

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA: A PANACEA FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

It has been argued that interfaith dialogue could be critical for achieving sustainable development. However, there are limited studies on the relationship between interfaith dialogue and development in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this chapter explores the relationship between interfaith dialogue and development. The convergence of faith among Islam and Christianity is examined through shared beliefs, themes, characters, and teachings found in their holy scriptures. The chapter uses secondary data as both relevant grey and academic literatures were used to achieve the aim of the study. The analysis revealed that despite differences in major religious in Nigeria, the shared belief in one God, the importance of prophets, moral codes, and the afterlife serve as common ground for mutual dialogue and understanding. Principles such as mutual respect, understanding, empathy, education, and communication are identified as foundational for successful interfaith dialogue. While challenges such as stereotypes and misconceptions exist, approaching dialogue with humility, curiosity, and respect can pave the way forward. The benefits of interfaith dialogue include mutual learning, increased social cohesion, and collaboration towards addressing common concerns. Despite the challenges, concerted efforts at individual and organizational levels can lead to deeper understanding, finding common ground, and building bridges for a more peaceful and just society.

Keywords: Interfaith; Religious; Dialogue; Understanding

Introduction

The world is like a home where the diversity lives in. Religious plurality is one of the integral parts of it. Living in diversity surely is a formidable task. Thorough history we learn that religious diversity might contribute into violent or even bloody conflicts. In this context, we realize that diversity can be both a blessing and a challenge. On the one hand, the positive interface between the cultural practices and faith traditions of the community's diverse inhabitants can enrich community life. But on the other hand, the seemingly irreconcilable religious ideologies of the different faiths can often make it difficult for their adherents to look beyond their differences and search for common grounds upon which a shared community life can be built. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, differences in religion have been cited as a factor in conflicts between or within states. It is a paradox that historically religions have often been implicated in violence and conflict, either as a direct cause or as an associated factor, but have also contributed to building peace. Nigeria has for years been embroiled in violent conflict with attributed factor of religion. The consequence of manipulating religion for political purposes in the country is both self-evident and alarming. In a nation where religion, ethnicity and politics differences form a basis for intolerance, crises, unresolved political differences, perceived social and economic marginalization.

The insecurity phenomenon in the Nigeria erodes trust among the various religious groups. In some cases, suspicion, intolerance and the uncompromising disposition of communities in their social relations with people outside their group identity have further reinforced conflict and distrust, resulting in the spontaneous outbreak of civil disorder with untold sufferings and loss of lives and properties. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria(as amended) guarantees freedom of worship and religion, freedom of

association, freedom from discrimination-chapter IV, Section 38, 40 and 42 in that sequence. The constitution further spells out the secularity status of Nigeria-chapter II, Section 10. In a large and complex country with a population consisting of more than 250 different ethnic groups, divided between Christians and Muslims, finding common ground and allaying the fears of majority and minority groups is paramount. Both Christians and Moslems in Nigeria are human beings. As rational beings, they are expected to be rational in their thoughts and actions. It is rational and human to preserve life than to take away life. All the religions of the world, both Islam and Christianity, value life so dearly. Every rational human person values life.

Interfaith dialogue has been recognized as one of the most effective means of promoting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among people of different religious backgrounds. Interfaith dialogue is a conversation between people of different religious or spiritual backgrounds with the aim of understanding and respecting their beliefs and practices. Interfaith dialogue can be an important tool for promoting peace, understanding, and cooperation between different communities, especially in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. In today's world, where conflicts and misunderstandings between Muslims, Christians, and Jews are still prevalent, interfaith dialogue has become more important than ever. Islam and Christianity are all Abrahamic religions, which means that they trace their spiritual lineage back to the prophet Abraham. The three religions share many beliefs and values, including monotheism, respect for prophets, and a commitment to social justice. This essay will explore the importance of interfaith dialogue in achieving sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. Interfaith dialogue has been identified as a key strategy to address these issues and promote peaceful coexistence. Dialogue among Muslims and Christians is an important aspect of interfaith relations. These two Abrahamic religions share a common heritage and have much in common, yet they also have differences in beliefs and practices that have often led to conflicts and misunderstandings. By engaging in constructive dialogue, members of these faiths can come to better understand and respect one another, and work together towards a more peaceful and just society. Interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians Jews has been a topic of discussion for many years. These three religions have a shared history and common values, which can provide a basis for dialogue and understanding.

