Supreme Being behind these mysteries who deserves praise and worship since all things owe their existence to him. Man, therefore becomes essentially religious. Over the years, however, good number of religion has developed with millions of adherents. Each religion makes claim concerning man's ultimate end and the way to attain it. Sometimes, these claims can be conflicting with each individual believing his or her faith to be the ultimate, and therefore, looks at other opposing views with suspicion and rejection. In Nigeria, this tendency is found more conspicuously between Muslims and Christians. Often time, Christians see their Muslim brothers as enemies and vice versa. This study employs critical method to evaluate how the situation can be rescued through interreligious dialogue. The research discovers that both Christianity and Islam ultimately propose to foster interreligious dialogue, and quite certain, little progress has been made so far in Nigeria. Yet a deeper sense of interreligious dialogue needs to be fostered between the two religions if peace and the long needed social development are to be achieved.

**Keywords:** Religion, Dialogue, Islam, Muslim, Catholicism, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

V.C. Ogbo (2018, p.42) noted that one of the earliest surviving criticisms of Islamic moral values is to be found in the writings of John Damascus (676-749) who was familiar with Islam and Arabic. He noted that the second Chapter of his book, *The Fount of Wisdom*, titled –Concerning Heresies, presents a series of discussions between Christians and Muslims. John claimed an Arabian monk (whom he did not know was Bahira) influenced Muhammad and viewed the Islamic doctrines as nothing more than a hodgepodge culled from the Bible (Ogbo, 2018, p.42). In tenth and eleventh –century Syria, there lived a poet called Al-Ma'arri. He became well known for a poetry that was affected by a pervasive pessimism. He labeled religions in general as ‘noxious weeds’ and said that Islam does not have a monopoly of truth. He had particular contempt for the *ulema*, writing that, –They recite their sacred books, although the fact informs me that these are fiction from first to last. O Reason, thou (alone) speaks the truth. Then perish the fools who forged the religious traditions or interpreted them (Ogbo, 2018, p.42).

In his *Examination of the Three Faiths*, the Jewish philosopher, Ibn Kammuna, offered a critique of Islamic values. He reasoned that the Sharia was incompatible with the

principles of Justice, and that this undercut the notion of Mohammad being the perfect man. There is no proof, according to him, that Mohammad attained perfection and the ability to perfect others as claimed (Kamuna, 1971, pp.148-149). Ibn Kammuna thus claimed that people converted to Islam from ulterior motives:

That is why, to this day we never see anyone converting to Islam unless in terror, or in quest of power, or to avoid heavy taxation, or to escape humiliation, or if taken prisoner, or because of infatuation with a Muslim woman, or for some similar reason. Nor do we see a respected, wealthy and pious non-Muslim well versed in both his faith and that of Islam, going over to the Islamic faith without some of the aforementioned or similar motives (Kamuna, 1971, pp.148-149).

Similarly, Maimonides, one of the 12th century thinkers, criticized what he perceived as the lack of virtue in the way Muslims rule their societies and relate to one another. In his *Epistle to Yemenite Jewry*, he refers to Mohammad as *‘hameshuga’* – literary, *‘that mad man’* (Hartman & Halkin, 1993, p.5).

In *Of the Standard of Taste*, an essay by David Hume, the Quran is described as an *‘absurd performance’* of a pretended prophet who lacked a just sentiment of morals. Attending to the narration, Hume says, *–We shall soon find that Muhammad bestows praise on such instances of treachery, inhumanity, cruelty, revenge, bigotry, as are utterly incompatible with civilized society. No steady rule of right seems there to be attended to; and every action is blamed or praised, so far as it is beneficial or hurtful to the true believers’* (Ogbo, 2008, p.43). The Hindu philosopher Vivekananda commented on Islam as follows:

