

**INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS PEACE-BUILDING IN
NIGERIA: A STUDY OF ACTS 15:1-15 TOWARDS THE SURVIVAL OF THE
CHURCH**

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Abstract

Religion and peace are dynamic concepts because they involve human relationship. The conflicts and insecurities in Nigeria have triggered the worst humanitarian crisis since after the independence, and if not checked, will continue to rise. Population and values displacements are increasing and an entire generation of youth and children has and is being exposed to war and violence, increasingly deprived of basic services, education and protection. Three major religions are being practiced in Nigeria; Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. These religious affiliations make it more difficult for the country to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue because she is deeply affected by religious identities and meanings. Hence peace search based solely on secular values will probably not be sustainable. The study adopts hermeneutical and historic approaches. Biblical passage of Acts 15:1-15 is used. It is therefore the aim of this paper to recommend religious post-conflict dialogue as expressed in the Acts 15: 2-15 which involves the different religious believers and recognize their religiousness. The council of Jerusalem thus demonstrated the willingness of the religious leaders to make compromise on certain issues in order to maintain peace and unity.

Keywords: Interfaith, dialogue, religious peace building, church

Introduction

The insecurity and discriminatory events in Nigeria were in nexus with the discrimination deeds and lack of peace in the days of the early Christians (Acts 6:1-7). The religious organization should be involved in dealing with the problem of injustice, discrimination and oppression for the promotion of religious peace-building. Everywhere in Nigeria is been ruled by insecurity. The insecurity in Nigeria today is of great worrisome and concern to all stakeholders and the entire citizens. It has triggered the most humanitarian crisis since after the independence. Sectarian conflict is so high in Nigerian that of the three major tribes, existing situation seems to suggest that almost none appreciates the other.

Emilia and Chukwuemeka, went further to said there is tension everywhere which pushes many to placing security measures in their various residential places consequently pushing them to be unusually and abnormally hypersensitive to any state of unrest and disorder. The various regions in the country are a volatile mix of insecurity, ethno-religious and political instability calls for various community policing. Many tragedies and devastations had become noticeable and felt due to the domineering, overbearing manifestation of ethnic and religious discrimination. Many have been killed, others maimed while other people's property have been destroyed. The situation even saddens the heart when all these take place with impunity; no repercussion of judicial redress and moral approbation seems to be given to all these violence (354). In the light of all these ugly and threatening situations in the country, for which various formed committees and institutions have failed to fight, this paper therefore is posited to recommend the use of interfaith dialogue as in the case of Acts 6:1-7 where the Disciples reach a certain compromise in their dialogue in some aspect of their belief to gain peace and tranquility. Consequently, the situation in Nigeria at this moment needs this kind of interfaith dialogue and religious peace-building if peace, unity and development must be gained (Emilia & Chukwuemeka 354).

Conceptual Clarifications

Interfaith

Arinze as in Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, Khoury, Amal I, Welty, Emily, said interfaith referred to as interreligious interaction which is also often refer to as the coming together of different faiths, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, norms (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships (176-178). It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings. In Ireland Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Interreligious Dialogue is defined as: "All positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of faith which are

directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom” (Emilia & Chukwuemeka 355).

Franda, argued that the term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and faith, at both the individual and institutional levels. Increased awareness of religious plurality, the potential role of religion in conflict, and the growing place of religion in public life present urgent challenges that require greater understanding and cooperation among people of diverse faiths to increase acceptance of others and to better understand their identity. Such interfaith dialogue can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from joint appeals by high-level religious leaders, to attempts to develop mutual understanding and the recognition of shared values and interests, to grassroots efforts to encourage repentance and promote reconciliation (4-5).

Therefore, interfaith dialogue can be summarized as the coming together of different religious persuasions for mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence.

Interfaith Dialogue

The nation Nigeria is deeply affected by religious identities and meanings. A peace process based solely on secular values will probably not be sustainable. According to the writings of several academics, the reconciliation must involve the religious believers and recognize the religiousness. An empirical research was published in 2007 called *Unity in Diversity - Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East*, where interfaith dialogue was studied in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. The study demonstrates the desire for interfaith dialogue in polarized society, and confirms that religion can be a source of peace instead of war and violence. Resulting from this study of Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty (40-41), interfaith dialogue contributes toward conflict resolution because its concept of reconciliation, involves processes of confession, repentance, mercy, and forgiveness. These processes are drawing on religious resources as the basis for dialogue. Millions of residents in the Nigeria are motivated largely by religion. Bringing religion into the dialogue allows the participants to engage in the process, with their religious identity as their primary point of reference.