Theoretical Framework: Critical-Dialogic Framework

Zúñiga et al. (2002) articulates a critical-dialogic model for practicing intergroup dialogue that could be incorporated in co-curricular interfaith dialogue programs. They based their four-stage model and guiding principles on a pedagogical foundation that they enhanced after a decade of conducting research and synthesizing empirical data on the subject. Special focus was paid to identities of participants, both individual and intersecting identities, while acknowledging the privilege and power that are systematically reinforced in societal structures. Zúñiga et al. (2002, p.8) asserts that in order to engage dialogue across difference, a model was needed that “incorporates sustained communication, consciousness-raising, and the bridging of differences”. Foundational pieces were woven into exploring differences, exploring and dialoguing about hot topics, and action planning and alliance building and maintaining a social justice. The Nigerian experience can only have a positive outcome in the engagement of inter religious dialogue when it’s directed at achieving social justice, tolerance and alliance building

Inter-religious Conflicts in Nigeria

The interactions between Muslims and Christians at socio-political level in the recent time have been influenced by mutual suspicion and competition. These often lead to unabated religious conflicts such as sporadic religious crises which continue to engulf the Northern part of Nigeria in the recent time. However, the first religious crisis experienced in Nigeria was the revolutionary activities (Jihad) of Uthman Dan Fodio in 1804 in the old Hausa Fulani Empire (Adekunle & Adegbaire, 2010). The revolution was launched to fight against syncretism rampant during the time. The Jihad was aimed to restore the pristine Islam. The scenario of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has left indelible psychological trauma and mistrust among the Nigerian citizenry.

Carnage, arson and physical assaults were recorded in the past crises and these continue to threaten the corporate existence of the Federal polity.

The first military coup in Nigeria was 1966. The coup was mutinous and calamitous because it had ethno-religious undertone. It was led by young Igbo revolutionist military officers. The coup was masterminded by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu and the bloody coup led to the murder of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (the first Prime Minister of Nigeria) and Sir Ahmadu Bello; the Sardauna of Sokoto. A counter coup was staged by Hausa young military officers and this led to the assassination of Major J.I.U Aguiyi Ironsi (Ovwasa, 1993). The coup can be deemed to be religio-ethnic conflict due to the vengeance that occurred in the Northern part against the Igbo people living there. The Maitatsene religious crisis of February 1980 was the first sectarian crisis that led the country into confusion. The religious mayhem extended to Yola in 1984, Bauchi and Borno in 1985 respectively while the infiltration of the sectarian militancy engulfed Kaduna in 1986. The casualties recorded were more than ten thousand people who were Muslims and Christians (Adekunle, 2010).

In Nigeria, there are religious crises in most parts of the country. Wherever particular faith adherents are in the majority, the majority tends to have advantage over the minority when there is an outbreak of religious conflict. There turn to civilian rule in 1999 gave some governors from northern Nigeria the opportunity to prove their allegiance to their religion. They did this through the implementation of the Sharia legal system in their States regardless of protests against it by civil society organizations (Ostien & Dekker, 2010). Some Muslims saw the governors as heroes of a long-awaited effort that came a little late. However, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body of Christians in the country, opposed such a move, reasoning that Nigeria is a secular State. The constitution of the country allows for the establishment of Sharia courts to entertain cases brought to it by Muslims who want to be tried under Islamic law. However, the constitution did not approve full implementation of Sharia law in a State or the country (Ostien & Dekker, 2010).

The Sharia controversy was resolved when the Supreme Court pronounced that such implementation can only take place in a State where Muslims are in the majority, and Christians should not be subject to such laws. The ruling of the Supreme Court was violated in some States where some Christians were prosecuted in Sharia courts, with the excuse that other parties in the cases were Muslims (Ohadike, 1992). This happenstance was abhorred vehemently by CAN in some States in Northern Nigeria. February 2000: Riot over Shari' ah issue in Kaduna. April 2000: Saki Oyo State and Iwo had religious violence as a result of the preaching of one Alfa Mofoye (an Islamic scholar) against Christianity. November 2000: The people of Offa in Kwara State witnessed religious riot following the demolition of the ancient Moremi shrine. The second religious mayhem was recorded between 26th and 30 October 1982. The religious uprising was championed by Maitatsine disciples at Bulumkutu on the outskirts of Maiduguri, Borno State and Kaduna.