Now, some Mohammedans are the crudest in this respect, and the most sectarian. Their watchword is: *–There is one God, and Mohammed is his prophet.* Everything beyond that not only is bad, but must be destroyed forthwith, at a moment’s notice, every man or woman who does not exactly believe in that must be killed; everything that does not belong to this worship must be immediately broken; every book that teaches anything else must be burnt. From the Pacific to the Atlantic, for five hundred years blood ran all over the world. That is

Mohammedanism. Nevertheless, among these Mohammedans, wherever there is a philosophic man, he was sure to protest against these cruelties. In that he showed the touch of the Divine and realized a fragment of the truth; he was not playing with his religion; for it was not his father's religion he was talking, but spoke the truth direct like a man ((Ogbo, 2008, p.43).

Referring to the founder of Islam Vivekananda further comments that the more selfish a man, the more immoral he is. This, according to him, also applies to race. He observes that that race which is bound down to itself has been the most cruel and the most wicked in the whole world. He then noted that there has not been a religion that has clung to this dualism more than that founded by the Prophet of Arabia, and that there has not been a religion, which has shed so much blood and has been cruel to other men. He observes that:

In the Koran there is the doctrine that a man who does not believe these teachings should be killed, it is mercy to kill him! And the surest way to get to heaven, where there are beautiful houris and all sorts of sense enjoyments, is by killing these unbelievers. Thinks of the bloodshed there has been in consequence of such beliefs (Ogbo, 2008, p.44).

Dayanand Saraswati in fact doubted that there is any connection of Islam with God. According to him, had the God of the Quran been the Lord of all creatures, and been merciful and kind to all, he would ever have commanded the Mohammedans to slaughter men of other faith: -If he is merciful, will he show mercy even to the sinner? If the answer be given in the affirmative, it cannot be true, because further on it is said in the Quran, Put infidels to sword (Ogbo, 2008, p.44). In other words, he that does not believe in Quran and the Prophet Mohammad is an infidel; he should therefore be put to death. Saraswati then concludes that since the Quran sanctions such cruelty to non-Mohammedans, it can never be the Word of God.

Winston Churchill condemning some Islamic moral values says that the effects of such values are apparent in many countries: -Improvident habits, slovenly systems of agriculture, sluggish methods of commerce, and insecurity of (life and) property exist wherever the followers of the Prophet rule or live (Ogbo, 2008, p.44). The influence of the religion paralyses the social development of those who follow it. He added that the fact that in Mohammedan law every woman must belong to some man as his absolute property – either as a child, a wife, or a concubine – must delay the final extinction of

slavery until the faith of Islam has ceased to be a great power among men. In his words, –No stronger retrograde force exists in the world. Far from being moribund, Mohammedanism is a militant and proselytizing faith...and were it not that Christianity is sheltered in the strong arms of science, the science against which it had vainly struggled, the civilization of modern Europe might fall, as fell the civilization of ancient Rome (Ogbo, 2008, p.44-45).

According to Sadegh Hedayat, –Every aspect of life and thought, including women’s condition, changed after Islam. Enslaved by men, women were confined to the home. Polygamy, injection of fatalistic attitude, mourning, sorrow and grief led people to seek solace in magic, witchcraft, prayer, and supernatural beings (Ogbo, 2008, p.45). Agreeing with Hedayat that Islamic values produce a variety of social ills in the regions it conquered, Philip Schaff asserts that: –Mohammedanism conquered the fairest portions of the earth by sword and cursed them by polygamy, slavery, despotism and desolation. The moving power of Christian mission was; the moving power of Islam was fanaticism and brute force (Ogbo, 2008, p.45). In the same light, James Barton regrets that in Islam:

Man is reduced to a cipher. Human agency and human freedom are nullified. Right is no longer right because it is right, but because Allah wills it to be right...It has become a deadening doctrine of faith. Man must believe and pray, but these do not ensure salvation or any benefits except Allah wills it...even in the most extreme forms of the Augustinian and Calvinistic systems there were always present in Christianity other elements which prevented the conception of the divine sovereignty from paralyzing the healthy activities of life as the Mohammedans doctrine has done (Barton, 1918, p.139).

