

Muslim-Christian Relations and Peaceful Co-Existence for National Integration: A Biblical and Quranic Perspective



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Abstract

Peace and peaceful co-existence has become the catalyst in the development of any nation in the world. All countries, particularly their leadership places importance to peaceful co-existence among its citizens. The developed world from the beginning, developed as a result of their sustained peace and tranquility in their environment. We saw it right from the industrial revolution in Europe. In Nigeria there was peaceful co-existence among the people of various sub-nationals before the coming of colonial invaders. With the arrival of Christianity, competing with the early Islamic traditions particularly in the North brought about much more religious awareness and eventual conflicts of superiority, neglecting the common ground of all the religious teachings. This paper addresses this quagmire of Muslim-Christian relations in search of peaceful co-existence in our Universities and Nigeria with Biblical and Quranic reflections as we try to draw areas of application. This paper recommend that four major themes; peace, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, should be the cardinal point that the government and all stakeholders in Nigeria should focus.

Keywords: *Muslim-Christian, Relations, Co-Existence, National Integration, Biblical, Quranic, Perspective.*

I. Introduction

Interfaith involves persons of different religious faiths relating together in spite their religious differences for mutual reasons and benefits. On the other hand, integration is the act or process or an instance of integrating, incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups (as races). Christianity and Islam being the more elated religions than other religions in Nigeria seem to have dominated and captured the religious space, in all matters of national interaction and existence, to the point of making other religions less popular. This paper, therefore, discusses primarily, interfaith, in the context of Muslim-Christian relations. Indeed, the axiomatic expression, “Though Tribe and Faith May Differ”, confirms the multi-tribal-religious stance of Nigeria. This stance seems to have retarded some aspects of national cohesion and integration because of lack of peaceful co-existence, hence, the purpose of this research. The pertinent questions to be asked are, how has interfaith relations faired among University Students and Nigerians in this multi-tribal-religious status and how has it enhanced national integration?

A Muslim-Christian relation in Nigeria has witnessed uneasy and sometimes contentious experiences over the years. Such contentions and controversial relationship have resulted into frictions, arguments, tensions, conflicts, deaths and destruction of property. The peace in Nigeria particularly, Northern Nigeria has been threatened and meaningful mutual harmony fractured. It has become in the words of Ignatius A. Kaigama, “a boiling cauldron of intra-religious conflicts.” Situating this unfortunate scenario, Shobana noted:

The history of Muslim-Christian interaction in Northern Nigeria has yielded a rich and enduring popular memory and imagination traceable across the vast distances, the reigns of particular sultans and republican leaders, and generational divides. The elements of this history are frequently deployed in the service of partisan agendas by self-appointed prophets.

This derives from the fact that these themes are inextricably linked to each other. Buttressing the significance of reflecting on the communalities between Christians and Muslims, Colin Chapman states that, one way to break out of the deadlock created by centuries of controversy between Muslims and Christians is to start with basic convictions that are common to both faiths, and from there move to

explore differences,” The presuppositions in this paper are hinged on:

That these four themes as outlined above, are key ingredients that Nigeria needs today in order to chart a pathway towards inter-religious or interfaith peace between Christians and Muslims.

That Christianity and Islam contain teachings on these selected themes which call for deeper understanding and application.

That Nigeria has experienced religious tensions and conflicts because these key religious elements or themes have not been appropriated in inter-religious relations between Christians and Muslims.

Brief History of Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria

A Muslim-Christian relation in Nigeria has been a frosty one over the years. Such relationship could best be contextualized within the global historical relationship between Christianity and Islam which has witnessed what Christine A. Mallouhi calls “troubled encounters.” Mallouhi traces some of such “troubled encounters” to include, the period of the Umayyads in the 7th century, the crusades, in the 11th and 12th centuries, the conquests through the Jihads, western ascendancy and impact which have become what could be considered the “burden of memory” on both sides, Mallouhi put it this way:

The Muslims encountered the Christian west as a hostile enemy. The bloody images of the crusades and a militant Christianity continued to be presented in Muslim countries through the western colonization of Islamic lands over the last centuries.

The result of the observation above is further presented thus: “the Muslim word sees the church today as the same group that fought the crusades, so Muslims scrutinize Christianity’s attempt to evangelize the Arab region for any signs of the old crusade mentality of hostility or antagonism.”

Such “troubled history” is also captured by Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell this way:

Much of this history is marked by warfare, respective gains and losses through imperial expansion and resulting endemic mutual mistrust...the crusades represent a Christian counterattack, and its brutality has never been forgotten by Muslims in the Arab world. The Ottoman Turkish incursions into Europe from the 16th century created and abiding fear among the European populations involved on the front line. The Western colonization of Islamic lands around the world around 1800-1945 left Muslims with bitter memories of being exploited and subservient to non-Muslim rule.

Thus, the present relationship between Christians and Muslims at the global level is characterized by the so-called conspiracy theories of “Islamophobia” and “Westophobia.” In Nigeria, the scenario is not different. Nigeria’s religious demographics particularly between Christians and Muslims have always elicited controversy and contestations due to the political colouring it easily assumes. Most conservative estimates put Christian and Muslim population at near par with each other. For John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Nigeria could best be described as an “Islam-Christian nation” commenting further on Nigeria’s religious demographics, Onaiyekan writes:

There is an important factor too in our sheer numbers. Take the approximate and conservative figures of forty million each for the two faiths in the country. It means that there are more Muslims in Nigeria than in all the Middle East, minus Egypt and that there are more Christians in Nigeria than there are in Belgium, Ireland, Holland plus the Scandinavian countries put together. And these large bodies do not consider themselves in anyway inferior to their counterpart elsewhere. What we do with ourselves, therefore, is very important for Muslim-Christian relations worldwide.

