

Decoloniality and Inter-religious Transformation among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria: A Practical Theological Approach

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Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria experience a dysfunctional relationship which is responsible for the recurrent inter-religious crises that create a deep-rooted trauma. This trauma co-exists with anger, fear and suspicion. As a result of their volatile relationship, the two religious groups live with a mindset that spurs the practices of exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. In addressing the volatile relationship, the study was guided by a practical theological methodology through the hermeneutical process of the EDNA model proposed by Noel Woodbridge. The 'Exploratory' task reflected the era of the British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria in relation to religious policy. The 'Descriptive' task describes the continuity of colonially-established inter-religious discrimination among Christians and Muslims today. The 'Normative' task considered inter-religious consciousness with the examples of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. Having identified the challenge of Christian/Muslim co-existence in Northern Nigeria, the 'Action' task focused on decoloniality and inter-religious transformation.

Introduction

Nigeria, like many other countries today, faces challenges of security, accountability in the government, unity, inter-religious relationship and tolerance. These tensions have fueled the crises of Boko Haram's terrorism, inter-religious conflicts, the Fulani herdsmen attacks, and popular agitation regarding regional independence. In this context, religion plays a critical role. According to Best (Best 2001, 63), "Religion is becoming a divisive issue and constitutes a growing conflict flash point." Religion participates in generating, escalating, and resolving crisis. As the Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, "Religion is like a knife: you can either use it to cut bread or stick in someone's back." The ambivalent use of religion has emerged as a great challenge to Christian/Muslim inter-religious co-existence in Nigeria.

This research concentrates on a region identified as Northern Nigeria which has experienced post-colonial inter-religious crises that resulted in out-

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breaks of violence among Christians and Muslims. According to research (e.g. Mulders 2016), the region has been under periodic religious crises since 1980. Despite this state of tension, the two groups still live together: some families have mixed via proselytization and inter-marriage. However, as religious groups, the state of being together is often characterized by fear and suspicion. Therefore, each religious group has opted for an enclosed lifestyle that forces it into believing that it is and should continue to be alone, thus excluding and abandoning the other in the affairs of public services, the use of





social amenities and inter-personal relationships. This insularity spurs the practices of exclusion and discrimination in public spaces at the expense of the minority group and leaves a dysfunctional Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship.

As I have argued (Tuduks 2018, 178), the inter-religious dysfunctional relationship originated in the British colonial era in Northern Nigeria with a creation of Muslim/Non-Muslim distinct identities and a discriminatory administration. Coloniality, which upholds and promotes the continuity of the legacy of the colonial administration in the context of separate religious development, puts the inter-religious relationship in further jeopardy. As a way of addressing the threat, I argue for decoloniality and inter-religious transformation for dialogue and bridge-building; as policies of inclusion towards a functional relationship, through a hermeneutical process in practical theology.

Practical Theology and Hermeneutical Process

The challenge of human relationship requires a hermeneutical process for adequate understanding and interpretation. In the context of religious practices, I concur with Weyel (Weyel 2014, 153) who asserts that 'lived religion' is a subject of practical theology that reflects the interdependencies of the modern lifeworld and the manifestations of religious practices. Practical theology is concerned with hermeneutics as it locates itself within the diversity of human experience, making its home in the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that is known (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 3). According to Kim (Kim 2007, 420), since the mid-20th century, practical theology as hermeneutics, and a renewed emphasis on 'praxis' has been the prime concern of the methodology of practical theology. He asserted that the term 'hermeneutical' demonstrates the interpretive activity of practical theology which attempts to both understand concrete human situations and discern God's will.