During a lecture given at the University of Regensburg in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI quoted an unfavorable remark about Islam made at the end of the 14th century by Manuel II Palaiologos, the Byzantine emperor: –Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached (Ogbo, 2008, p.45). Benedict XVI was of course an advocate of interreligious dialogue and he believes that through dialogue, we may gain a deeper understanding of each religion and be able to relate better with one another in the society.

Much of misunderstanding in Nigeria today which has been responsible to various crises is a result of lack of understanding and mutual coexistence between the two major

religious traditions in the country, namely Islam and Christianity. The bone of contention in most cases is the exclusive claim to the truth of divine revelation by adherents of each of these religious groups. Rather than bring peace and development, such a development contributes in keeping Nigeria backward. This attitude of rejecting the tenets of other religions and placing one's own religion first had been a problem confronting humanity from early times.

During a quarrel between Muhammad and some Meccans, the Meccans inquired from some Jews who visited and said to them: -Jewish people, you are the first scripture people and know our quarrel with Muhammad. Is our religion better or his? (Kenny, 1997, p.75). They Jews said to them, -your religion is better than his, and you are more in the right (Kenny, 1997, p.75). The issue here is the claim that one's religion is better than other religions. The people of Mecca believed that their religion was superior to that preached by Muhammad. The Jews who were equally suspicious of the Islamic religion did not hesitate to subordinate Islam to the Meccan religion. You find out that people regarded some religious tradition as inferior to others. Muhammad too was not an exception. About the Jews came the Qur'an verse (4:51-2, 54-5):

Have you not seen those who were given part of the scripture? They believe in Jibt and Taghut and say to the unbelievers that these are better guided than those who believe. God has caused them...and they jealous of what God has given some people in his favour? (that is prophecy) We gave the family of Abraham the scripture and wisdom and a great kingdom. Some of them believe in it, while other turn from it and Hell will suffice for their burning (Kenny, 1997, p.75).

In the above passage, we find that the Qu'ran in regards adherents of other religions as unbelievers. For the holy book, only the Muslims are true believers. This passage also accuses the Jews of jealousy of the gift of prophecy which God has given to Mohammad and condemns nonbelievers to hell fire. Such is the outcome of the situation whereby dialogue is excluded in the relation between various religions in the society.

Thus, a fundamental concern in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is the competing claim to the truth of the beliefs of the different religions. Are the claims of each tradition being the only source of theological truth justified? With this basic theological question in view, this work is divided into six sections. The first is the introduction. The section looks at the meaning and definition of interreligious dialogue. The third and the fourth present the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church and Islam respectively on interreligious dialogue. In this section attention is paid to the

Vatican documents and post Vatican documents on the one hand, as well as the Koran and writings of Islamic scholars on the other hand. The fifth section considers the experience of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria by both Christians and Muslims, while the last section is the conclusion.

Interreligious dialogue is all about human interaction and relationships (Fults, 2020). Thus, as Sandi Fults (2020) noted, it can take place between individuals and communities and it can feature on different levels. It can take place in both formal and informal settings, for instance, in schools, in our working places, between neighbors, etc. Dialogue is therefore expedient inasmuch as we come into daily contact with each other in the course of life (Fults, 2020). Now, that Muslims and Christians in Nigeria share many things in common including the environment, school, market, workplace, political party is incontestable. In the words of Fults (2020), –Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, becomes –part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.‖

This tension may be a result of the conscious or unconscious belief that one’s religion is better off than the others’. The question, however, is: can such a claim be justified? With this in mind this study is divided into six sections. The first is the introduction. The section looks at the meaning and definition of interreligious dialogue. The third and the fourth present the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church and Islam respectively on interreligious dialogue. In this section attention is paid to the Vatican documents and post Vatican documents on the one hand, as well as the Koran and writings of Islamic scholars on the other hand. The fifth section considers the experience of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria by both Christians and Muslims, while the last section is the conclusion.