Christian and Muslim adherents crisscross the length and breadth of the nation, with these faiths represented in most ethnic groups in Nigeria such as the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Middle Belt area. They live also in peace and daily encounter each other in areas of business, sports, professions, politics, schools, markets and government offices. Nigeria’s Christians have made significant impact in world Christianity and are shaping African Christianity particularly in ways unprecedented in modern history. Similarly, Muslims in Nigeria have created significant impact in global Islam as they have also added powerful voice in the promotion of Islam.

Nigeria today is acclaimed as one of the religious nations in the world. Religious symbols dot most religious space in Nigeria through religious worship centres evident in churches and cathedrals competing for space, mosques, “holy noises” through loud speakers in religious worship centres, moving automobiles, religious stickers and posters among religious adherents. The religious vocabulary among most Nigerians depicts them as “a religious people.” Richard Dowden supports this when he wrote that,

“religion reinforces some of Nigeria’s political divisions but it is not the cause of division. Nigerians are deeply religious, the vast majority being Christian or Muslim. When religion overlays ethnicity and culture, it is easy to claim God or Allah to back your cause.”

A Muslim-Christian relation in Nigeria has been a cheered one. Relationship between them have been marked by mutual distrust, fear, alleged cases of government’s partisanship to the other, discrimination and outright denial of certain rights such as approval to build religious worship places, appointment into government positions, allocation of burial places, and so on. Theresa Adamu has observed this as well when she states that “the hindrances of fear, misconception, lack of trust and deception are cancers that are eating deep and destroying the mutual relationship between Christians and Muslims.” While Christians have alleged Islamic agenda towards gradual Islamization of Nigeria, Muslims on the other hand have consistently opposed the secular outlook of Nigeria’s constitution which projects Nigeria as a “godless society.” Till date, Christians are still opposed to Nigeria’s membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). While Muslims have pushed for the introduction of Islamic Banking in Nigeria, Christians have been opposed to its implementation as they fear subtle effects on non-Muslims. Thus, while Christians are opposed to government’s partisanship in dealing with religious matters, Muslims see religion and the state as one and the same which need not to be separated.

Hussaini Abdu has put this in context “since the 1970s, Nigeria has continued to experience and unprecedented surge in Islamic and Christian religious revivalism.” Abdu has shown how such Islamic and Christian revivalism had led to the rise of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), the Izala Movement and Muslim Brothers which have had their influence in many ways in shaping the religious landscape of Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria today.

The very avoidable ethno-religious conflicts that have been witnessed in Nigeria since the last three or more decades have further widened the Muslim-Christian relations with heightened levels of religious consciousness, mobilization and identity contestations. Today, the Boko Haram insurgency in some parts of Nigeria have awakened Christian apprehensions as the insurgents are committed to the enthronement of “Islamic Caliphate” in Nigeria and the eradication of corruption and bad governance in its many forms. In fact, Yinka Olamojobi says, “conceivably, the Boko Haram sect is Nigeria’s greatest nightmare since independence. “Shobana Shankar has also indicated how “Boko Haram has killed thousands of people, destroyed property, and forced both Muslims and Christians to flee their homes.” Shankar has observed that ‘Muslim-Christian differences have been shaped within ethnic, gender, occupational, generational, and class dynamics; mission to Muslims were the scenes of many kinds of struggles.’ Shankar notes significantly that Muslim-Christian relations had been characterized with much interaction, through travel, trade and other forms of socio-religious encounters that have shaped modern relationships. Shankar quotes Murray Last, a British historian who worked in Nigeria for several years and observed that “there is an economy of panic surrounding Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria.” Boko Haram has killed Christians and Muslims in their activities and churches and mosques have been burnt and many thousand people displaced. It has been observed by many due to the pervasive effects of corruption and economic woes occasioned by bad governance, religious activities have heightened in Nigeria and provided grounds for Boko Haram’s rise and its growth. Peter Cuncliffe-Jones supports this assertion thus:

But disenchanted by the years of misrule and corruption; and by the half-hearted implementation of the new laws by Northern leaders that was meant to end it, growing numbers are giving support to the Islamist cause. New Islamist groups have been formed.

A Muslim-Christian relation has a long history which some scholars today have traced to colonial legacy in Nigeria. For example, while it is observed that colonial policy of non-interference with Islam” did not encourage Christian missionary penetration to Northern Nigeria particularly, it partly hindered conversion of the Hausa-Fulani to Christianity. Muslims on the other hand, blame British colonial values and symbols in Nigeria’s public space till date. E.P.T. Crompton, Yusufu Turaki and others have indicated how the colonial administration sent out memoranda and government circulars to all residents and district officers on how to check missionary activities.ⁱ In fact, Yusufu Turaki notes that:

The colonial regulations were imposed on itinerancy, evangelism, visitation, preaching, church planting,

mission stations, religious instructions and schools and relations with Africans. The negative impact of these regulations on the status of African Christians converts and of Christianity itself endured into post-colonial Nigeria.

It is such colonial hangovers that have shaped Christian-Muslims in Nigeria today. Since 1999 when the military exited governance in Nigerian there has been growing radicalization of religion, religious mobilization and consciousness and further widening of Muslim-Christian relations. The Sharia introduction in some States war in Iraq and Afghanistan, among others, is believed to have added great impetus to the growth of religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and intolerance with negative effects on the Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria.

Today, religion still easily draws very passionate relations among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. For example, in Nigeria's political conference convened in 2014 by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, religion played significant role in the appointment of delegates to the sub-committees in the conference. Some political elites also employed religions in the 2015 electioneering campaigns in order that to seek for electoral votes as some political constants wooed religious leaders and attended worship centres to canvas for votes.