Humans are interpretive beings, thus inherently 'hermeneutical', as they are always in the activity of interpreting and making sense of their existential experience (Osmer 2008, 4). The hermeneutical endeavor is necessitated by the reality of the pluralistic voices of interpretations and experiences; it supports people in finding, speaking, and interpreting their voices (Dillen 2008, 387). Therefore, in practi-

cal theology, Louw (Louw 1998, 95) provides the following hermeneutical process as research methodology: first is to describe or observe the situation. Second, to critically analyse what was observed. Third, to critically reflect and systematize what was observed by providing theological meaning and the impact of data. And the last task is to design a strategic plan for contributing towards addressing the situation. In the same vein, Osmer (Osmer 2008, 4) presents a hermeneutical process which also involves four tasks: 'the descriptive-empirical', 'the interpretive', 'the normative', and 'the pragmatic'. The four tasks are expressed through asking the following questions respectively: What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? and How might we respond?

However, Woodbridge (Woodbridge 2014, 92) challenged Osmer's process for placing the 'descriptive task' before the 'interpretive'. He argues that the latter should rather precede the former to enable the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the nature, extent and origin of the present situation. He therefore presents a revised model coined in an acronym 'EDNA' – Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative, and Action. It could be argued that the EDNA model works best when the knowledge of a situation is already perceived, so that the exploratory (interpretive) task which asks the question – 'why is this happening?' will be reasoned as the first task in the hermeneutical process. But if the researcher is completely ignorant of the situation, then Osmer's process takes preference in first seeking to know what is happening through the 'descriptive-empirical' endeavor before engaging in interpretation. Therefore, both hermeneutical processes are feasible depending on the researcher's point of departure. In this study, the EDNA model will be considered because the situation of Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship is already described as dysfunctional due to coloniality, as researched in my previous work (see Tuduks 2018).

In focusing on the hermeneutical process, the 'Exploratory task' would reflect on the British colonial history of religious policy in Northern Nigeria. The 'Descriptive endeavor' points to coloniality that describes the current state of Christian/Muslim relationships. The 'Normative effort' would consider inter-religious consciousness and the models of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. And the 'Action consideration' makes a pragmatic contribution through decoloniality and inter-religious transformation.

Reflecting the Colonial History of Inter-religious Relationship

In research that revealed the need for addressing the state of the dysfunctional Christian/Muslim relationship, I (Tuduks 2018, 180) traced the root back to colonial times in Northern Nigeria where distinct religious identities were established and sustained. When the British colonial administrators arrived in the region from 1900 to 1903, the Muslims were the only group found with an organized structure of community and religious leadership (Ubah 1991, 133). Through 'indirect rule', the British authorities took advantage of the leadership structure, allowing the continuity of the basic institutions of the emirates to facilitate and consolidate imperial rule. The Muslims were therefore promised security and non-religious interference, they were appointed and imposed as judges in courts located in non-Muslim communities (Ubah 1991, 135). The Muslim religious group continued to enjoy their privileges including colonial educational, judicial and social policies instituted on the policy of separate development and isolation against the non-Muslim (Turaki 1993, 188). Islam gained a stronghold in Northern Nigeria as the result of the support enjoyed from the colonial administration and thereby became the state religion, with its adherents dominating the colonial hierarchical structure (Sodiq 2009, 649).

When Christian Missionaries arrived, the covert policy action of colonial leadership favored the expansion of Islam at the expense of Christianity (Barnes 2004, 63). Thus, the relationship between Muslims and Christians was evidently dysfunctional, marked with distinct identities of superiority and inferiority. The colonial administration identified the leadership of the non-Muslim area as the 'Pagan Administration' with the inhabitance provokingly referred to as 'arna'¹ by the privileged religious group (Turaki 1993, 189). The derogatory term is still used today, constituting part of the causes for the inter-religious dysfunctional relationship.

The dysfunctional state, maintained through coloniality, explains the lasting structure of inequality and domination, which continues to challenge the inter-religious relationship in the context of 'religious stratification'. Pyle and Davidson (Pyle and

Davidson 2003, 58) describe religious stratification as an institutionalized use of religious affiliation as a criterion for accessing social, economic, and political resources. They stress three key components in the definition: first, the adherents use religious affiliation as a criterion; second, when the adherents institutionalized the use of the criterion; and third, when the adherents access scarce resources. Pyle and Davidson (Pyle and Davidson 2003, 58) assert that religious inequality can only exist in societies where there are two or more religious groups and when adherence to one tradition provides social, economic, and political benefits that are not available to members of the other faith.

