Sustaining the Mutual Co-existence between Muslims and Christians through Interreligious Dialogue in Yoruba South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

There will be no peace within the nation without peace and tolerance among the religions. This paper intends to investigate how to sustain the mutual co-existence between Muslims and Christians through inter-religious dialogue in Yorubaland of the South Western Nigeria. It also looks at the important of dialogue and cooperation, the various forms of dialogue and the scriptural teachings on dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The method of approach is purely from written sources which comprise documents, monographs, manuscripts, books, journals as well as magazines. The paper revealed that, there have not been religious clashes in Yorubaland. The paper recommended that, Government should create more job opportunities especially for the youths in educational institutions, ministries and other government parastatals so that jobless youths would not be employed as agents of religious clashes. Poverty alleviation programs should be followed strictly and payment of worker's salaries not compromised. The Nigerian inter-religious dialogue council should be established in all the elementary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutions and Local Governments throughout the Country. Also, electronic media should be employed to educate people on the need to ensure peaceful co-existence among Christians and Muslims. In the same vein public worship should be done, bearing in mind that others also deserved their peace within the neighbourhood. It is concluded that the effect of the peaceful co-existence of the adherents of the different religions in Yorubaland could be scored highly.

Key Words: tolerance, dialogue, cooperation, co-existence, inter-religions, peace
Introduction

Down the ages, people have professed the faiths of one of the world religions. However, in spite of the fact that all religions lead their adherents to the honour of the creator of all beings, it is sad today to see violence and conflicts in the world, attacks on the beautiful works of the creator by the human creatures. Today it is clear that, while no one disputes the fact that all religions preach peace, Nigeria, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, USA, the Balkans and Latin America societies have experienced violence and conflict with reverberating effects on human and material resources up to the 21St century more than peace. In all these societies, there is tremendous support for all the major religions. So if these societies have continued to experience violence and even genocide as the case of Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and currently Darfur have revealed, then pertinent question such as these demand undivided attention by scholars: Is religion a source of conflict? As a point of mobilization, has religion been used by fanatics and political bigots to promote conflict? Can religion be used violently to achieve political and social goals? Can one question the validity and legitimacy of the authorities of various religions including their strategies for propagating their central messages?

However, in the face of the different negative news about organized armed violence associated with the adherents of the world religions in the different parts of the world and Nigeria in particular, the story is different in Yorubaland. In Yorubaland, which is made up of a homogenous community of Yoruba people inhabiting the south-western part of Nigeria, Muslims and Christians have co-existed peacefully for many years more than in any part of Nigeria. As one appreciates the mutual co-existence between Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland, it is good to examine some ways by which the mutual coexistence could be sustained. Hence, the aim of this work is to propose that interreligious dialogue as an effective way by which the mutual co-existence between Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland could be sustained.

What is Dialogue

Dialogue, sometimes spelled dialog in American English is a literary and theatrical form consisting of a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people. Also, dialogue is a special kind of discourse that enables people with different perspectives and worldviews to work together, to dispel mistrust and create a climate of good faith, break through negative stereotypes, shift the focus from transactions to relationships and create peaceful community. It also makes participants more sympathetic to one another even when they disagree, prepare the ground for negotiation or decision making on emotion-laden issues and increase the number of people committed to decisions on challenging issues. To explain dialogue we contrast it with debate, a more common form of discourse. Both are essential in decision-making, but they have different purposes. Debate is about winning; dialogue is about learning.

Therefore, dialogue as an act is a two-way communication between two or more people, which requires speaking and listening. It is an act of exchange of ideas whereby the participants contribute on equal terms to the discussion. It is expected that the subject matter to be discussed will not be foreign to the discussants and the discussants are expected to approach the subject
matter from their different points of view. Dialogue gives the participants the opportunity to express their positions in an atmosphere of sincerity, objectivity, freedom and mutual respect. It is expected that none of the discussants will impose his/her views on others; rather, the discussion should lead to a point where they would agree on a consensus conclusion.

Listening to others when they speak is an important virtue to be cultivated among the participants in dialogue. This is because many people today are not very patient to listen to others when they are speaking. Many are mainly interested in seeing others listen to them but without listening to others. The desire to listen to others is a pointer to the fact that the discussants appreciate others and have the conviction that others have important ideas to offer. Thus an individual who wants to be listened to and does not want to listen to the others cannot be good in dialogue. Dialogue also involves asking questions for clarifications and for better understanding of others. Others are also expected to offer sincere answers to the questions asked.