Common Grounds between Christianity and Islam

This section seeks to discuss common teachings between Christianity and Islam on selected themes such as justice, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. This section argues that Christianity and Islam contain adequate teaching on these themes that should call for religious harmony and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria rather than acrimony, hatred and conflict. References to Biblical passages and the Qur'an are made in discussing this paper for effective illustration of the arguments being made.

Justice

The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary defines justice as the quality of being just, just treatment, fairness.ⁱⁱThe Chambers Thesaurus adds to this definition by stating other qualities such as equity, fair play, impartiality, objectivity, neutrality, equitableness, honesty and fair mindedness. The Bible upholds justice and encourages believers to practice justice in all their dealings.

Deuteronomy 16:19 says; "Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you." King Solomon exhibited wisdom from God to administer justice (1Kgs 3:28). The Queen of Sheba on visit to Solomon exclaimed that, "praise is to the Lord your God who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's external love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness" (1Kgs 10:9; 2 Chron. 9:8). Ezra was commanded by God to "appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates-all who know the laws of God" (Ezra 7:25). Job corroborates this demand by God when he states in 34:17, "can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty one?"

Psalms 9:16 brings the quality of God related to justice when it says; "the Lord is known for his justice, the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands." Psalm 11:7 says, "for the Lord is righteous, he loves justice, upright men will see his face." Psalm 33:5 says, "the Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." Psalm 89: 14 says; "righteousness and justice are the foundations of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you." Psalm 106:3 says, "Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right."

Proverbs 28:5 says, "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand fully." Proverbs 29:4 says, "by justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down." Isaiah 1:17 says, "stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed! Defend the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow?"

Administering justice to the poor, the weak and the powerless resonates in the Biblical passages. Other verses include; Exod. 23:3 says; "do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favouritism to a poor man in his lawsuit." Exodus 23:6 which says 'do not deny justice to your poor people in their

lawsuits. Having nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.” For God says, “I will make justice the measuring line, hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place” (Isa. 28:11).

Isaiah 30:18 says, “yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you, he rises to show you compassion, for the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him.” Lamentations 3:36 says, “do not deprive a man of justice-would not the Lord see such things?” Ezekiel decried how justice was perverted among the people and says; “the people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery, they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien denying them justice.” Amos also condemned injustices in the land of in his days and says; “you who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground” (Am. 5:7). Amos 5:15 says “hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Amos 5:24 says, “but let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.” Amos asked rhetorically, “do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice in to poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness” (AM. 16:15).

The result of the scenario painted above by Amos is also corroborated by Habakkuk when he states that “therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted” (Hab.1:4). But there is reward for those who practice justice. Psalm 115:5 says, “Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice.” Proverbs 21:15 says, “When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous, but terror to evil doers.”

Similarly, Islam has every strong teaching on justice just as in the Bible. Khalid Baig notes that, “there is one word that captures the essence of all Islamic laws and all Islamic teachings, one word that describes the overriding value that permeates all Islamic values: justice.”iii Qur’an 57:25 says, “Assuredly we sent our Messengers with evidence and we sent down with them the Book and the balance that the people might observe equity.” In fact, the main purpose of sending the prophets was to establish justice in the world and end injustice. Islam teaches that people be treated with equal sense of justice without regard to primordial affinities or status. Qur’an 4:35 says:

O you who believe! Be you maintainers of equity and bearers of testimony of Allah’s sake, though it is against yourselves or your parents or kindred. Be he rich or poor Allah is higher unto others, so follow not the caprices, lest you may deviate. If you incline or turn away, then verily Allah is aware of what you do” (cf. Qur’an 5:8).

Qur’an 16:90 says; “Verily Allah commands justice and well-doing and giving to kindred; and oppression. He exhorts you that haply you may be admonished.”

In another verse, Qur’an 5:18 says:

O you who believe! Be maintainers of your pact with Allah and witnesses in equity, and let not the ‘detestation for a people’ incite you not to act fairly; act fairly; that is nigh into piety. And fear Allah; surely is aware of what you do.

Khalid Baig has indicated that “justice does require retribution and Islam does call for “an eye for an eye.” This is the departing point from Christianity, as Jesus “abrogated” this mosaic provision in the New Testament when he said, “you have heard that it was said, ‘eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:88). Here, Jesus taught forbearance and tolerance.

With regards to dealings or establishing relationship with non-Muslims, the Qur’an 60:8 states, “Allah does not forbid you to deal benevolently and equitably with those who did not fight against you on account of religion, now drove you out from homes, very Allah is equitable.” In administering, Islam demands that leader’s judge justly. Qur’an 5:42 says:

Listeners are they to falsehood and devourers of the forbidden. So, if they come to you, either judge between them or turn away from them. And if you turned away from them, they shall not be able to harm you in aught; and if you judged them, with equity; verily Allah loves the equitable.

Qur’an 4:58 says, “Verily Allah commands that you shall render due to the owners thereof, and that, when you judge between men, judge them with equity. Excellent is that which Allah exhorts you; verily Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing.”

Qur’an enjoins that justice should be maintained even when it hurts close one. Qur’an 6:152 says:

And do not approach the substance of an orphan save with what is best until he reaches maturity, and fill up the measures, and balance with equity. We burden not a soul except according to its capacity. And when you speak, be fair, even though it be against a kinsman; and fulfill the covenant with Allah. In this case wise He enjoins you that perhaps you may be administered.