## **2. Meaning of Interreligious Dialogue**

The term –dialogue‖ can be understood as that which involves the recognition of difference not as a way of foreclosing engagement, but as a way of seeing and engaging with each other (Awoke, et al. 2020, p.113). Interreligious dialogue –is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences (Fult, 2020). According to Sandi Fults, interreligious dialogue is a challenging process by which adherents of different religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the center of most wars (Fults, 2020). Interreligious dialogue, thus, is an interactive process by which people of varied religious traditions try to understand themselves so that religion may not be an instrument of division but of peace in the society. For, as Fults (2020) rightly observes, –the objective of interreligious dialogue is peace.‖ It follows, then, that interreligious dialogue can take different forms. Hence, Fults writes:

Interreligious dialogue has many faces. Two people can come together and share the aspects of their respective faiths and struggle to understand that which is foreign. Theologians can write papers, publish in journals, and convene to discuss the finer theological issues related to interreligious dialogue (and there are a multitude of theological issues). Perhaps members of one faith tradition can join with members of another religion to improve a neighborhood...Each of the above examples is a form of interreligious dialogue (Fulst, 2020).

From here it is clear that the invitation to dialogue is extended to everyone and not an exclusive preserve of the religious leaders. Hence, the clarification which Fulst provides with regard to this point cannot be ignored. He further remarks that interreligious dialogue –refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions...at both the individual and institutional level (Fulst, 2020). The methodology for dialogue which Fulst provides is of particular importance. He remarks that in the process of dialogue, it is important that each of the participants makes no attempt to evangelize the others, as this tendency for evangelism is often accompanied by an attitude of exclusive superiority, namely –the spoken or unspoken belief that one’s religion...the only way in the ultimate sense of the term (Fulst, 2020).

It is in line with the above assumption that Fulst provides some general guidelines for effective interreligious dialogue. Some of these are worthy of our mention here (Fulst, 2020):

- i. Participants in interreligious dialogue cannot use the encounter as opportunities to defend their own traditions.
- ii. Interreligious dialogue should not be seen as a means to defend religion in general.
- iii. Although conversion is not the goal of interreligious dialogue, yet it is possible that it may take place as participants may find themselves transformed by the interfaith encounter.
- iv. Dialogue participants must reveal the beliefs that they hold closest and that define their tradition.
- v. Since interreligious dialogue is an expression of the participant’s lived faith, it should form communities of awareness, keeping in mind that it is not a philosophical, theological or intellectual exercise.
- vi. Since peace is the goal of interreligious dialogue, the process must be peaceful

This is why Fulst emphasizes that in interreligious dialogue, –each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely

(Fults, 2020) see also Otu, 2006, p.137). Similarly, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) describes four forms of dialogue so that all can find a method that suits their experience: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020).

### **3. Interreligious Dialogue in Catholicism**

One cannot underestimate the impact of the Church's interreligious undertaking in today's increasingly globalized world, especially as the vast human society finds itself everyday more intimately connected across the geographical, cultural and religious boundaries (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020). The necessity of Catholic Church involvement in bringing about healing cause by division and misunderstanding in a world filled with conflict and tension is highlighted by Pope Francis in his September 1, 2013, Angelus Message (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020). According to him, -It is neither a culture of confrontation nor a culture of conflict which builds harmony within and between peoples, but rather a culture of encounter and a culture of dialogue; this is the only way to peace (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020).