Dialogue is also a reciprocal communication, mutual friendship and respect, as well as joint effort for the sake of shared goals, all in the service of a common search for truth and in the context of religious pluralism, as a complex of human activities, all founded upon respect and esteem for people of different religions. Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but it is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. Dialogue does not grow out of the opportunism of the tactics of the moment, but arises from reasons which experience and reflection, and even the difficulties themselves, have deepened. Dialogue is a path worthy of the human person. It is a means by which people discover one another and discover the hopes and peaceful aspirations that too often lie hidden in their hearts. It is a central and essential element of ethical thinking among people, and an indispensable tool for the recognition of the truth. The path of dialogue makes it possible to achieve the peace so longed for, which is the foundation of fruitful coexistence among people it excludes all kinds of violence, and helps to build a more human future with the cooperation of all, thus avoiding a radical impoverishment of society.

Down the ages, different disciplines have employed dialogue as a way of explaining the contents of their disciplines to all who are outside the disciplines. For example, the ancient Greeks employed dialogue as a tool for the teaching of philosophy. Socrates the great Greek philosopher through dialogue (dialectics) was able to pass on the philosophical heritage to the youths. Plato also presented his great works in forms of dialogues. Dialogue is also employed in the drama to present difficult and abstract ideas in a way that will be intelligible to the minds.

Dialogue as an act could be employed in different ways,
1. At a purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion.
2. Dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission. This can appropriately be called "the spirit of dialogue".
3. In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. It is in this third sense that the term dialogue [denotes] for one of the integral elements of the evangelizing mission, [inter-religious dialogue].

**Inter-religious Dialogue**

Inter-religious dialogue is a challenging process by which adherents of differing religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the center of most wars. The objective of inter-religious dialogue is peace. Inter-religious dialogue can also be defined as a forum purposefully created to generate contacts, discussion and interaction between two (or more) different religious groups with a view to bringing about an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence. Inter-religious dialogue should not aim at obliterating the identity of participating religious group. Rather, its objective should be to discuss and reason together through aspects of problems that poses a threat to the peaceful co-existence between religious groups.

Inter-religious dialogue is thus a gathering of adherents of the different religions in an open and free forum. The forum provides very conducive environment whereby the adherents could listen to one another, to understand the religions of others and to seek out consensus agreement of difficult issues in their co-existence. It presupposes that the person coming to dialogue has a better understanding of his faith and ready to learn about the faith of the others in dialogue. It involves the establishment of strong relationship and building of trust and confidence among the participants. This requires a growing respect for the others in dialogue and a better readiness to understand the religious tradition of others in dialogue. It requires acknowledgements of others as creatures of God and readiness to establish a better relationship with God through others.

Inter-religious dialogue should not be understood as the study of the different religions of the world as in the discipline called Comparative Religion. In the same vein, debates between the adherents of the different religions even in a most friendly atmosphere is not inter-religious dialogue since the partners are out to argue to justify their different positions and to prove that one religion is better than others. Inter-religious dialogue is contained to all activities between the different religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, African Traditional Religion etc. The aim of the activities is not to work towards the unity of all religions in a form of syncretism or super-religion. It is not also an avenue to engage in the conversion of the adherents of other religions to one's own religion. It is good now to examine the various forms of dialogue.
Why Dialogue and Cooperation between Muslims and Christians is Important

There are two quotations that highlight the urgency and need for Muslims and Christians to cooperate. The first is taken from an address made by Pope Benedict XVI to Ambassadors from Muslim countries in 2006 in which he said:

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.

The second quotation is from a letter signed by 137 Muslim Scholars and Leaders from across the Muslim world and sent to Christian leaders in 2007. It says:

Muslims and Christians together make up over half the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

These statements highlight the urgent need for Muslims and Christians to address the polarization that is growing between them. This has been fuelled by wars, persecution, injustices and by individuals and groups stirring up religious divisions to achieve political or material gain. Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is needed now more than ever before to address the issues causing this growing division. The fact that Muslims and Christians make up over 50% of the world's population makes dialogue and cooperation imperative.

Various Forms of Dialogue

There are different forms or ways by which inter-religious dialogue could be understood or practiced among the adherents of the world religions. They are dialogue of life, action, theological exchange and religious experience. The different forms of dialogue could be understood as presented below.