Christians and Muslims could collaborate together in Nigerian today to maintain justice as their scriptural reference books teach and encourage that justice be maintained in all human relationships. If Christians and Muslims promote justice in Nigeria today, it will help immensely to reduce or completely eradicate tendencies and alleged injustices and perversion of justice particularly where the rich seem to have cornered the judiciary in order to rob the poor and the weak, and to pervert justice. If Christians and Muslims work together to promote justice, it will help to reduce alleged cases of perceived injustice, marginalization and favouritism that have provided grounds for protests, tension and conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, certain pertinent questions become very necessary in order to address issues of justice that will help to enhance Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria, namely: how do you ensure justice in Nigeria today when some people have died due to communal and ethno-religious conflicts and perpetrators of such evil have not been punished? How do you ensure justice when some have lost their loved ones and their property destroyed and some displaced from their homes due to incessant religious fundamentalist activities? How do you ensure that Nigerians imbibe the sense and culture of promoting justice among Nigerians without regard to ethnic, religious and regional cleavages? How do you ensure justice in a lawless country like Nigeria where impunity has become the norm in Nigeria's public life? These and many questions constitute stumbling blocks towards ensuring that justice reign in Nigeria as an ingredient for a peaceful nation.

Peace

We live in a country today that needs peace. Incessant communal and religious conflicts, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping etc. have made the quest for peace more imperative in Nigeria. Peace has been defined by Chambers 21st Century Dictionary among other derivatives to include:

Freedom from or absence of war.

A treaty or agreement ending a war.

Freedom from or absence of noise, disturbances, or disorder, quietness or calm.

In harmony or friendship.

Other derivative meanings include; restfulness, tranquility, serenity and pacidity.^{iv} TM Gregory has observed that the concept of peace implies:

Cessation of hostilities, between nations, the absence of civil or ecclesiastical, disorder, and freedom from dissension between individuals through positive situations which and individual has prospered materially, or is healthy or possesses a tranquil freedom from mental or spiritual perturbation, to condition where there is a minimum of noise or activity.

The Bible provides enough resources for peace to seek peace in the world. In the Old Testament (OT), the Hebrew word *shalom* occurs and is used to describe prosperity of a material sort. It is also used in the spiritual sense. For example, Isaiah 32:17-18 says; "the fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." God gave prophet Jeremiah to proclaim peace to Judah saying; "but I said, Ah, sovereign Lord, the prophets keep telling them, 'you will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting people in this place' (Jer. 14:13). Malachi 2:5 used the phrase of "covenant of life and peace." Isaiah referred to the Messianic mission and character as one who will herald peace and calls him "prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6). Israelite rulers were considered successful and great due partly to their ability to maintain peace in the land (see 2 Kings 22:42; 1 Chron. 19:19, 2 Chron. 20: 31-32).

Psalms 119:165 says, "Great peace have they who have your law, and nothing can make them stumble."

In Matthew 5:9, Jesus said, "blessed are the peace makers for they shall see God." In John 14:27, Jesus said, "peace I leave with you, my peace I give." 1 Corinthians 14:33; Paul says, "For God is not a

God of disorder but peace.”

Psalms 31:14 says, “Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.” Colossians 3:15 says, “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” 1 Peter 3:11 says, “He must turn from evil and do well, he must seek peace and pursue it. In Romans 12:18, Paul enjoined believers to “live in peace with everyone.” Galatians 6:10 says, “therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” James 3:19 says, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” In fact, the gospel is described as the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15).

Peter re-affirmed “the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the goodnews of peace, through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 110:36). Paul also called the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). God is called “God of peace” (1Thess, 5:23); Heb. 13:20, Phil. 4:9.

Jesus told his disciples to “have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other” (Mk. 9:50b). Paul too advised believers, “if it is possible live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends but leave room of God’s wrath, for it is written, “it is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord.” In fact, Paul told Christians at Corinth that “God has called us to live in peace” (1 Cor. 7:150. He says, “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Col. 3:15). Paul also enjoined Thessalonians to “live in peace with each other” (1Thess.15:13). In Hebrews, the writer enjoined that, “make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy, without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Desmond Tutu has pointed out that “the rainbow in the Bible is the sign of peace. The rainbow is the sign of prosperity. In our world we want peace, prosperity and justice, and we can have it when all the people of God, the rainbow people of God, work together.”

Similarly, Islam projects peace as its key essence and Qur’an in many instances enjoins peaceful co-existence among its adherents within the Ummah and among non-Muslims. For example, Qur’an 25:63 says; “And the servants of the compassionate are those who walk upon the earth meekly, and when the ignorant address them, they say: “peace.” Qur’an 8:61 says; “and if they incline to peace, then do you incline to it, and rely on Allah. Verily He! He is the Hearing, the Knowing.” The opening verse of the Qur’an express an important element of the Muslim understanding of peace. “In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most compassionate”, which is repeated no less than 114 times. In fact, one of the Qur’anic attributes for Allah is “As Salaam,” which means “the peaceful.” The Qur’an refers to Islam as the “paths of peace” (Qur’an 5:16). Islam regards the mission of Prophet Muhammad (PBWH) as one of peace and mercy to human kind. Qur’an 21:107 says; “and we have not sent you except as a mercy to the world.”

Like Biblical passages, the Qur’an also contains verses which address violence and war. Thus, the so-called abrogation verses within the Qur’an which punctures peaceful living among non-Muslim citizens particularly, has remained parts of the “difficult passages” in the Qur’an, to interpret and apply. Reflecting on such passages, Bassam Khoury writes, that, “these verses seem to say clearly enough that “the Qur’an teaches a peaceful response to those who oppose Islam. But there are other verses in the Qur’an which say quite the opposite.” A few of such verses include Qur’an 9:5 which says; “when, therefore, the sacred months have slipped away, slay the associators whenever you find them and capture them and confine them and be in waiting for them at every ambush. Then should they repent and establish prayer and give the poor-rates, leave them alone, verily Allah is the Forgiving, the Merciful.”

Qur’an 2:190 says, “Fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.” Islam permits use of war in situations such as:

To overcome oppression where there is the denial of religious freedom.

When individual Muslims and their properties are under attack from another group in the community.

Where an Islamic state is invaded by a foreign power.

When it relates to enforcement where there is a need to subdue rebellion against legitimate authority (2:251, 22:40).