In Northern Nigeria, research has shown that from colonial to post-colonial times, being a member of one religious group has advantages over being in the other. The British colonial era depicted an event where the adherents of traditional religions were forced to convert to Islam as the last resort for enjoying the security and free trade accessed by the Muslims (Sodiq 2009, 649). Such an unfortunate conversion strategy could be understood in the classic form of exclusion described as assimilation that calls one group into being like 'them' for survival (Volf 1996, 75). Similarly, Mulders (Mulders 2016, 29) reveals that in Northern Nigeria Christians are often faced with the temptation of changing their name to bear a Muslim name in order to access and gain favours in public service.

Christian/Muslim distinct identities in Northern Nigeria create tension among adherents. Davidson (Davidson 2008, 374) explains the conditions of distinct identities that portray inequalities as ethnocentrism, competition, and power differentials: when a group sees itself as better off than the others; when the interaction between the groups results in a desire to gain control of the same scarce resources; and, when the dominant group has stronger organizational bases, more access to external support, and has more power than others. Davidson further reveals the manipulation of the dominant group in developing strategies that allow it to accumulate resources and pass them on to children and grandchildren. In Northern Nigeria, Turaki (Turaki 1993, 189) stressed the effects of the colonial religious inequality in the context of succession of power among the Muslim political elites to the detriment of the subordination of the non-Muslim group. The state of religious inequality is also reflected in a geographical polarization where Muslims' residential areas, and in some cases local markets, are segregated from those of Christians. In view of these

¹ Arna is a Hausa word referring to pagans, its singular form is arne. The term arne (singular) is sometimes used interchangeably with Kafir (Arabic) which means infidel.



dysfunctional situations in Northern Nigeria, the normative task would consider inter-religious consciousness as necessary among Christians and Muslims for a functional relationship.

Inter-religious Consciousness

In her quest for what she called ‘an umbrella phrase’, Lucinda Mosher (Mosher 2011, 637) was motivated by Stephen Cherry who holds an idea that his calling includes enabling inter-religious understanding, asserting that his skills make him a good companion, as one who ‘deliberately walks into difference’. Mosher thus adopts ‘walking deliberately into difference’ as the nature of her ministry that enables inter-religious understanding. Becoming an ‘inter-religious relations consultant’ in the promotion of inter-religious awareness, Mosher engages in consultative, educational and writing projects. Her interest is to encourage Christian love of the neighbor as the other who possesses different religious commitments and convictions. Knitter (Knitter 2011, 127) affirms that a religious group that engages in knowing about the other will eventually appreciate the uniqueness of its religion. He stressed that the existence of people religiously should be with the consciousness of and in co-existence with other religious people in different ways from theirs, hence his expression “to be religious today is to be religious inter-religiously”. Knitter believes that being religious inter-religiously is a matter of praxis, and that there is urgent need to build a society that is inter-religiously making peace and establishing justice.

Inter-religious consciousness creates an inclusive mindset among adherents of the religions where all people are seen and treated as human beings created in the image of God. Mother Teresa expressed this conviction in her inter-religious compassionate service when she asserted, “I see God in every human being” (Wuthnow 2005, 1). The conviction made her serve people regardless of their religious affiliations, implying her recognition and respect for human beings created in the image of God. According to Sachedina (Sachedina 2001, 110), the consciousness of human beings as related creatures of God was the conviction of a man highly respected in Islam – Ali ibn Abi Talib² (d. 660) who taught that people are of

two types: “they are either brothers in faith or equals in humanity.” He believed the consciousness of oneness in humanity is the foundation of Muslim civil society where the privilege of citizenry accorded to Muslim and non-Muslim are the same, while sharing equal dignity of God’s creation. Even though there are differences among religious groups, the common things amongst them are worth celebrating. However, rich differences benefit the groups as they learn from each other. In the words of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “*Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.*”³ A group is unique because of the difference of the other. Thus, each group is an ingredient of the other’s uniqueness. Therefore, the religious groups share in the uniqueness of each other.