Kaduna State experienced another inter-religious violence at Kafachan in 1984 during the preaching session of a Muslim convert; Pastor Bako who's preaching infuriated Muslims due to his sacrilegious utterance to Islam. The mayhem further widened the animosity between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria. There were more successive inter-religious riots between the Muslims and Christians which further broadened the socio-religious cleavages among the citizens of Nigeria and even geo-political zones of Nigeria. Such inter-religious conflicts included the March 10, 1987 Kafachan religious riot which ensued from the preaching of Bello Abubakar, a Muslim convert. There were other subsequent religious violence in 1991 in Bauchi, in 1992 ZangoKataf episode had a colossal destruction of human life and property on April 28th 2000. (Tell, August 10, 2009, p.37).

In 2001, over 2,000 people were killed and thousands displaced in religious violence that spread across the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and Nasarawa (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2012). An article titled: "The World at their Feet" on Miss World Beauty 2002 Pageant erupted national violence. The article was written by Isioma Daniel and published in "This Day", a Nigerian Newspaper on the 26 November, 2002 some parts

of the article were considered denigrating to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) because of the following statement: 'The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring ninety-two women to Nigeria and ask them to revel in vanity. What would Muhammad think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from among them' (This Day, 2002).

Apart from the perennial unhealthy religious interactions between the Nigerian Muslims and Christians, there have also been series of hot conflicts between Muslims and adherents of traditional religion in the South-West Nigeria in the colonial and post-colonial periods. According to Doi (1969), Islamic missionary activities at embryonic stage were met with stiff opposition by the adherents of traditional religion in Yoruba land. There were attacks on Muslims as they were practising Islam openly and establishing a new social order. The new social drive was conceived by the Afrelists as a threat to their cherished conservative cultural heritage. The spread of Islam in Yoruba land was largely based on voluntary efforts of some scholars and societies 'Egbe'. Because of the circumstances surrounding the acceptance of Islam by some Yoruba people, there were syncretic practices in their religious disposition. This inevitably gave rise to another form of religious wrangle which led to the evolution of some Islamic reformers in Yoruba land (Adelowo, 1986).

In the 1980s, such reformers included Abdul Azeez Ajagbemokeferi, a versatile Islamic preacher from Esa-Odo in Osun State. He was critical of cult activities and idolatry practices. He had terrific encounters with cultists and Oloolu masquerades in Ibadan (Adelowo, 1986:70). His persuasive preaching sessions converted many Ogboni cultists and other Afrelists. Offa, an Ibolu community of Yoruba land in Kwara States which fosters an ideal hitch-free Muslim-Christian interactive community also experienced religious violence in November 2000 when the young Muslim youth revolutionists pulled down the ancient Moremi shrine in Offa. The crisis was justified by the concerned Muslim youth revolutionists on the basis of the proximity of the shrine to Offa Jumat Mosque and involvement of some Muslims in the Moremi annual festivity (Tell August 10, 2009). However, 'This Day' management tendered an unreserved apology to the Muslims in the subsequent editorial series of the newspaper.

Convergence of Faiths

In our discussion of the dialogue between the adherents of the two major religions, an important aspect of our consideration is commonness in verses of the Holy books, namely, Bible and Quran. These are considered the holy scriptures of three major Abrahamic religions – Christianity and Islam. While there are certainly differences between the texts, there are also some commonalities. These are follows:

Commonness of theme: One common theme in all two texts is the importance of monotheism - the belief in one God. This is particularly emphasized in the Holy Qur'an and Holy Bible, which declares, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. The Quran similarly asserts the oneness of God, with the declaration 'There is no god but God' (Surah Al-Ikhlās, 112:1). Another common theme is the importance of following God's commandments and living a righteous life. The Bible, for example, contains the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), which provide a moral code for believers to follow. Similarly, the Quran emphasizes the importance of doing good deeds and avoiding evil, as in the verse, 'Those who believe and do good deeds, their Lord guides them by their faith' (Surah Yunus, 10:9). The two texts also contain stories and teachings about many of the same prophets and figures, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. While there are some differences in the way these figures are portrayed, there is often overlap in their stories and teachings. Furthermore, all the three texts emphasize the importance of love, compassion, and mercy. In the Bible, for example, Jesus teaches his followers to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), while in the Quran, believers are encouraged to 'show kindness to parents, and to kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and to neighbors who are near, and neighbors who are strangers' (Surah An-Nisa, 4:36).