Some have interpreted such abrogated verses in the Qur’an to promote war and terrorist activities

in dealing with non-Muslims around the world. Old and New Testaments contain seeming ambivalent positions which have also influenced divergent interpretations and applications on Christian position on war, violence and the search for peace. For example, Deuteronomy 7:1-2 says:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and defeated them, then you must destroy them totally.

Deuteronomy 20:10-17 says:

When you march up to attack a city make its people and offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labour and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay a siege to that city. When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take this use as plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them-the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites-as the Lord your God has commanded you.

Numbers 31:17-18 says: “now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.” In Luke 19:27, Jesus said; “I tell you that to everyone who has more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even the what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be King over them bring them here and kill them in front of me.”

In the Old Testament, God is projected as the God of war who helped Israel to not only fight battles but win them (Deut. 3:22, 1Sam. 17:46-47, Jos, 6:2-27, Jos. 8:1-29, Jos. 11:6-9, Judg. 1:1-6, Judg. 2:20-23). In the New Testament also, Jesus’ teaching on the use of the sword supports the use of the sword and in another condemns it. For example, in Matthew 10:34, Jesus said, “do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” But in Matthew 26:52, Jesus said, “put your sword back in its place, for those who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

Similarly, Islam also abhors violence and murder as it upholds very strongly, the sanctity of the human life. For examples, Qur’an 6:151 says:

Say: “come, I will rehearse what Allah hath (really) prohibited you form”: join not anything with Him: Be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want; We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not nigh to indecent deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus doth He command you, that ye may learn wisdom.

Closely related to this verse is Qur’an 17:23 which says: “And do not kill anyone whom Allah has forbidden except by right, and whoever is killed wrongly We have surely given his next of kin authority, so let him not exceed killing, verily he is ever succored.” According to the Qur’an, killing any person without a “just cause” is a sin. It is equated to killing the whole humanity, and saving the life of one person is as good as saving the whole humanity. Qur’an 5:32 says:

On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land-it would be as if he shew the whole people: and if any one saved a life. It would be as if he slew the whole people: Then although there came them Our Messengers with Clear Signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.

Reflecting on the above, Daniel Rodier observes, “if people are intent on using religion to motivate terror or violence, they’ll find and excuse there no matter what the actual text says...Like the Koran, most holy scripture are filled with stories of war and warriors, and these images have been used throughout history by some members of every faith to justify bloodshed.”

It is to be noted that Islam encourages dialogue with “people of the Book,” ahl Kitab, namely, Christians and the Jews and extols their common monotheistic and Abrahamic ancestry. Such communities between Christians and Muslims need to provide grounds for developing the foundations towards promoting inter-religious understanding and cooperation in Nigeria. Colin Chapman has graphically presented a few of such communalities as presented below and he states that, “the way to break out of the deadlock created by centuries of controversy between Muslims and Christians is to start

with basic conviction that are common to both faiths, and from there move on to explore differences,”

Christians God creates Muslims

God is one

God rules

God reveals

God loves

God judges

God forgives

Forgiveness

Chambers 21st Century Dictionary defines to forgive as “to stop being angry with someone who has done something wrong, or about an offence to pardon someone.” P.H. Monsma has also noted that forgiveness involves pardon, to lift up, bear, to cover, to less pass, take away, wash and release.^v Biblical passages are full of instances of forgiveness between persons. For example, Esau forgave his brother Esau (Gen. 33:1-17); Joseph forgave his brothers (Gen. 45:1-15); Moses forgave Israel (Ex. 32:111-41, 30-33); David forgave Absalom (2 Sam. 14:21, 33); and Solomon forgave Adonijah (2 Kings 1:52).

In the New Testament also, Jesus and Peter spoke of forgiving others. For example, in Matthew 16:14-15, Jesus said, “for if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” When Peter asked Jesus how many times one could forgive a brother if he sinned against him, Jesus replied: “I tell you, not seven times, but Seventy-Seven times” (Matt. 18:21). In other words, forgiveness has no limits.

Jesus linked forgiveness to prayers and answer to prayers when he said; “and when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mk. 11:25). Jesus said we should forgive so as to be forgiven (Lk. 6:37). He demonstrated forgiveness when he called God to forgive his accusers and those who crucified him and said; “father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Nehemiah 9:17 spoke of God as a forgiving God when he stated, “but you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”

Psalms 86:5 says, “you are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.” Ps. 89:8 says, “you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds.” Daniel 9:9 says, “the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.” Paul advised Ephesians to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” And in Colossians 3:13 Paul advised, “bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you”

Islam also encourages forgiveness and reconciliation towards a peaceful society. It is one of the superior moral traits commanded in the Qur’an. Qur’an 7:199 says; “show forgiveness and enjoin what is honourable and turn away from the ignorant.” Qur’an 24:22 says, “and let not the man of affluence and plenty among you swear off giving to the kindred and the needy and the emigrants in the way of Allah; let them pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is the most forgiving, the merciful.”

Qur’an 17:25 says; “your Lord is the Best knower of what is in your souls; if you have been righteous, then He is unto you the pertinent, the forgiving.”

Qur’an 42:40 says; “the need of an ill deed is an ill like there unto, but whosoever pardons and is reconciled, his reward is on Allah; verily He does not approve the wrong-doers.” Qur’an 64:14 says; “O ye who believe! Truly, among your wives and your children are (some that are) enemies to yourselves: beware of them! But if ye forgive and overlook and cover up (their faults), verily Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

Qur’an 42:43 says; “and whosoever forgives and forbears, that verily is one of the firmness of affairs.” In fact, believers of Islam are forgiving, compassionate and tolerant people who, as revealed in the Qur’an, control their rage and pardon of people (see also Qur’an 3:134). In Qur’an 41:34 Allah says, “Kind words and covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. Allah is free of all wants

and He is most forbearing.” And in Qur’an 42:37 it says, “and those who avoid heinous sins and indecencies and forgive when they are wrathful.”