The Church's relationship with the communities of other religious traditions was impacted by the Second Vatican Council's 1965 Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020). As Idara Out (2006, p.135) remarks, -In *Nostra Aetate*, the Council recognized that the Church shares certain basic truths and values with other religions, and that humans share a common desire to probe the ultimate mystery of life. Here, the Catholic Church encourages her members in dialogue and collaboration with members of other religions. She believes that there are certain elements about other religious traditions which are good and true. The goal of the Church, then, is to foster bonds of friendship, mutual understanding, and constructive collaboration among the world's religions in the genuine service of humanity (Otu, 2006, p.135). Moreover, -All men form but one community. This is because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share in a common destiny, namely God (Flannery, 2001, no.1). Furthermore, in *Nostra Aetate* we read: -The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (Flannery, 2001, no.1). The relationship with Islamic religion is particularly emphasized:

The Church also has a high regard for the Muslims.  
They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent,  
merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and



earth, who has also spoken to men. They try to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own (Flannery, 2001, no.3).

What the Council Fathers are saying is that the Catholic Church does not wish to discriminate against the Muslims. For, as a matter of fact they have a lot in common with us; and even with regard to the differences, the Church still recognizes the truth in some of these and has high regard for them. Recognizing the many quarrels which have arisen between Christians and Muslims, the Catholic Church now wishes to enter into dialogue with the Muslims in order to achieve a mutual understanding for the benefit of all. The Council concludes –...let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (Flannery, 2001, no.3).

IdaraOtu (2006, p.134) remarked that this welcome development was not the case prior to the Vatican II Council. He says:

Vatican II teachings on the relations of the Church with other world religions are a watershed in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Prior to the Council, the Church had adopted a cautionary and condemnatory stand in its attitudes towards other religions...With the convocation of Vatican II, the Church signaled a shift from the theological presupposition of *extra ecclesia nullasalus* (outside the Church there is no salvation) towards the recognition of the possibility of salvation both outside the Church and from non-Christian religions (Otu, 2006, p.134).

Reiterating the same point, Thomas Reese says, –For us, religious freedom is a matter of Church teaching. We have to observe it, we have to respect it; whereas before Vatican II, we were not very respectful of religious freedom (Poggiloi, 2009). With *Nostra Aetate*, therefore, –the Church sets its foot on the path of dialogue with other world religions (Otu, 2006, p.134). Turning our attention to the post Vatican II documents, we find the same attitude of invitation to dialogue and collaboration. In its 1984 document, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of other Religions*, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue defined four kinds of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological experience, and dialogue of religious experience (Secretariat for non-Christians, 1985).

Pope Benedict XVI added emphasis on being a Pilgrim Church journeying toward –the fullness of Truth| in friendship with –fellow pilgrims| of other religions; appealing to the Church in Africa to live in respect and peace with Muslims (Otu, 2006, p.144). Now, Pope Francis expands the dialogue further by emphasizing the fact that we all are pilgrims journeying together, seeking the radiant peace of God’s face (Otu, 2006, p.147). Hence, he expounded the need to develop a sense of –friendship| as a foundation for the dialogue that addresses the social ills of our world (Otu, 2006, p.147).

#### **4. Interreligious Dialogue in Islam**

Like Catholicism, the emergence of dialogue in Islam took a gradual process. It was altogether absent *ab initio*. For instance, during a quarrel between Muhammad and some Meccans, the Meccans inquired from some Jews who visited and said to them: –Jewish people, you are the first scripture people and know our quarrel with Muhammad. Is our religion better or his?| (Kenny, 1997, p.75). The Jews said to them, –your religion is better than his, and you are more in the right| (Kenny, 1997, p.75). The issue here is the claim that one’s religion is better than other religions. The people of Mecca believed that their religion was superior to that preached by Muhammad. The Jews who were equally suspicious of the Islamic religion did not hesitate to subordinate Islam to the Meccan religion. You find out that people regarded some religious tradition as inferior to others. Muhammad too was not an exception. About the Jews came the Qur’an verse (4:51-2, 54-5):