From the Muslim perspective, giant strides have been made in initiating and promoting inter-religious consciousness. ‘A common word between us and you’ was a courageous effort of some top Muslim personalities from across the world drawing the attention of Christians towards the need for the two religious groups to consider issues of common ground for peaceful co-existence (Awwad, 2009, 78). According to HRH Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad of Jordan and the author of the ‘a common word between us and you’, the initiative was an open letter signed by 138 prominent Muslim scholars and intellectuals. It also included figures such as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul (Bin Muhammad 2010, 3). The letter was addressed to Christian leaders of churches and denominations across the globe, including His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Bin Mohammad pointed out that the initiative was based on the common reference found in both the Qur’an (Surah Ali ‘Imran 3:64) and the Bible (Mark 12:29–31).

Bin Mohammad (Bin Mohammad 2010, 8) described the goals and motives of ‘a common word between us and you’ as follows:

We wanted – and want – to avoid a greater worldwide conflict between Muslims and the West. We wanted to – and must – resolve all our current crises. To do both, we had – and have – to find a *modus vivendi* to live and let live, to ‘love thy neighbor’; this idea must be expressed

2 According to Oxford Islamic Studies online, Ali ibn Abi Talib was the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muham-

mad. He was the fourth caliph of Sunni Muslims, and first imam of Shii Muslims. First male convert to Islam and second convert after Muhammad’s wife Khadijah (Oxford Islamic Studies online 2020).

3 See Tutu 2016.

from within our religious scriptures and must then be applied everywhere.

With these goals and motives in mind, Bin Mohammad described the letter as a global extension of Muslims' handshake with Christians for making and spreading peaceful harmony through friendship and fellowship of inter-religious peace. Ghazi Bin Muhammad and Aref Nayed point that the summary of the document is the Two Golden Commandments – Love God, and Love Neighbor – and includes the invitation to join hands together with Christians based on common ground, for the sake of God and towards ensuring global peace and harmony. An inter-religious application of the message of 'a common word between us and you' would be to address the dysfunctional relationship between Christians and Muslims. If adherents were to give attention to the religious books, they would discover many points of convergence for functional co-existence. The Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN, 2009) of the Islamic Education Trust engages in creating inter-religious consciousness in an intra-religious setting through programs such as the Train the Trainers Course (TTC) on Islam and dialogue.

The Marrakesh declaration⁴ is another document initiated by Muslims for the promotion of inter-religious consciousness. The document is authored by Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah and endorsed by participants of the conference that led to the declaration on the 27th January 2016. The document is invariably a Muslim international call for the protection of religious minorities. The Marrakesh declaration was largely drawn from the legacy of the Prophet Mohammad's 'charter of Medina' with which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has been found to be in harmony. The charter was initiated as a result of the acknowledgment of challenges faced by minority religious groups in Muslim majority countries or regions. Inter-religious leaders, scholars, activists, and politicians in Marrakesh, Morocco converged to address the challenges facing minorities mostly inflicted by violent extremist groups who claim Islamic legitimization.

The declaration stresses the following points:

- A need for a reconsideration of the concept of 'citizenship' that is to be inclusive of diverse groups.

- A need for a review of educational curricula to ensure content that promotes honesty and has nothing in it that instigates aggression and extremism.
- A need for politicians and decision makers to be inter-religious in their dealings.
- A need for the educated, artistic and creative members of societies to support and campaign for the Marrakesh declaration by extending awareness of the rights of minorities.
- A need for various religious groups to build bridges with the past and to confront any forms of religious bigotry as well as religious hate speech.