In Islam there are many attributes of God given in the Qur’an. They are called, “Most Beautiful Names,” which convey various qualities of God. Among such names are related to His mercy and forgiveness. For example, “Al-Ghafoor,” the most forgiving occurs more than seventy times in the Qur’an. The meaning of the Arabic word “ghafara” is “to cover,” “to hide.” It comes from the meaning, “to excuse,” “to pardon,” “to remit” and “to forgive.” The other name is “al-afuw” which literally comes from the Arabic word “afwa,” “to release,” “to heal,” “to restore.” Al-Tawwab is “the Acceptor of Repentance,” mentioned 11 times in the Quran. Then “Al Rahman” and “Al-Rahim,” “the Most Merciful and Compassionate.”^{vi} These names are mentioned frequently in the Qur’an to indicate that God’s mercy is unending and are full of love. Such qualities of God are to be extended to follow humanity as God says; “each one of you should be benevolent to his brother as he is to himself.” Forgiveness helps to heal past wounds and hurts. Forgiveness restores relationships that create conditions to foster peaceful relationships. The greatest weapon against violence is forgiveness.

Psychologists today, encourage forgiveness and letting go of past wrongs for a healthier mind and body. For according to Herbert Benson who conducted research on the way religions encourage forgiveness, “there is a physiology of forgiveness...when you do not forgive, it will chew you up.”^{vii} We need to forgive each other together in Nigeria for us to move on as a people amidst alleged cases of marginalization, favouritism, oppression and neglect. In a country that has witnessed several cases of inter-communal conflicts and ethno-religious crises, and currently experiencing all of forms of barbaric treatments in the hands of haters of humans, forgiveness becomes a very useful and potent tool towards healing the Nigerian nation.

Reflecting on the need for reconciliation in Nigeria, I had similarly noted that; “we need men and women politicians today who need to forgive and be models towards healing a wounded nation like Nigeria. Nigerian political elite needs to emulate Nelson Mandela whose unparalleled and unprecedented forgiveness of his former jailers brought reconciliation and healing to South Africa.” Richard Stengel has stated quite rightly that “Mandela’s life is a model not just for our time but all time. In David Aikman’s, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century*, Aikman not only listed Nelson Mandela among the six who changed the 20th century but as one whose exhibition of the Biblical character of forgiveness was unprecedented in history which brought healing and reconciliation in post-Apartheid South Africa. For Mandela, it was a philosophy to “forgive and forget.”

Richard Stengel has also showed how Mandela paid public visit to the widow of former Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the father of apartheid, and for extending his hand of friendship to a Constand Viljoen, the right-wing former general who had allegedly plotted a coup against him.

We need leaders today in Nigeria in the likes of Nelson Mandela who will propel Nigeria towards forgiveness and healing in order to help promote Christian- Muslim relations towards peaceful co-existence and national integration.

Another illustrative example on forgiveness relevant for this paper is the example of Kim Phuc, a Vietnamese war survivor who has become a Peace Ambassador to the United Nations today and has used her story to illustrate the beauty of forgiveness. Kim Phuc’s photograph was taken when she was 9 years old running away from the smoke of the Vietnamese war. Taken in 1972 by a war photojournalist, running away from napalm, a bomb of inflammable liquid which causes horrific burns when ignited. The photograph won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. She survived and grew to hate the photograph which depicted her horrific experience and her nakedness. She learnt to forgive and forget the past. The point of this story draws the need for forgiveness in Nigeria today particularly among victims of Boko Haram insurgency and many who have survived the horrendous activities of avoidable religious fundamentalists’ activities.

Nations that have experienced conflicts and wars particularly in Africa such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Cote D’Ivoire and Rwanda have been brought together again to work towards peace and development by achieving forgiveness and reconciliation. In the words of Eric Irvuzumugabe, “forgive even when it doesn’t make sense.”

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is understood as putting on friendly terms again after a quarrel or misunderstanding.^{viii} The Bible teaches reconciliation as one of the pillars of a peaceful society. According to Sebastian Kim, “it is not too much to say that the Bible is a book about reconciliation of relationships”^{ix} Reconciliation is bringing again into - unity, harmony, or agreement what has been alienated. The New Testament Greek concept of *Katallage* speaks of a proper relationship between two parties (1 Cor. 7:11), and enmity removed (Rom. 10, Eph. 2:14, Col. 1:22). In the positive sense, it is related peace (Rom. 5.1, 10; Eph. 2:15; Col. 1:10, 1:9).

Jesus spoke of reconciliation when in his sermon on the mount, advised that “people settle matters quickly with adversaries who is taking advantage to court” (Matt. 5:25). Jesus tied forgiveness to offering gift at the altar which requires first reconciling with a brother if there had been any infractions before such offering could be accepted by God (Matt. 5:23). Paul told Corinthian Christians that God has given them a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), and are commissioned to a message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).

Qur’an also enjoins reconciliation. Qur’an 4:128 says:

If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband’s part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best; even though men’s souls are swayed by greed. But if ye do well and practise self-restraint, Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

Qur’an 41:34 says; “Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred becomes as it were thy friend and intimate!”

Qur’an 49:10 says: “the believers are but brethren, so effect reconciliation between your brethren, and fear Allah that haply mercy may be shown to you.” Other Qur’anic verses include:

Allah the MostHigh in Qur’an 4:114 says; “There is no good in most of their secret councils except (in his) who enjoins charity or goodness or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this, seeking Allah’s pleasure, we will give him mighty reward.”