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In the above passage, we find that the Qur’an in regards adherents of other religions as unbelievers. For the holy book, only the Muslims are true believers. This passage also accuses the Jews of jealousy of the gift of prophecy which God has given to Mohammad and condemns nonbelievers to hell fire. Such is the outcome of the situation whereby dialogue is excluded in the relation between various religions in the society. Thus, a fundamental concern in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is the competing claim to the truth of the beliefs of the different religions. Nowadays, however, Islam like Catholicism has embraced dialogue as a necessary tool for peaceful coexistence with other religions. The Qur’an actually places emphasis on brotherhood and unity and

makes invitation for peaceful coexistence among believers. Thus, in Sura:49, Ayat 10, we read that –The believers are but a single brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear God, that you may receive mercy (Mohammad, ? p.45). This passage is an invitation to dialogue among believers. In line with Pope Francis' call for fraternal brotherhood, the Qur'an calls us for reconciliation and peace, and these can only come about through dialogue. In the political realm, however, Islam has been used as a tool for confrontation with, and conquest of others (Kenny, 1997, p.45). But although the Qur'an speaks of differences as real, it condemns the use of the notion of –difference as a pretext to demonize or subjugate others (Monti, 2019).

Turning our attention to the writings of Islamic scholars, we also find the same attitude of invitation to dialogue and collaboration. According to Monti, Islam as a religion arose within the milieu where, among the Arabs, there were Christian and Jewish communities who professed monotheism not practiced by other tribes (Monti, 2019). People who eventually became Muslims were always aware of many of the figures that were part of Jewish and Christian such as Abraham and Hagar; after the rise of Islam these figures became integral to the belief system of the new religion even though they were now seen through a slightly different interpretative lens (Monti, 2019). Historically speaking, Islam, while recognizing these religions, sought to engage with their adherents and even referred to them as part of the family of religions (*ahl-i-kitab*) (Monti, 2019). This is the context in which this study locates Islam's position on interreligious dialogue. In this sense, Islam has been dialogical from its very inception.

### **5. Experience of Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria**

With regard to interreligious dialogue in Nigeria, we can speak of both successes and failures. Every religious tradition has grown through the ages in (dialogue and) historical interaction with others. Christians, Muslims and members of other religious communities, have shared not only villages and cities, but ideas of God and divine revelation. Hence, Hans Kung's opinion that: –There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; there will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions (Monti, 2019), becomes very relevant. With this in mind, we shall have a look at the experiences of both Islam and Catholicism in Nigeria on interreligious dialogue looking primarily at their successes and challenges.

One of the fundamental problems standing between Christian-Muslim relationships in Nigeria is the claim of each religion to be the only source of theological truth. IdaraOtu made a similar observation when he remarked, with reference to the Church in Africa, that –the main potential barrier to dialogue is the tendency of one of either religions to lay claim to exclusivity of revelation (Otu, 2006, p.141). This claim can hardly be justified. Rather, the existence of both religions should be understood as an effect of interaction between different points of view and common effort of looking for the answers to the

question about God and his relation to the world. In this way, the role of dialogue cannot be reduced to only a politically correct element but may be something more essential – the basis of reasonable existence and development of religions.

A number of successes have therefore been recorded in this regard. Here in Nigeria there is the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations (Igwe, 2018). Many Nigerian dioceses have similar commissions to implement the Church's teaching in response to the particular multi-religious mix in their respective territories. Their mandate is to foster relations with the leaders and congregations of other religions, organize joint services to celebrate national events and to show a united religious response to local, national and international tragedies, publish messages on interfaith/interreligious relations and to promote the Church's teaching on interreligious dialogue. The following successes have been achieved:

- The study of Islam is undertaken in major institutions such as seminary schools
- Many Christians now come to the understanding that there can be salvation outside the confines of Christianity
- Christians and Muslims coexist in one political party in Nigeria in search of common good
- During elections into political offices in Nigeria, as was observed in the 2019 general elections, many Christians happily voted Muslims into political offices
- Catholic clergy take up further studies in Islam in order to deepen our understanding of the Islamic faith