Dialogue of Life

In the dialogue of life," people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations." The practice of the dialogue of life could be understood in the sense that in Yorubaland today, Christians and Muslims live together in the same house without any frictions. In many cases, they share the same toilet, bathroom, kitchen and go to the same farmlands without problems. Sometimes they participate in each other's feasts and festivals through sharing of meals and drinks even though they rarely attend the places of worship different from their own during these festivals. They are fans of the same football clubs and social organizations. The adherents of the two religions go to the same markets to "shop". Christians purchase goods produced by the Muslims without discrimination. In the same vein, the Muslims feed on the products on sale in the markets by Christians. Muslims also do not see the need not to buy goods from Christians even
when some Christians who belong to the white garments Churches like Cherubim and Seraphim or Celestial Church of Christ come to the markets to sell their garments. Muslims and Christians are happily married in Yorubaland and in some of these marriages the parties retain their religions before marriage in their marital life.

**Dialogue of Action**

In the dialogue of action Christians and Muslims collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. Christians and Muslims engage in the dialogue of action in some joint projects for the good of the community without discrimination. Some of these projects include the clearing of bushy areas within their neighbourhood, joint efforts against thieves or intruders, constructions of bridges for the good of the community. They belong to the same political parties and become running mates while contesting for different political offices.

**Dialogue of Theological Exchange**

Dialogue of theological exchange provides forum where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. The Nigeria Inter-religious Dialogue Council had in the past provided avenues whereby the Muslims and Christians came together to reflect on common themes in both religions. This forum provided great opportunities for the Muslims and the Christians to learn about each other's religions. The dialogue is not about finding what is acceptable to both religions or to point out where a religion is better than others, it is all about efforts at presenting the doctrines and practices of other religions in a sincere way as it is understood and practiced by the adherents of the religion. It is expected that participants in this dialogue will put aside their preconceived notion of the religion being presented and learn the religions without imposing their negative or positive biases.

**Dialogue of Religious Experience**

The dialogue of religious experience gives opportunity for persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, to share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. In Yorubaland, there have been many instances whereby Christians joined the Muslims for ceremonies like weddings, naming ceremonies etc and the Muslims joined the Christians in their Churches for the same ceremonies. However, Muslims and Christians rarely engage in dialogue of religious experience with the adherents of African Traditional Religion.

It should be pointed out that the different forms of dialogue are interrelated. For instance, the exercise of the dialogue of life cannot be understood without the dialogue of action since both are the daily experiences of the adherents of the different religions. Again, even though dialogue of theological exchange is for specialists who have better understanding of their various religions, it cannot be denied that in informal settings, the adherents of the
different religions asks questions about the beliefs of the religions of the other. In the same vein, the dialogue of religious experiences is a common occurrence between the Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland save for the African Traditional Religion.

The Muslims encourages dialogue with other Religions

The literal meaning of Islam, derived from the Arabic word Salaam, means peace. The word “Islam” has another root derivation Slim which means surrender or submission. In short, Islam means peace acquired by humans by submitting their will to the Will of Allah.

Moreover, Islam not only fosters love between fellow Muslims; rather it is a mercy for all of humankind. The “peace” of Islam has got many dimensions: peace with Allah, peace with society and peace with all of mankind irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Islam guides people to the path of non-violence and tolerance and shows the path of righteousness and piety.

It is enshrined in the Holy Qur’an that there is no compulsion in Islam. Muslims are prohibited to force people of other faiths to accept Islam. There is no tolerance for one who forces another person to submit to his/her will and convert to the religion unwillingly. Allah says:

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things.” (Qur’an 2:256)

This is the foundation for tolerance towards any and every religion and their people. There is no force and no compulsion on any individual to accept Islam. If he or she wants to accept Islam, it has to be necessarily out of their own free will and not at the point of sword. This is the essence of Islam. Islam is an open invitation to mankind and they have the full right either to accept it or to reject it. One interesting way of understanding the Islamic view on freedom of religion is to look at the role of Prophet Muhammad. Once the people of Mecca said to Prophet Muhammad that if God did not want them to worship idols then why does he not forcefully prevent them from doing so? Then God sent the following message:

“(O Muhammad) This is not a new excuse; those who weft before, them made, the same excuses. Is there anything upon the messengers except the dear conveying of the message” (Qur’an 16: 35).