Inter-religious relationship and co-operation will serve as motivation for respect, tolerance and fair consideration of each religious group. Imam Mohammed Baianonie stressed inter-religious relationship in one of his Friday messages affirming that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is a Qur'anic injunction to Muslims. He exemplifies the life of the Prophet Muhammad who is Muslims' greatest model, for keeping a relationship with non-Muslims in his days. He mentions peace, tolerance, compassion, and good relationship as the norm in the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. He further explained the word 'Bir' as used in the Qur'an to describe the highest relationship expected by an individual to have with his or her parents; the same word is also used by the Qur'an to describe the relationship a Muslim is expected to keep with a non-Muslim. Baianonie asserts that the use of the term 'Bir' for Muslims implies the importance of keeping a good relationship with non-Muslims, and the nature of the relationship includes all the good things needed for companionship and excludes all the bad things that are abhorred.

The Inter-religious Consciousness of Prophet Mohammed

Historically, Prophet Mohammed had an interesting inter-religious relationship with some individuals and groups of Christians. The relationship began around 610 CE at Mecca with a monk called Waraqa Ibn Nawfal who was considered very close to the Prophet in amity and was relied on for counsel (Sodiq 2009, 647). As a Christian, Ibn Nawfal was said to have congratulated the Prophet on his appointment as Messenger of God and continued to

4 Copy available at <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/declaration/>.



support and encourage him in the process of receiving revelation. When the adherents of Islam began to grow, inter-religious dialogue was initiated in Medina with the Muslims extending invitations to the Jews and Christians who were believed to have the same source of revelation and oneness with God as found in the Qur'an Surah Al-Ankabut 29:46 and Surah Ali 'Imran 3:64 (Omotosho 2003, 21).

During the earlier persecution in Mecca, being confident in the Muslim/Christian amity, the Prophet sent out his followers to the security and protection of a Christian king in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) who welcomed and hosted them (Sodiq 2009, 647). The Christian/Muslim amity had Qur'anic support, "...And nearest among them in love to the believers will thou find those who say, 'we are Christians.' Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:82). In a commentary on the statement "those who say, 'we are Christians'", Ali (Ali 1934, 268) asserts that they did not merely call themselves Christians, truly and sincerely they are, for they respect and appreciate Muslim virtues.

Another famous Islamic inter-religious relationship includes the visit of a group of Christians from Najran to the Prophet Mohammad in Medina. Muir (Muir 1923, 458) revealed that the visit was intended to investigate and understand the nature of the revelation that the Prophet was receiving from God. He explained that the group was hosted for about three days and engaged in inter-religious dialogue over this period. After realizing their theological differences, they both resolved not to compromise but instead to respect each other's unique positions. The interaction ended with a written treaty as the Prophet pledged security to Christians, their religion, leaders, and places of worship (Muir 1923, 458). The written pledge was captioned "The Covenant of the Prophet Mohammad with the Christians of Najran"⁵. According to Ayoub (Ayoub 2007, 14), the content of the covenant suggested that the Prophet did not expect Christians to renounce their faith, but that the intention was for peaceful co-existence. Based on this vignette, inter-religious understanding, through dialogue and tolerance with intrinsic compassionate caring is what ought to be taking place among religious groups.