From the foregoing on reconciliation therefore, it becomes very clear that both Christianity and Islam teach about the very significant need for reconciliation in societies that have been torn apart due to division, conflict and crises such as Nigeria. Reflecting on this related theme, Sunday Bobai Agang writing in his *The Impact of Ethnic, Political and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria*, and a *Theological Reflection on its Healing*, emphasized the need for reconciliation in Nigeria. While stressing the need to model the way of Jesus on non-violence in relating to our context, Agang also refer to Leo Tolstoy who exhibited love as the path beyond violent in the Russian Christian context, Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr, and Desmond Tutu.^x Corroborating Agang, Michael J, Nojeim observes that, “Ghandi’s idea of ahimsa (non-harm or non-violence) came from fusing traditional Jain and Hindu concepts with ideas he found in Tolstoy and also in Christ’s’ sermon in the mount particularly Jesus’ teaching to his followers to turn the other cheek.”

The point that has been very pertinent from the foregoing references to Biblical and Quranic passages in respect of Christian and Islamic teaching lies really with the misapplication or failure to apply the scriptural provisions, or lack of adequate knowledge of these teachings, or sheer manipulation or politicization of these religious provisions by adherents and some religious leaders in order to serve their own narrow self-interests against national interest, peaceful mutual coexistence and national integration. Yinka Olomjobi bemoaned this scenario this way; “religion when used for political manipulation tends to generate conflicts in Northern Nigeria and the more political Islam is, the more the tendency it has to feed into religious crisis provoked by political elites seeking political capital for personal and group interests.” Patrick Wilmot put it more bluntly this way; “for too long the people have allowed leaders to steal using excuses of religion, region and ethnicity. But no religion, region or ethnic group glorifies theft, and African leaders should be no exception”

Quest for Peaceful Co-existence and National Integration in Nigeria

The National Peace Policy developed by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution has produced a very good document which could be considered a roadmap or blueprint towards evolving a peaceful society in Nigeria. The National Peace Policy (NPP) defines the commitment of the Nigerian

state “to building and entrenching a culture of peaceful co-existence through a set of actions and activities as well as addressing issues of governance at all level.” The context of the National Policy evolved from the realization that, “in its over 50-year history Nigeria endured episodic cataclysmic events ranging from ethno-religious violence to politically induced conflict including a damaging three-year fratricidal civil war, which claimed an estimated one million lives and threatened her corporate existence.

From the above observations, it becomes evident that Nigeria today needs peace more than any period of its history as Muslim-Christian relations have continued to widen due to the negative forms in which religion has been used and abused.

In defining peace, Oke Ibeanu, states that “peace is a state of perfection, an earthly expression of God's kingdom that is yet uncorrupted.” Ibeanu refers to St. Augustine of Hippo who distinguished between two cities-namely; the city of God, which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation, and the earthly city of man, which is founded on appetitive and oppressive impulses, is corrupt and torn by strife.

Ignatius Ayau Kaigama has made two distinctions between negative and positive peace. According to him:

Today people talk of what is termed “negative peace,” that is the peace that springs from an absence of direct or systematic violence, but which does not mean that weapons are not easily available or social conditions of life have unproved to the extent that hunger, ignorance and diseases have been drastically reduced. “Negative peace” to my mind is the sort of peace enjoyed by Nigerians today. “Positive peace” however is what we yearn for and should work for. “Positive peace springs from the presence of justice throughout society with opportunities for all, a fair distribution of power and resources, protection from harm and, impartial enforcement by law. Positive peace means the elimination of the root causes of war, violence, and injustice, and the conscious effort to build a society that reflects these commitments.

Reference to the scriptural passages on peace as we had discussed earlier shows the numerous teachings which teach and encourage adherents of either Christianity or Islam to live in peace, strive to promote peace and to teach and preach peace. Thus, it could be said, that what we have witnessed in Nigeria is antithetical to what Christianity or Islam requires of religious societies. But as we had also showed from the scriptural passages referred to in this work, there cannot be peace in the absence of justice. For interfaith dialogue to be meaningful and Nigeria to experience peace and national integration therefore, cases of all injustices and the gap between the rich poor needs to be eradicated. There cannot be peace without forgiveness in place. Where there have been crises of various forms.

There cannot be peace when there is no reconciliation among communities in Nigeria. For there to be cordial interfaith or Muslim-Christian peaceful relations, adherents need to accept their religious injunctions, and appropriate them.

This need requires commitment, sincerity of purpose and mutual self-respect. This need calls for collaborative action among Christians, Muslims and Adherents of indigenous religion towards shared common concerns such as uniting to fight terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, fraudulent acts, drug abuse, child labor and child abuse etc. Interfaith collaboration between Christians and Muslims could help to develop education, youth, fight unemployment, poverty and societal vices that have infiltrated the social fabric of the Nigerian society.

Islam encourages interfaith understanding and dialogue. Some Quranic verses teach this. For example, Quran 3:64 says; “say: ‘O people of the Book! Come to a word common to us and you, that we shall worship none save Allah, and that we shall not join anyone with Him, and that none of us shall take other away; say bear witness that we are Muslims. Quran 3:65 adds: “O people of the Book! Why do you contend regarding Abraham whereas the Torah and the Gospel were not sent down save after him? Will you not then understand?” On relationship with non-Muslims, Qur'an 60:8 says; “Allah forbid you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.” Islam provides conditions in which to relate with members of other faiths and too act kindly towards them. They include;

If they dispossess Muslims of their legitimate land rights.

If they engage in hostilities towards Muslims or show clear intention to destroy the Islamic nation as a whole. A Jihad could be declared to protect the Islamic state.

Before I conclude this paper, I wish to affirm that one of the lasting practical steps that need to be taken and pursued is meaningful dialogue among Christians, Muslims, and adherents of indigenous religion in Nigeria in order to evolve and build foundations for sustainable peaceful coexistence and national integration. Sebastain Kim defines dialogue “as commitment to one’s faith and openness to that of others with genuine respect.”