So one can see that from the Qur’anic point of view, the mission of the prophets and messengers of God was not to forcefully impose their teachings on the people but to guide them and ask them to accept God with their own will. In another revelation, God says to Prophet Muhammad:

"But if the people turn away (then do not be sad because) We did not sent you to be a guardian over them. It is for you only to deliver the message." (Qur’an 42:43).
The Qur’an clearly says that religion cannot be forced on anyone. It says, “There is no compulsion in (accepting) the religion (of Islam)…”

The Prophet of Islam faced much difficulty and opposition in his own birthplace, the city of Mecca. He was eventually forced to migrate to Medina. But in spite of all the opposition and physical torture that his followers suffered in Mecca, Prophet Muhammad always approached the unbelievers of Mecca with tolerance. At one stage of his mission, the Prophet read to them a short chapter from the revelation:

“O you who do not believe! I worship not what you worship, and you are not worshipping what I worship; or am I worshipping what you worship; neither art you worshipping what I worship. Therefore, to you is your religion; and to me my religion!” (Qur’an, 109: 1)

When Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, he found that besides those who had accepted Islam, there was a large Jewish community in that city but this did not bother him. He did not contemplate on forcing them into the fold of Islam, instead, he made a peace agreement with them and called them ahlul kitab, the people of the Scripture. This was indeed the supreme example of tolerance shown towards the followers of other religions. The peace agreement between the Prophet and the Jews of Medina dearly guaranteed the physical safety and security of the Jewish community and also the freedom to practise their religion freely as long that community also abided in the terms of the treaty.

So, one can see that even historically, the Prophet of Islam was prepared to live in peace with the followers of other monotheistic religions, especially Judaism and Christianity. Even the letters that the Prophet wrote to the rulers of various countries and nations around Arabia are interesting documents for discussion. In none of the letters does the Prophet threaten them of a military aggression if they did not accept the message of Islam. The letter to the Christian King of Abyssinia ends with the words: "I have conveyed the message and now it is up to you to accept it. Once again, peace be upon him who follows the true guidance."

There is an interesting historical document from fourth Imam, ‘Ali Zaynul Abidin (A.S.). This document is entitled as Risalatu ‘l huquq which means “The Charter of Rights.” In this Risalah, the Imam has mentioned rights related to various issues and people in human society, the last part is on the rights of non-Muslims in a Muslim society. Among other things, it says:

“And there must be a barrier keeping you from doing any injustice to them, from depriving them of the protection provided by God, and from flaunting the commitments of God and His Messenger concerning them. Because we have been told that the Holy Prophet said, "Whosoever does injustice to a protected non-Muslim, then I will be his enemy (on the Day of Judgement),”

In a letter which Imam ‘Ali wrote to his Governor in Egypt, he says,
From the foregoing, it is shown that, Islam, both in theory and practice, does not preach intolerance. Instead, it enjoins its adherents not only to be tolerant but also to respect and appreciate the point of view of others. We shall now have a cursory look at the Christianity on tolerance to see it’s compatible to Islam.

The Christians Encourage Dialogue with Other Religions

There is example of Jesus, (John 13: 13) and at the same time is meek and humble of heart (Matthew 11: 29), acting patiently in attracting and inviting his disciples (Matthew 11: 28-30; John 6: 67-8). He supported and confirmed his preaching by miracles to arouse the faith of his hearers and give them assurance, but not to coerce them (Matthew 9: 28-29; Mark 9: 23-24; 6: 5-6). He indeed denounced the disbelief of his listeners but left vengeance to God until the Day of Judgment (Matthew 11: 20-24; Romans 12: 19-20; 2 Thessalonians 1: 8). When he sent His disciples into the world he said to them: "He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark, 16:16): He himself recognised that weeds had been sown through the wheat but ordered that both be allowed to grow until the harvest which will come at the end of the world (Matthew 13: 30, 40-42). He did not wish to be a political Messiah who would dominate by force (Matthew 4: 8-10; John 6: 15) but preferred to call himself the Son of Man who came to serve and "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10: 45). He showed himself as the perfect Servant of God (Isaiah 42: 1-4) who "will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick" (Matthew 12: 20). He recognised civil authority and its rights when he ordered tribute to be paid to Caesar, but he gave clear warning that the higher rights of God must be respected: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s" (Matthew 22: 21).

Also, he brought his revelation to perfection when he accomplished on the cross the work of redemption by which he achieved salvation and true freedom for men. He bore witness to the truth (John 18: 37) but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke out against it. His kingdom does not make its claims by blows (Matthew 26: 51-53; Jude 18. 36), but is established by bearing, witness to and hearing the truth and grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself (John 12: 32).