Shared belief: One most striking areas of convergence among the three texts is their shared belief in one God. The Bible and Quran describe God as the creator of the universe, the source of all life, and the one who is worshipped by

believers. In the Bible, God is referred to as Yahweh, Jehovah, or simply God. In the Quran, God is known as Allah. God is referred to as Yahweh or Adonai. Despite the different names, all three texts teach that there is only one God and that this God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-merciful. Another area of convergence among the Bible and Quran is their shared belief in the importance of prophets. In all three texts, God chooses prophets to deliver His message to the people. The Bible recognizes many prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, while the Quran also recognizes these prophets, as well as others like Adam, Noah, and Muhammad. The prophets are seen as messengers of God who guide the people on the path of righteousness and remind them of their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, all two texts share a common moral code that emphasizes the importance of compassion, justice, and righteousness. The Bible and Quran all teach that believers should treat others with kindness, respect, and dignity, regardless of their social status, ethnicity, or religion. They also emphasize the importance of justice and fairness in all aspects of life, including in personal relationships, business dealings, and governance. Additionally, the texts call for believers to act with righteousness and to avoid sin and wrongdoing. Another area of convergence among the three texts is their shared belief in the afterlife. The Bible and Quran all teach that there is an afterlife and that people will be held accountable for their actions in this life. They also describe the concept of heaven and hell, with heaven being a place of eternal bliss and happiness, and hell being a place of eternal punishment and suffering. The texts teach that believers will be rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their sins in the afterlife.

Similar stories: Yet another convergences among the Bible and Quran is the similarity of their stories. Many of the stories that appear in one text also appear in the other two, although sometimes with variations in details or emphasis. This is not surprising, given that all three texts share a common historical and cultural background. For example, in the story of Adam and Eve which appears in all three texts, although with variations in detail. In the Bible, the story describes Adam and Eve as the first humans, created by God in the Garden of Eden. In the Quran, the story is similar, but Adam and Eve are described as the first parents of humanity, rather than the first humans themselves. Another example is the story of Noah's Ark. This story appears in all three texts, and again there are variations in detail. In the Bible, the story describes God's decision to flood the earth and the instructions he gives to Noah to build an ark and gather pairs of animals. In the Quran, the story is similar, but with some differences in detail, such as the number of people on the ark and the name of one of Noah's sons. The story of Moses is another example of convergence among the three texts. Moses is a central figure in all two texts, and his story is told in similar ways. In the Bible, Moses is a Hebrew prophet who leads his people out of slavery in Egypt and receives the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. In the Quran, Moses is also a prophet who leads his people out of Egypt and receives the Torah from God. These are just a few examples of the many stories that appear in all two texts. The fact that these stories are so similar is evidence of the shared cultural and historical background of the Abrahamic religions.

Similar characters: In addition to the stories, there are many similarities in the characters who appear in the Bible and Quran. Many of these characters are shared among the three texts, and their stories are told in similar ways. One example of this convergence is Abraham. Abraham is a central figure in all three texts, and his story is told in similar ways. In the Bible, Abraham is the father of the Jewish people and the founder of the covenant between God and his chosen people. In the Quran, Abraham is also a prophet and the father of the Arab people. Another example is Moses, as mentioned earlier. In all three texts, Moses is a central figure and a prophet who plays a key role in the story of his people. Other shared characters include Noah, David, and Solomon, among others. These characters appear in similar ways in all two texts, and their stories are told in similar ways.

Similar Teachings: In addition to the stories and characters, there are many convergences among the teachings of the Bible and Quran. These teachings include beliefs about God, morality, and the afterlife, among other topics. Overall, while there are certainly differences between the Bible and Quran, there are also many common themes and teachings that unite these texts and the religions that follow them.