The above successes notwithstanding, and irrespective of the fact that there is a Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations in Nigeria, from all indication little or no dialogue has been going on in recent times among Christians and Muslims in the country. Hence, clashes, killings and political exclusion based on religion have characterized interreligious relationships. Therefore, bearing in mind that it is not religion per se that causes conflict, but individuals who exploit religion for personal, commercial and political gains, efforts should be made in the spirit of love to meet the following challenges:

- The study of religions other than one's religion should be extended to other institutions in Nigeria beginning from secondary schools
- Children in primary school levels should be thought to respect and value religions other than the one they profess
- Catholics should get more involved in politics in order to contribute their quota in seeing that Nigerian constitution permits interreligious studies in early school age of our children and to ensure that the religious tenets of a particular group is not imposed on others by the constitution
- Church leaders should learn to preach the message of love towards other religious adherents and highlight the need to forgive past mistakes.

- The Church should stand against violence and terrorism perpetrated in the name of religion. Religion cannot justify intolerance or war; —We cannot kill in God's name! (Benedict XVI, 2010, p.120) see also (Onayekan, 2011, p.46).

## 6. Conclusion

One of the fundamental problems standing between Christian-Muslim relationships in Nigeria is the claim of each religion to be the only source of theological truth. IdaraOtu made a similar observation when he remarked, with reference to the Church in Africa, that –the main potential barrier to dialogue is the tendency of one of either religions to lay claim to exclusivity of revelation! (Otu, 2006, p.141). The study observes that since Nigerians live in a community consisting of Christians and Muslims, there is need for mutual respect for each religion and this can only be achieved through dialogue. Rather than sounding the alarm about the strength of Christians as is often the case, it would be better to exert oneself for development of the country (Buhimann, 1997, p.135), and this can hardly come about except we live in mutual understanding – except we engage in interreligious dialogue.

Similarly, it should be noted that reformism becomes Islamism from the moment it adopt a specific program of introducing an Islamic society to the exclusion of all others, from the moment it directs its energies towards the full application of Sharia and the establishment of an Islamic state (Stamer, 1996, p.66). This development is contrary to the true spirit of interreligious dialogue which demands freedom of belief and religion. Being the most religious nation in the world (Onaiyekan, 2011, p.37), Nigeria should as well be an exemplary nation, a true light of the world. The study started by defining the term interreligious dialogue. It then goes further to examine how it is welcomed or rejected in both Catholicism and Islam. It has been established in this regard that fundamentally, The Catholic as well as Islam is a promoter of interreligious dialogue. How this reality is lived in Nigerian experience was then examined with regard to which the study identifies not only strengths but also some weaknesses.

The purpose of the Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate*, is given in its first paragraph as an examination of the relation which the Church has to non-Christian religions (Flannery, no.1). This is motivated by the Church's desire to foster unity and charity among individuals since all shares in a common destiny, namely God (Flannery, no.1). It is a profound awareness of this divine being, God that gave rise to religions in the first place including Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions found throughout the world. The document remarks that: –The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions... Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Flannery, no.2). Based on this, the Church urges her sons and daughters to enter into dialogue and collaboration with members of other religions,

with prudence and charity. Concerning the Muslims, the document identifies great similarity between their faith and the faith of the Church and urges that –a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding (Flannery, no.3) with them. It also acknowledges the common spiritual heritage which the Church shares with Jews and calls also for mutual understanding and appreciation through dialogue (Flannery, no.4). God, in whose image we are all created, is the Father of all (Flannery, no.5). Hence, there is no bases whatsoever for any discrimination.

This study thus condemns all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion. This is because we all are God's children as we are all created in his image and likeness. God becomes our common Father. Therefore, there is no ground for discriminations because we are brothers and sisters. Moreover, there are certain things which are good and holy from other religions such as Islam and Judaism. However, this does not mean we can compromise the Gospel of Christ. Although there may be some misunderstandings in the past, the surest means to true friendship is mutual dialogue.

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