Taught by Christ's word and example, the apostles followed the same path. From the very beginnings of the Church the disciples of Christ strove to convert men to confess Christ as Lord, not however by applying coercion or with the use of techniques unworthy of the Gospel but by the power of the word of God (I Corinthians 2: 3-5; 1 Thessalonians, 2: 3-5). They steadfastly proclaimed to all men the plan of God the Saviour, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2: 4). At the same time, however, they showed respect for the weak even though they were in error, and in this way made it clear how
"each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12; I Corinthians. 8: 9-13;10: 23-33) and for this reason is bound to obey his conscience24. Like Christ, the apostles were constantly bent on bearing witness to the truth of God and they showed the greatest courage in speaking "the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4: 31; Ephesians. 6: 19- 20) before people and rulers. With a firm faith they upheld the truth that the Gospel itself is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (Romans16). They therefore despised "all worldly weapons" (2 Corinthians. 10: 4; I Thessalonians, 5: 8-9) and followed the example of Christ's meekness and gentleness as they preached the word of God with full confidence in the divine power of that word to destroy those forces hostile to God (Ephesians, 6:1117) and led men to believe in and serve Christ (2 Corinthians 10: 3-5). Like their Master, the apostles recognised legitimate civil authority: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities . . . he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed" (Romans 13: 1-2; 1 Peter 2: 13-17). At the same time they were not afraid to speak out against public authority when it opposed God's holy will: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5'29, 4. 19-20).

Some Proposals for the Sustenance of Peaceful Co-Existence between Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland

With the background understanding in inter-religious dialogue, the forms of Inter-religious dialogue, it is good to locate the contexts whereby the acts of inter-religious dialogue could serve as a paradigm for the sustenance of the mutual co-existence between people of the different faiths in Yorubaland. Hence, it is good to propose the following as some of the steps that could help to sustain the peaceful co-existence among people of faiths. It is expected that the Inter-religious Dialogue bodies will also reflect on the proposals as parts of the steps that could help to sustain peaceful co-existence between their members.

Religious Leaders in Yorubaland Must be United

It is a known fact that the Nigeria Inter-religious Dialogue Council (NIREC) has been a body for the meeting/dialogue for the adherents of the different religions. In the words of John Cardinal Ololunfemi Onaiyekan, the former National Co Chairman of Nigeria Inter-religious Council, "...the main structure for Nigerian Inter-religious Council (NIREC) is formed by the initiative of the leadership of Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria during the Presidency of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 as a forum for high-level dialogue between the leaders of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria while the different States of the Federation were commissioned to establish it in the 36 States of the federation."25 Hence within the provisions of the Nigeria government concerning religious matters, the Nigeria Inter-religious Dialogue Council is the platform for the harmonization/utilization of structures for peaceful co-existence among people of faiths in Nigeria. This is because the leaders of the different religions have recognised the body as an avenue for heart to heart discussion on how to live together.

It is important to point out that before Yorubaland could guarantee the mutual co-existence among the Muslims and Christians, the religious leaders in Yorubaland must be
united under the Nigeria Inter-religious Dialogue Council. This unity entails that the members should be reconciled among themselves. This is because as leaders of different religious traditions, they cannot preach reconciliation to others if they are not personally reconciled within themselves and with one another. The people of the world look up to them as people of faith bringing peace and hope. Their meetings strengthen bridges between religions. They also need now to promote healing and reconciliation in their own communities and in their wounded world. As religious leaders, they should set a good example as reconcilers 26.

The Traditional Home Training on Human Dignity and Sacredness of Blood Must be Revived as Part of Lessons at Home and Schools

For sustain a peaceful atmosphere in Yorubaland, there is need to bring to birth in homes and schools the traditional teaching that people have all taught their children down the ages that all men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image, they have the same nature and origin 27. It is also good to re-activate the reverence that was accorded to human blood which makes it a sacred object that should not be wasted. This teaching will help all to realize that human life should be treated with all dignity and should not be terminated by anybody for selfish reasons.

Education on the Constitutional Provisions on Freedom of Religion Should be an Important Aspect of Civic Education from Elementary Schools to Tertiary Institutions

Respecting the rights of others on the choice of religion is very important for the peace of any society. The natural law confers some rights on every human being. One of these rights is the right to freedom to practise the religion of one's choice. The fundamental human rights of all Nigerian treated in details in Section 38 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended has been able to put this better. The constitution says that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance" 28.