Despite these areas of convergence, there are also significant differences among the Bible and Quran. These differences are mainly due to variations in language, cultural context, and historical background. For example, the Bible is written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic and covers a period of over 1,000 years, from around 1500 BC to 100 AD. The Quran is written in Arabic and was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century AD. The Torah is written in Hebrew and covers the period from creation to the death of Moses, around 1400 BC. Moreover, the different contexts in which the texts were written and developed have also led to differences in the interpretation and application of their teachings. For example, the Bible has been subject to numerous translations, interpretations, and revisions over the centuries, leading to different denominations and sects with varying beliefs and practices. Similarly, the Quran has been interpreted in different ways by different Islamic scholars, leading to different schools of thought and practices within Islam.

Interfaith Dialogue

Smock (2002, p.12) aptly emphasizes that “a dialogue is not a debate.” Debate implies an intention to win the argument, to prove one side right, or to change the views of the opponent. Dialogue does not aim to eliminate differences of opinion and conviction, but to gain an understanding and acceptance of those differences (Abu-Nimer 2007, p.19). Inter-religious dialogue aims at enrichment, trust, respect, and the creation of a sense of “us/we” through increased understanding. Inter-religious dialogue does not aim at undermining belief, either. On the contrary, an inter-religious dialogue is more constructive when people who participate are firmly grounded in their own religious traditions, allowing them to take seriously the practices and beliefs of others (Cilliers 2002, p.90). Inter-religious dialogue taps into the spiritual resources of the religious traditions, creating opportunities for connecting participants at a deeper spiritual level. Using spirituality as a main source of commitment to social change is what distinguishes inter-religious dialogue from other forms of dialogue (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p.104). Peace-building is defined as a “whole host of activities and modalities of intervention designed to bring about a state of peaceful relations by conflicting parties” (Bercovitch & Kadayifci, 2002, p.39). Peace-building is a complex and dynamic process of changing relationships, perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, interests, and underlying structures that encourage and perpetuate violent conflicts. Engaging multiple levels of society (i.e. high, mid and grass-roots), peace-building involves addressing the root causes of the conflict through long-term economic and social justice provisions, the reform of political structures of governance, strengthening the rule of law, and healing through reconciliation. It also refers to mechanisms and structures that can prevent a conflict, terminate it, transform it, or resolve it. However, Peace-building is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Principles of Interfaith Dialogue

The principles of interfaith dialogue are presented and discussed as follows:

Mutual Respect: Mutual respect is one of the foundational principles of interfaith dialogue. It is important for all participants to approach the dialogue with an open and respectful attitude towards each other's beliefs and practices, even if they do not agree with them. This means avoiding judgment, criticism, and ridicule, and instead seeking to understand and appreciate the richness and diversity of different faith traditions. One way to cultivate mutual respect is to emphasize common values and beliefs, such as the importance of compassion, justice, and love, which are shared by many faith traditions. By focusing on shared values and beliefs, participants can build bridges of understanding and empathy, and create a sense of shared purpose and community.

Understanding: Understanding is another key principle of interfaith dialogue. It is important for participants to take the time to learn about each other's beliefs and practices, and to ask questions and seek clarification when necessary.

This means avoiding assumptions and stereotypes, and instead engaging in a genuine and curious exploration of different faith traditions. Understanding also means recognizing the historical and cultural contexts in which different faith traditions have developed, and the ways in which they have been shaped by social, political, and economic forces. By understanding the broader context in which different faith traditions have emerged, participants can gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity of different belief systems.

Empathy: Empathy is a powerful tool for building bridges between people of different faith traditions. It involves putting oneself in another person's shoes and imagining how they might feel or think about a particular issue. Empathy can help participants to develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives, and to appreciate the unique challenges and opportunities that different faith traditions face. Empathy also involves recognizing the common humanity that we all share, and the universal desires for love, acceptance, and belonging that we all experience. By cultivating empathy, participants can develop a deeper sense of connection and solidarity with each other, and build stronger relationships of trust and cooperation.

Education and Communication: Education and communication are essential for promoting interfaith dialogue. It is important for participants to have access to accurate and reliable information about different faith traditions, and to have opportunities to share their own beliefs and practices with others. This can involve attending workshops, lectures, and seminars, reading books and articles, and participating in online discussions and forums. Effective communication is also crucial for interfaith dialogue. This involves listening attentively to others, expressing oneself clearly and respectfully, and engaging in constructive and open-minded dialogue. It also means recognizing the importance of nonverbal communication, such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, which can convey subtle cues about one's attitudes and intentions.