Chawkat Moucary has noted also that Muslim-Christian dialogue goes back to the time of Muhammad (PBWH). He traced how in 630 A.D. for example, a Christian delegation from Najran (South Arabia) came to Madina and had important discussions with him about the coexistence of the Christian community alongside the Muslim community.” He observed however that, relationship is conditioned by a wider historical content.”

Dialogue is understood here to meaningful and sincere engagement with the two faith adherents through discussions, agreements on very contentious disagreements, and collaboration in working for peace, Onaiyekan puts it in simple terms as “you talk, I listen: I talk, you listen.” The essence being, “to be able to understand one another, dissolve suspicious and prejudices, and so pave the way for collaboration and mutual respect.” Most Nigerians today are in search for peace and are very eager to collaborate with inter-faith platforms as they engage in different forms of dialogue. Muslim-Christian dialogue could help to promote responsible politics in Nigeria, thus, helping to promote good governance and nation building. Interreligious dialogue demands frank talk, commitment and a two-way reciprocal engagement. This paper argues that because both Christian and Islamic injunctions contain values and teach on key elements common to them just as justice, peace, forgiveness, accountability, reconciliation, and adherents of these faiths have no option than to collaborate towards promoting them in Nigeria. The undeniable fact of Nigeria’s religious pluralism today and the continuing growth of urbanization which has boosted rapid interaction and travel along the forces of globalization, demand dialogue of faiths in Nigeria. Kim recognizes the need for dialogue and corroborates the foregoing fact thus:

The need for dialogue with the people of other faiths arises from the fact that increasingly we live in multi-religious societies of different religious traditions is a reality one has to accept. People of different religious traditions face the common problems of contemporary society such as conflicts, injustice, spiritual deprivation, ecological crisis, moral and ethical dehumanization; they also encounter the common challenge of secularism and modern and post-modern criticisms of religion.

Kim concludes that “dialogue is an important tool to be employed in contemporary multi-religious societies.” Dialogue is closely tied to tolerance. Fethullah Gulen, the Turkish Islamic preacher and scholar has noted that “dialogue, tolerance and trust reinforce each other: tolerance is the acceptance of differences that arise from dialogue in order to pursue the larger goal of cooperation.”^{xi} There cannot be genuine dialogue without tolerance as the window towards meaningful engagement which requires tolerating each other, including prejudices, fears, past memories and “spiritual arrogance.” Gulen puts it bluntly when he argues that “society has to uphold tolerance: if we don’t announce Jihad for anything else, we should announce it for tolerance.”

It is to be noted however that Kaigama has indicated significantly that there are distinctions that need to be recognized which are key to either enhancing dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria or inhibiting factors that work against dialogical engagement between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. He notes that there are “fire-for-fire believers who are very intolerant and are committed to kill in the name of advancing their religion, There are indifferent believers who are neither cold or hot, and others who are open and fair minded believers who are conciliatory in nature. As we had noted earlier, the incessant ethno-religious conflicts and the corruption of religion by some political and religious elites call for dialogical engagement between Christians and Muslims. Today, we need open and fair minded believers who will be vanguards towards maintaining good Muslim-Christian relations up that fosters peaceful co-existence than religious bigots and manipulators of religion in Nigeria.

Reflecting on the need for mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse religious society such as Nigeria, Mahatma Ghandi provides a wise counsel thus:

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach out not dead level, but unity in diversity. The soul of religion is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time.

While Mahatma's counsel might seem to a call towards ecumenism which some Christians object to, but the reality of religious pluralism occasioned by several factors of urbanization, globalization, religious revivalism and fundamentalism, the way of dialogue remains relevant and imperative in Nigeria.

The point made by Mahatma Ghandi has been concurred in a slightly different but significant way by Desmond Tutu, in his *God is Not a Christian: Speaking Truth in Times of Crisis*. Tutu states:

The accidents of birth and geography determine to a very large extent to what faith we belong. The chances are very great that if you were born in Pakistan you are a Muslim or a Hindu if you happened to be born in India or a Shintoist if it is Japan, a Christian if you were born in Italy.

Tutu's apt observation explains the context of Muslim-Christian demographics and geographical affiliations in 'Nigeria. Thus, this paper concludes that Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria is not only an unavoidable reality but one that needs to be accepted and which calls for working out equitable balance devoid of injustices, hypocrisy and practical living to the dictates of Muslim-Christian teachings.

II. Conclusion

For Nigeria to experience peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims, some few identified challenges need to be confronted and overcome. They include among others:

The need for dialogical engagement that is theologically-driven between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. This is very necessary in order to help to clarify and confront scriptural bases of dialogue among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

The need for openness and dialogical engagement which involves frankness, and addressing perceived grievances and "controversial areas" that border Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

The need for public awareness and enlightenment on the imperatives of Muslim-Christian relations and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

The need to remove aspects that have corrupted religion in Nigeria such as manipulation; politicization and religionizing politics by the elite, religious leaders and government partisanship to religious matters. Such corruption of religion has created bad feelings of alienation, favouritism and marginalization among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

The need to draw more adherents into the dialogical encounter between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. This will require accepting to live together in mutual harmony and understanding despite religious beliefs and practices. This could be achieved with greater religious education and mass appeal to adherents of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria.

Religious Associations should engage in lectures and symposia to remind adherents of their obligations to co-exist through interfaith dialogue.

Priests and Imams should engage their congregations on the need to obey the teachings of their scriptures. Priest and Imams should preach what is common to humanity and universal creed in the mosques and churches.

Rumours of any nature especially those that are capable of destroying peaceful co-existence should be avoided.

If some of these challenges are addressed then Muslim-Christian relations can be achieved in Nigeria today with sincere resolve to work towards peace, development and national integration which all yearn for despite religious divide.

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