5 Translated copy available at <https://archive.org/details/ProphetMuhammedsCovenantToTheChristiansOfNajran>.

The Inter-religious Consciousness of Jesus Christ

Inter-religious consciousness was seen in the earthly life of Jesus Christ. He often moved beyond Jewish communities to meet the needs of people from other religious traditions. The mission of Jesus was concrete, he offered immediate care for people in need, and his ministry restored dignity and included in the community those who were excluded (Graff 1994, 107). The compassion of Jesus is described as a reaction against oppressors and victimizers interested in maintaining the divide between 'us' and 'them' (Sobrinho 2009, 454). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus answered the question from an expert in the law (Luke 10:29) with a message of inter-religious compassion. Batson et al. (Batson et al, 2001, 39) argue that Jesus' answer has a double meaning. The first note in the parable is the universal compassion of the Samaritan who, though a non-Jew and a religiously outcast person, offered his best for the dying man. Second, the parable condemns the piety of the two religious leaders who ignored the dying man. Cornelius (Cornelius 2013, 3) asserts that the self-preservation and self-interest of the priest and the Levite, intent on following ritual purity laws, made them ignore the man in need of compassion. While the Levite and the priest avoided the dying man to comply with the purity laws, the Samaritan instead avoided ethnic and religious animosity between his people and the Jews in order to reach out to the dying man (O'Connell 2009, 69). In the context of being religious extrinsically or intrinsically in relation to universal compassion, the latter has an orientation that makes one care for others against all forms of self-centered life and exclusionary praxis. Intrinsic religion describes a neighbor as anyone who is in need regardless of their religious affiliation.

Jesus' involvement with people outside the Jewish community includes the centurion man (Matthew 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) who both received his compassionate attention. During his earthly ministry, non-Jews were not excluded, despite his statement that he came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). However, His ministry was later opened to the Gentiles, as he declared "I say to you that many will come from the east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Another

message of inclusion is found in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24) presented by Jesus. According to Sankamo (Sankamo 2012, 245), the first group of people who were invited but unable to attend the feast are traditionally argued to be from the Jewish group, while the group who later received invitation and surprisingly filled the banquet hall constitute the outcasts and Gentiles. The parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32) captures the inclusive message of Jesus towards outsiders. The presence of the birds of the air enjoying the refreshment of the gigantic tree implies the inclusion of the Gentiles into the restored kingdom of God (Sankamo 2012, 252). Jesus' reaction to exclusion and discrimination today would not be different in terms of challenging the group that engages in oppression and injustice, be it Christian or Muslim. The consciousness of peoples' needs, regardless of their religious adherence should permeate and motivate inter-religious compassionate caring. This too calls for transformation in Christian/Muslim co-existence.

Decoloniality and Inter-religious Transformation

Decoloniality denotes the confrontation of religious discriminations that colonialism is responsible for. It rehumanizes the world by breaking hierarchies created for differences that dehumanize people and communities (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10). Decoloniality identifies coloniality as a major barrier to development in Africa, and thus seeks to unveil and unmask it as an underside of modernity that coexisted together with the rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty (Kaunda 2015, 76). In the context of Northern Nigeria, Decoloniality condemns the practices of exclusion and discrimination, it argues against religiously distinct identities, and strives towards breaking all barriers that make implementation and practice possible. Decoloniality creates space for inclusive, transformational inter-religious relationships.

To aid decoloniality, religious leaders must accept the responsibility of standing in the gap to facilitate the inter-religious transformational process of building bridges towards common identity and inclusive relationship. Different fora for inter-religious discussion must be utilized for inculcating the consciousness of pluralistic communities. In a pluralistic state, despite religious differences, social

cohesion has the capacity to keep adherents in relationship towards building an inter-religious society.

In order to build a functional relationship through transformational efforts, Kritzinger (Kritzinger 2018, 9) argues that there are three ways in which inter-religious relationships could be developed: (1) 'face-to-face relationship'– engaging in conversation that allows a deeper entrance into one another's world of faith and scholarship. (2) 'Shoulder-to-shoulder relationship'– enabling an inter-religious tackling of social, economic and political problems in society together as people of faith. And (3) 'back-to-back relationship'– following up previous relationships by retaining the trust they developed together and purging from their own traditions the negative and one-sided rejections and condemnations of each other, as they work together to create a respectful, just and inclusive society. When a back-to-back relationship is efficiently managed, it has great potential for transforming Christian/Muslim inter-religious states.