In times of conflict, religious believers from different faiths often find that they have more in common with one another than they have with non-religious

people from their own background. Interfaith dialogue requires individuals to meet as equals in a process of giving and receiving information. Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty (41) suggest the following ground rules for making an interfaith dialogue as effective as possible. All participants should;

1. be willing to share their views in the context of their own life story, and not presume to speak for the entire religious tradition
2. recognize the complexities and varieties of the other faiths
3. stand firmly in their own faith while remaining self-critical and open to new perspectives
4. undertake a realistic view of their faith, and not focus on “defense” against others
5. be considered to have equal status and importance
6. commit to some basic ground rules for the meeting

Dialogue

Etymologically, dialogue means a speech across, between, through two or more people. Dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* is a preposition that means “through,” “between,” “across,” “by,” and “of.” *Dia* does not mean two, as in two separate entities; rather, *dia* suggests a “passing through” as in diagnosis “thoroughly” or “completely.” Logos comes from *legein*, “to speak” Crapanzano cited by Emilia and Chukwuemeka (354-355). Logos means “the word,” or more specifically, the “meaning of the word,” created by “passing through,” as in the use of language as a symbolic tool and conversation as a medium. As Onians points out, logos may also mean thought as well as a speech-thought that is conceived individually or collectively, and/or expressed materially. Consequently, dialogue is a sharing through language as a cultural symbolic tool and conversation as a medium for sharing. Accordingly, dialogue refers to the mutual exchange of experience, ideas and opinions between two or more parties; i.e., a conversation. Dialogue is two-way or multi-way communication. It presumes the opportunity to reply on several occasions in order to enhance a line of reasoning. The concept of dialogue contains a dimension of simultaneity and direct contact, either physical or via technical aids. In order to achieve genuine civic participation, there must be some form of dialogue between citizens and those in positions of power. In a dialogue, everyone taking part must be given the chance to study the other parties’ suggestions and opinions, contemplate them and respond (31-34). According to Turner cited in (355):

Dialogue is a culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions. It

suggests community, mutuality, and authenticity—an egalitarian relationship. So understood, dialogue provides a meeting ground, *communitas*, and manifests itself in a variety of spontaneous and ritual modes of discourse in which nature and structure meet.

Listed below are some of the phrases used by people who have engaged in dialogue in many different schools, corporations, government, non-profit organisations, communities, families:

1. a level playing field with respect for all
2. a chance to get all our cards up on the table and play with a full deck
3. space and pace that allows for all to hear and be heard, recognition and strengthening of relationships
4. an exploration of our individual and group assumptions to reveal our thinking and generate new possibilities
5. building shared understanding of differing points of view
6. ability to hold the tensions of complexity and paradox and see systemic patterns

Dajwan (5-6) defined the concept of dialogue as the conversation between two or more persons of different faiths and beliefs systems, ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, norms, philosophy and people of different understandings. He went further that the purpose of dialogue is “seeking mutual understanding and harmony”. Again, that it is essentially a process of shared thinking, in the course of which a valuable form of relationship may emerge. He concluded that dialogue to encompass a broader range of activities in which people of different cultures, religions, social, political or professional groups come together and interact. Dialogue is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible. Therefore, dialogue can be seen as the mode of interaction which made any human life, in any society, worth living example is the Africa value of communality (6).

Religious Peace-building

An urgent call for religious peace-building in Nigeria constitutes the thrust of this paper. This is premised on the fact that peace has remained elusive in the country because government has failed to utilize a relevant strategy for attaining

lasting peace. Peace-building that engages dialogue and a down-up strategy means, I suggest, much more than just sending security tax forces in violent conflict zones to enforce peace or the provision of relief materials to victims of violence. Ambulance peace-building also transcends peace-making because peace-making fails to address the root cause(s) of violence by providing peace-sustaining structures in place to forestall future occurrence of violence according to Pokol as in (Dajwan 120).

According to Little, David, Appleby, and Scott cited in Emilia & Chukwuemeka (356):

Religious peace-building is a term used to describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence.

Philpott, Daniel, Powers and Gerhard as in Emilia & Chukwuemeka contend that religious peace-building includes the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peace-building, as well as a range of actors for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peace-building (356).

According to Franda, religious peace-building conceptualized as “the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence” (5). Religious peace-building includes; theological frame works, beliefs, norms, values and rituals that involves peace-building as well as the activities toward peace-building.