Challenges and Opportunities: While interfaith dialogue can be a powerful tool for promoting understanding and cooperation, it is not without its challenges. Some of the key challenges that arise in interfaith dialogue include:

Stereotypes and Misconceptions: Stereotypes and misconceptions can be a significant barrier to interfaith dialogue. These can arise when people make assumptions about other faith traditions based on limited or inaccurate information, or when they rely on simplistic and one-dimensional

Respect for Diversity: Interfaith dialogue must recognize and respect the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Each religion must be allowed to express their beliefs and values without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is important for several reasons. First, it promotes mutual understanding and respect among people of different religious backgrounds. By engaging in dialogue, individuals can learn about the beliefs and practices of others and gain a deeper appreciation for their differences. Second, interfaith dialogue can help to reduce prejudice and stereotypes. By breaking down the barriers of ignorance and fear, people can overcome their biases and see others as individuals, rather than as members of a particular group. Third, interfaith dialogue can promote peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. By fostering understanding and respect, people can work together to address common challenges and find solutions to conflicts. One of the key benefits of interfaith dialogue is the opportunity it provides for members of different faiths to learn from one another. Muslims, Christians, and Jews all have unique perspectives and insights that can help deepen the understanding of their own faith as well as the beliefs of others. Through open and respectful dialogue, individuals can share their experiences and beliefs, explore areas of common ground, and gain a greater appreciation for the diversity of religious expression. Another important benefit of interfaith dialogue is the potential for increased social cohesion and collaboration. When members of different faiths come together to address shared concerns, such as poverty, discrimination, or environmental issues, they can find common ground and work towards solutions that benefit everyone. This type of

cooperation can help to build stronger communities, promote social justice, and foster a greater sense of unity and understanding.

Challenges to Interfaith Dialogue

However, dialogue among Muslims and Christians is not always easy. There are deep-seated historical, cultural, and religious differences that can create barriers to communication and understanding. Additionally, there are often political and social factors that can exacerbate tensions and make it difficult to find common ground. While interfaith dialogue can be a powerful tool for promoting understanding and cooperation, it is not without its challenges. One of the key challenges that arise in interfaith dialogue includes stereotypes and misconception. Stereotypes and misconceptions can be a significant barrier to interfaith dialogue. These can arise when people make assumptions about other faith traditions based on limited or inaccurate information, or when they rely on simplistic and one-dimensional. To overcome these challenges, it is important to approach interfaith dialogue with a spirit of humility, curiosity, and respect. This means being open to learning from others, listening actively to their perspectives, and seeking to understand their beliefs and experiences without judgment or prejudice. It also means being willing to engage in difficult conversations, acknowledging differences, and working towards finding common ground. In addition to individual efforts, there are many organizations and initiatives that promote dialogue among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. These include interfaith councils, educational programs, and interfaith dialogues and conferences. These efforts provide valuable opportunities for members of these faith communities to come together, share their experiences and perspectives, and work towards greater understanding and cooperation.

The practitioners of inter faith dialogue are bereft of common purpose and focus. They mostly work at cross purposes. This is one major challenge that affects interfaith dialogue. The cardinal point practitioners focus on is to reduce the impact of conflict. Another challenge is the issue of proselytizing by participants. Some of the participants see interfaith dialogue as an avenue to convert others to their religion. Also, some religious traditions usually find it difficult to accept the position of others. Some individuals are of the opinion that accepting to learn from or about another religion through dialogue shows a sign of weakness. Issues such as this, increase the hostility towards interfaith dialogue. Abu-Nimer argued in this direction stating the fear of the Muslims when it comes to interfaith dialogue. The author remarks that one other fear of some Muslims is that non-Muslims who participate in interfaith dialogue are actually missionaries trying to improve their evangelization efforts. Some religious leaders tend to preach about the supremacy of their faith thereby encouraging their followers towards that direction. Many religious leaders feel their faith is the most perfect while others are adulterated and cannot learn anything from such faith. One of such scholars is Sanaullah (2014, p.88) who states that because "Islam is a missionary religion", the preference for Muslims should be missionary activities rather than interfaith dialogue. The author went further to list certain impediments of interfaith dialogue to Muslims such as the assumption that all religions are equal and point to the same truth.