The Use of Dialogue of Theological Exchange

One of the causes of tension between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is that the adherents of both religions lack the basic knowledge of each other's faith. As a result of this there is the fear of the other religion. It is good that dialogue of theological exchange should be organised in the different educational institutions as part of the extra curriculum activities. For example, the pupils should be made to know what the Qur'an is to the Muslims and the Bible to the Christians. It needs to be pointed out that a proper handling of the revealed books of the two religions is an important fact in sustaining peace between the adherents of both religions. The Muslims will not be happy to see that pages of the Qur'an are used as wraps in the market. So also the Christians will not be happy to see that the Bible is not treated with respect.
In the same vein, the person of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Jesus Christ should be made clear to the pupils. Using of foul language to describe the founders of Christianity and Islam has been a source of clashes. For instance a wrong portrayal of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that came out of the Danish Newspaper, Jyllands-Posten and republished in European media and in different parts of the world in September, 2006 led to protests from different Muslim communities in the different parts of the world including Maiduguri and Bauchi where Christians were targeted and 18 people were killed. In the same vein, another negative presentation of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) during the Miss World beauty pageant in Lagos, Nigeria led to riots which lasted for days in Nigeria even when the Miss World pageant had been relocated to London. Many other factors also bring clashes, such as ignorance, sentiments, emotions of worshippers and fanaticism.

Other central themes of the Christian and Islamic faiths should be made known to the pupils. It is good to educate the Christians to learn and accept to see the doctrinal and theological teachings of the Muslims as the Muslims understand it and vice versa. A prejudicial teaching of a religion by a non-believer of the religion could be a source of cold wars that could blow out of proportion in the nearest future. It should also be suggested that excursion to Mosque for Christians and excursion for Muslims to Churches will be of advantage. In all, we are called as Christians and Muslims to know and respect the religious convictions of the other, to discover that which unites us and what makes us different. Knowing and respecting these convictions does not necessarily imply sharing them. To be able to speak about them objectively and with respect forms part of the way we should behave as persons of belief.

Examination of Political Factors that Could Lead to Conflicts among People of Faiths in Ekitiland

There is the need to implore the politicians in Yorubaland not to drag the Muslims and Christians into cold wars in their political campaigns. This is because it is possible for a Christian politician to sensitize the populace on the need to have a Christian to occupy a particular office that has always been occupied by the Muslims and vice versa. It is good to encourage the politicians to avoid using religions as a tool to achieve their political ambitions. The adherents of the religions should also be made to understand that the politicians could use them for their selfish gains. There is also the need to ensure that external influence should not be allowed to disrupt the peaceful co-existence in Yorubaland.

Media Reports on Religious People

The Media have been an important aspect of a society down the ages. In the contemporary world, many see the events on the media as the ideal practices and behaviours and the information on the media to be the only truth. In the same vein, many Journalists have, in one way or the other, in the past been sources of unity and conflicts in the different parts of the world. It is good to point out that Media reporting of religious events should be positive. Trained Journalists in religious reporting should be made to handle religious events in the State. Journalists should avoid any reports that could cause tensions between the Muslims and
Christians. Information on the activities of the adherents of both religions should be confirmed and discussed before it is aired on the Television and Radio stations.

Concerning religious affairs in Nigeria, it may be necessary to redefine the role of the Mass media practitioners, particularly in terms of what events they will find newsworthy. Experience has shown that the Mass media reports, news analysis and features are capable of playing a positive or negative role in the relationship between Muslims and Christians depending on the intention and orientation of the journalist concerned. More often than not, the reactions of the Muslims to Christian’s actions or vice-versa are determined by the Mass media reports.31

In the same vein, during the Second Republic in Nigeria (1979-83) a press report stormed the whole nation like thunderbolt. It was alleged that the Muslims had been given ten million Naira, (N 10,000,000), by the then Federal Government, to build a central mosque in Abuja, the new Federal Capital. The gesture was considered a favour to the Muslims and contempt for, or neglect of, the Christians. The tension created by the report was better imagined. Even the prompt intervention of the government to explain the matter could not help the situation. The truth of the matter, as given by a prominent member of the ruling party who incidentally was a Christian, was that both Muslim and Christian groups were given ten million naira each to build a mosque and a church respectively in the new Federal Capital. The circumstances that led to the speculation arose when the Muslims started their mosque project in earnest. They had mobilized their resources to contribute more money sufficient to build a mosque to their taste. About the Christian Church, information gathered indicates that the Christians had to hold prolonged deliberations to resolve some nagging problems. First would it be possible for them to build a united church where all naira given to them had to be shared, among how many denominations? These and related questions could not be resolved easily and no project could take off. The Muslims were not faced with any problem of the nature 32.

Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, the Catholic Archbishop of Jos Archdiocese commenting on the religious crises in places like Bauchi town, Kotongora, Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi State, Kaduna, Maiduguri and of recent Jos in Plateau State states that

Most of these crises have largely received unfair and biased media coverage that has always aggravated the crises in the country. International media houses like the V.O.A, Deulche Welle, French Overseas Service, and BBC among others, in collaboration with their Hausa/Fulani employees broadcast biased news in the Hausa service to the disadvantage of Christians who do not have the same access to these media houses. Fresh in our memories is the recent political crises in Jos which degenerated to a religious conflict 33.

Examination of the Place of Illiteracy on Peaceful Coexistence among People of Faiths

Mass illiteracy in Yorubaland could lead to the breeding of agents that could disrupt the peaceful co-existence between the adherents of the various religions in Yorubaland. It is good then, that efforts should be geared toward seeing that many children are given the opportunity to embrace formal education at least to the secondary school level. Afterwards those who
would like to further the education to the tertiary level could continue and those who do not want could learn a trade. For example,

Malam Yusuf [the acclaimed founder of Boko Haram] may have had a dim view of Western education, in preference for Arabic education... The truth is that for members of the Boko Haram sect, it is not a question of whether they like Western education but whether they have access to it, even if they liked it. Many of us have always wondered how, in spite of all the privileges that Northern Nigeria has enjoyed at the expense of the rest of us in the past 50 years or so, a state like Delta would still boast more JME (sic) candidates than those of the entire seven states in the Northwest put together. Or is it not embarrassing that JME (sic) candidates from the five states of Imo, Delta, Ekiti, Ondo and Anambra put together far outnumbered those from the entire 19 northern states put together? It is in the nature of man that what he cannot have he often discredits or even tries to destroy. But if you ask me, I would even say that the Boko Haram laggards were not actually rebelling against Western influence in their lives as much as they were rebelling against the system that made it difficult for them to have access to the opportunities for a better life inherent in Western education, a system that drove them to the periphery of life while a few of their compatriots, sometimes even from the same neighbourhood lived in unimaginable privilege.**34**

**Attention on Eradication of Poverty as a Determinant Factor for Peace in the Land**

Poverty is another important factor to be tackled by the government in order for us to continue to enjoy a peaceful atmosphere in Yorubaland. Boko Haram incident was not so much about religion as it was about a disenchanted, disinherited people deciding to vent their anger and frustration, in a very violent way, against the rest of society. Boko Haram is, thus a metaphor for poverty. Just take a casual look at the states where the sect is said to be active and one will find that some of them are among the states with the worst poverty rates in the country. People with little or nothing to live for, who have no hope for, or faith in, a better tomorrow, who feel short changed by life, are almost always likely to offer themselves for use for nefarious purposes by persons who often masquerade as religious men but who only hide under religion to exploit others' weaknesses for personal aggrandizement. The young men and women in Boko Haram in Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Niger and Kano States who confess their hate of Western education and way of life generally, and say that they have a mission to Islamize Nigeria, fall under such group of low-lifers ever ready to do the bidding of any person who comes with a promise of heavenly rewards for religious piety; however illusory since they know no better.**35**

To buttress this fact better, going through their photographs, it was obvious that most of the people who [have been fighting] the police and army for Boko Haram and got killed [are] the lowliest of the northern poor [as at now], a media tour of some six northern states, organized by UNICEF Nigeria Office [shows] that in peace-time, [in] oil rich Nigeria, malnutrition is ravaging children in six northern states of Kebbi, Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Adamawa and Gombe!**36**
It is acknowledged that some efforts have been put in place to see that some of the Yoruba indigenes are gainfully employed. However, even though, it is impossible for any governments to employ all her citizens more efforts should be put in place to ensure that those who cannot embrace studies in tertiary institutions are provided with the means of fishing for themselves in the rivers of life. The religious bodies could be employed to offer initiative on how this could be achieved.

**Strong Security System in the State**

The ineffectiveness of the security system should be another major fact to be examined in Yorubaland. This had provided some individuals with the liberty to take laws into their hands. For example, no one knows what the security personnel in Yoruba have been doing to avoid an influx of *Boko Haram* members. Therefore, there should be peace meetings with the indigenes of Northern Nigeria, most especially North-eastern Nigeria in Yoruba on the need for them to be aware that their business and religious practices would be guaranteed in the Yorubaland in so far as there is no importation of violent activities from their members to Yorubaland. There is also the need for adequate surveillance of some of the *sabo* in the different parts of Yorubaland so that people may not be biting their fingers when the worst has been done in Yorubaland.