Christian/Muslim Inter-religious Functional Relationship

The Kritzinger's model could further be strengthened through a framework designed for Christian/Muslim functional relationship.

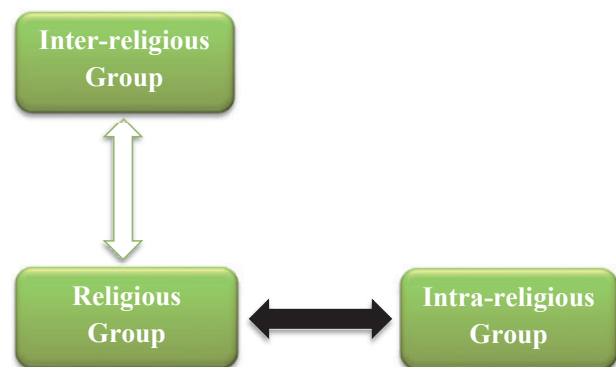


Diagram: A framework for Christian/Muslim inter-religious functional relationship

In the diagram above, two channels of communications could be noticed with arrows. The white arrow connects the relationship between a religious group and inter-religious body; while the black arrow connects a religious group with its different agencies. The channels strengthen inter-religious relation-



ships through religious and intra-religious groups in the two-way communication directions. Therefore, each religious group is required to initiate plans that will motivate inter-religious consciousness for building a peaceful pluralistic community. The initiatives are transmitted into the intra-religious group and to the inter-religious body, and then backward with reinforcement to 'complete the inter-religious relationship circuit'.

Strengthening and Securing Inter-religious Functional Relationship

To strengthen inter-religious relationships, I will implore the concept of 'inter-pathy' conceptualized by David Augsburger. According to him (Augsburger 1986, 29), inter-pathic caring has to do with entering the other's world of assumptions, beliefs, and values and temporarily claiming them, while 'bracketing' one's own. He identified the benefit of moving into the world of another with openness and reverence, in order to return with enrichment, awareness and more humility (Augsburger 1986, 29). After almost three decades exploring the concept of inter-pathy, Augsburger (Augsburger 2014, 17) acknowledged the need for strengthening the term as a result of so many happenings in the world. He stressed that the demand of inter-pathy is a profound reverence towards the worthiness and sanctity of the other. Thus, he asserted that as a form of pathos, the inter-pathic interest is a relationship with the other through passionate emotion and concern for their welfare. Therefore, to be more theological, inter-pathy is the love for neighbor as found in the words of Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Augsburger 2014, 20). Inter-religiously, inter-pathy would create opportunities for learning from the uniqueness of each religion. Experiencing the other must be sincere. Interaction must be built on dialogue, not debate.

Finally, to secure the Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship, I highlight the model of 'Wasatia' conceptualized by Mohammed Dajani, from the Arabic 'Wasat' meaning 'middle of the road' or 'center of the circle' embodying moderation, centrism, justice, balance, and fairness. Explaining the concept to denote a balance of extremes, Dajani (Dajani 2007, 1) uses 'moderation' as an English equivalent revealing its meaning in the Qur'an as justice and goodness. He thus stressed 'Wasatia' as the avoidance of extremes, rejecting any form of radicalism.

Christian/Muslim relationship has often been challenged by extremism, fundamentalism, and radicalism. Wasatia will play a vital role in moderating and controlling inter-religious relationship through religious leaders.

Conclusion

In this article through practical theological methodology, I worked through the hermeneutical process of explaining the challenge of Christian/Muslim relationship in Northern Nigeria and contributed towards addressing it. The study was important in view of how dysfunctional relationship, discrimination, and exclusion create a deep-rooted trauma which often causes inter-religious crises that create violence and devastation. Considering the volatile relationship between the two religious groups that necessitated the study, I argued that decoloniality and inter-religious transformation was vital for a functional relationship: in order to address coloniality and the institutions and policies that support discrimination and exclusion. It will create room for inter-religious learning and tolerance.

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