According to Sanaullah, "Islam is a complete religion...".The author relied on a Qur'anic verse to stress this point "...I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Q. 5:3). The author also listed certain issues like compromise, which is not accepted in Islam since interfaith dialogue may involve compromising one's beliefs and practices. Also, interfaith dialogue may be a barrier for mission work, since Muslims will not be allowed to embark on missionary endeavor (Sanaullah, 2014, pp. 89-90). To such misconceptions, Abu-Nimer posits that by continuous misinterpretation of various parts of the Qur'an, some Muslims believe that interfaith interaction is only designed to expand the politics, military control, economic might, and cultural influence of the Western world. Kilpatrick (2014) once criticized Cardinal Dolan of New York for addressing the Muslim community of Tompkinsville on Staten Island as his friends. The author went further to inquire if the church in the U.S has finally succumbed to the charms of Islam. Kilpatrick tried to draw a distinction about the two faiths by questioning the statement by Cardinal Dolan as to worshipping the same God with the Muslim Allah. He is of the opinion that the concept of common values and beliefs of Muslims and Christians as stated by Cardinal Dolan is misleading. These

misconception or misrepresentation according to Abu-Nimer prompted the different interpretation and understanding of interfaith dialogue. Another major challenge interfaith dialogue face is the challenge of convincing some religious leaders to be part of the process. These leaders believe their authority will be questioned if they engaged in interfaith dialogue, they prefer to maintain the status quo.

According to Moraes (2003) Gramsci advanced further with Marxist philosophy of bourgeois dominance in the society. He is of the opinion that a few individuals often use their position within the society to create a „class“, which translate to hegemony, thereby dominating others. The religious leaders prefer to maintain the hegemony within their religious faith; any counter-hegemony is resisted using any force available. For them, interfaith dialogue may challenge or question their ideology. However, inter-religious dialogue becomes almost impossible if the religion of the other is termed demonic. Financial challenge is another aspect that has been a source of concern for practitioners of interfaith dialogue since adherents would not donate their money for interfaith work.

In addition, international NGOs that are involved in interfaith work are few, as such funding is always hard to come by. According to Omari (2015), religious extremism is another challenge from the two faith traditions. Many adherents are totally against engaging in dialogue or in support of people from their faith to be involved in dialogue. Such people are of the belief that their religion is the only true and right way and thus engaging in dialogue with the other is of no use but a betrayal to their faith. Ramadan (2004) also remarks that those who engage in interfaith dialogue are often left alone without support from members of their faith. As Ramadan puts it, they end up moving from one interfaith conference to another without the support of their faith tradition. This, according to the scholar is one of the disturbing challenges confronting interfaith dialogue. The Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) is of the opinion that self-sufficiency, the inability to allow other people know more about one’s religion sometimes leads to defensive and aggressive attitudes.

Also, the lack of conviction by religious adherents about interreligious dialogue that sometimes is left for the specialists alone. The lack of forgiveness and wrong interpretation of other people’s beliefs or practices; and intolerance, which in some cases are believed to have link with political, economic, racial and ethnic struggles are some challenges interfaith practitioners encounter (Declaration and Proclamation, 1991). This prevailing situation has brought about a change in the dynamics of the city with people clustering based on such factors as religion, ethnicity, language and culture. Many communities have been displaced, religious organizations have suffered destructions and damaged and the previous harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationship have been severely strained and battered. The situation is pathetic as shops outlets, market places and residential domiciles are now based on religious affiliations. Whenever there is interfaith conflict, it creates mutual distrust. Trust deficit sets in between the people. Interfaith intolerance can only breed unfriendly disposition between the adherents of the faiths. Their approach in relating is mostly hostile to each other. Owing to the deep seated hatred, enemy is made out of persons from other faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, dialogue among Muslims and Christians, is an important aspect of interfaith relations. By engaging in constructive dialogue, members of these faiths can deepen their understanding of one another, find common ground, and work towards a more peaceful and just society. While there are challenges to this type of dialogue, with an open and respectful approach, it is possible to overcome differences and build bridges between these communities. The attempts made by the Civil Society Organizations and other faith and community-based organizations in promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria positive outcome. There should be a frantic efforts by the government to engage the youth in meaningful job. This could be done by robust skill acquisition schemes for the teeming youth. With the high youth bulge Nigeria skill acquisition will get them off the streets and being ready for hire to commit religious violence.

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