**Proper Interpretations of Biblical and Qur'anic Provisions**

It is a known fact that the two revealed books have provisions for those who have not embraced the faith. Appeal should be made to the religious leaders to ensure that the interpretations of the Holy books of both religions will not make their adherents to go out on verbal or physical attacks on the adherents of the other religions. The interpretations of the Holy Qur'an and the Bible by the different religious leaders should be done with the mind that all people need to sustain the peaceful co-existence of the people of Yorubaland.

**Traditional Festivals Should be Limited to the Shrines**

It has been noted earlier on that the activities of the Nigeria Interreligious Dialogue Council has been limited to the Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland. It is good to find ways of dialoguing with the adherents of African Traditional Religion through the traditional rulers who are close to them. This is because, in the past it has been noted that in some towns, festivals of the adherents of African Traditional Religion affect the whole town especially in cases, where a dust to dawn curfew is imposed on the whole town. It is good to propose that traditional festivals should be limited to a close area of the town. The idea of imposing a dust to dawn curfew on a particular town is not the best. This is because there are Christians, Muslims and free thinkers in the different towns who may not want to be disturbed. Hence, these ceremonies should be done in such a way that there will be free movements of vehicles for travelers who may want to pass through such towns and who may not be aware of the events. Such events should be limited to the shrines and worshippers and tourists who are interested in the ceremonies could be part of the ceremonies without any disturbances.
Yorubaland Has a Lesson to Teach the Whole World

As it has been noted in Yorubaland, Muslims, Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion have been co-existed peacefully for many years more than in any part of Nigeria. This is evidence from the word of Fr Louis Taiwo Omojola: As a child in our family, I grew up with the fact that My Uncle, a Muslim was responsible for the slaughtering of our Easter and Christmas goats. He was expected to partake in the meat. In the same vein, he would not celebrate any of the Muslims festivals without giving us some gifts in cash and kind as a way of celebrating with him. My father had done this in order to see that our religious differences within the extended families did not bring division in the large family since my uncle would not participate in the meat if a Christian had killed it.

As a result of this, it is worth saying that Christians, Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religions should find ways to continue to maintain this relationship. They should continue to teach the world that they can live in peace in the land in spite of their religious differences and thereby offering the world their communitarian living. Everybody must acknowledge that they inherit this from African Traditional Religion since the devotees of the different part of Yorubaland were able to live together and even participate in each other's festivals in the past.

Conclusion

There have not been religious clashes in Yorubaland, thus the effect of the peaceful co-existence of the adherents of the three religions in Yorubaland could be scored high. Nevertheless, Government should create more job opportunities especially for the youths in educational institutions, ministries and other government parastatals so that jobless youths would not be employed as agents of religious clashes. Poverty alleviation programs should be followed strictly and payment of worker's salaries not compromised. Government policies on religious matter should be communicated in a language that will be clear to Nigerians.

The Mass Media is capable of reaching and influencing not only individuals but also whole masses of people and indeed, the whole of humanity; it is good that the tools of the print and electronic media should be employed to educate Ekiti indigenes on the need to ensure peaceful co-existence among Christians, Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religion in Ekiti. For example, radio programmes; news, documentation programme, interview programme, talk programme, commentaries and features, radio-drama, the magazine programme, music radio and commercials are avenues to educate the Ekiti people on the fact that there is evil in violent activities, and that presentation of religious faith should be done in a convincing manner and not through violence. In the same vein public worship should be done with the intention that others also deserved their peace within this neighbourhhood.

The Nigerian inter-religious dialogue council should be established in all the elementary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutions and Local Governments throughout the Country. This will provide a stable environment where the aggrieved member of any religion could
present his/her grievances to the council and members from the different religions could look into the issues.
Notes and References


9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.


13 S. B.Mala “Peace-Passages in the Qur’an and their Implications in Inter-religious Relations”, J.K.Olupona (eds.) Religion and Peace in Multi-Faith Nigeria, O.A.U, 1992, 94-95


20 Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Memorial Speech of H. E. Cardinal Paul Poupard read on his behalf by Fr. Felix Machado on the Occasion of the Twentieth


22 S. 38 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended


26 M A. Bidmos, Inter-Religious Dialogue, The Nigerian Experience, p. 52


31 Rev Fr Louis Taiwo Omojola Being a paper delivered at the Inter-religious Dialogue Seminar/Workshop at Pope John Paul 11 Pastoral Centre, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria on 5th June, 2014, pp, 5-7

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For a detailed discussion on the Advisory Council for Religious Affairs, see S.B Mala “Advisory Council on Religious affairs: Nigeria Solution to Inter-Religious Conflicts” N. P, pp, 7-11