Church

For a proper understanding, there is the need to make a distinction between two senses in which the term Church' is used in this paper. In one sense, the Church is used as an institution while another sense it is used as an organism. The Church as an institution is defined by Van Reken as the "formal organization that sets out to accomplish a specific purpose (198). According to Van it is an agent which can do things; and can say things because it has its own voice. The Church as an institution has its own purposes and plans, its own structure and officers, and its own mission. It has its own proper sphere. In many ways it parallels

other institutions, like governments or schools (198-202). And the Church as an organism refers to "the church as the body of believers, the communion of believers. Caleb D. Dami, understands the term 'Church' to mean an organized people of God, a spiritual and moral force to be reckoned with (5);

The distinction between the two concepts of the Church is that while the institutional church refers to a unified organization. The Church as an organism refers to an aggregate of individual believers in which each Christian acts as a personal agent with a purpose and a call in God's plan. This twofold meaning of church reverberates in Jim Harris' view when he says: "By "church" I mean both the individual believer and the institutional entity (Dajwan 3). It therefore means that in discussing the role of the church in the pursuit of intra church conflict resolution and peace of a given country, we are invariably dealing with the part that both individuals and the corporate body have to play in the society.

Dialogue, Debate, Discussion And Deliberation

The differences between dialogue and debate is clear, in debate, you aim to win an argument. Dialogue is about mutual understanding, and "the worst possible way to advance mutual understanding is to win debating points at the expense of others". The relationship between dialogue and discussion is more subtle, talk becomes dialogue rather than just discussion when the three particular conditions are in place, first, and there must be equality between the participants and an absence of coercive influences. Even if outside the dialogue they have very different social or professional status, for dialogue to work, they have to try to put this aside so that all can participate freely, without fear of any form of intimidation. Secondly, dialogue requires us to listen with empathy. For dialogue to happen, we need the ability to think someone else' thoughts and feel some else's feelings. This demands considerable motivation and patience. Examples of dialogue are found in Genesis 13:1-8; workers strike as in bargaining and pre- and marital counseling.

Finally, in dialogue, participants need to explore their own assumptions and those of others, and bring them out into the open. Our deeply engrained assumptions about the world and other people can very effectively prevent us from understanding other points of view. As David Bohm as in Dajwan (13) notes, we tend to identify our assumptions very strongly with ourselves, and feel attacked when they are commented on or challenged by others. However, in a

real dialogue, participants suspend judgment when assumptions come to light, allowing these assumptions to be explored in safety.

To recap, discussion does not necessarily require equality, listening with empathy or the exploration of assumptions, but these three conditions are the marks of dialogue. Deliberation, (14) considers is 'a form of thought and reflection that can take place in any kind of conversation'. It is problem solving activity involving the weighing up of different options. This activity can happen; in dialogue as well as in discussion or debate (debate is a form of discussion aiming at winning the other party). It is only when imminent consensus and decision become the priority of the conversation that dialogue essential focus on mutual understanding gets lost. Example of desensitization and deliberation is found in Acts 6:1-7 (Dajwan 14).

a Brief Overview Of Dialogue In a Pluralistic Society In Nigeria

Northern Nigeria has the unfortunate peculiarity of experiencing some of the most violent that is destructive frictions/conflicts between Muslims and Christians in recent years. Thousands of lives have been lost as a result of the genocide along with properties worth billions of Naira. Communities have been displaced, and religious and communal relations devastated. Interreligious interactions and neighbours no longer trust each other, as everybody is suspicious of one another and Godly human values basterdised. What happened that set people against each other like this? Is the question (Kadala 20). Here the researcher is briefly seeking to look at the history of Christian-Muslim relations in northern Nigeria, and the factors that have made peaceful interaction as well as peaceful coexistence elusive.

Brief History of Northern Nigeria

Kadala (21) opined that Northern Nigeria is part of the area known to historians and geographers as the western Sudan. This area has been in contact with the outside world since the beginning of the middle Ages. 67 The Trans-Saharan trade route linked this region with places like North Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This contact introduced the area to civilization from Egypt and other parts of the world. This civilization brought through its contact with the Islamic faith. In this part of the country, many empires, city-states or states were formed and, at one time, had great influence over a large area, which extended its borders beyond what is now Nigeria.

Kadala (22) said before colonialism the north was divided into three sections: the first is Hausa land, which comprise the Kano and Sokoto axis that has come to be popularly known as “Daulan Usmaniya”. They were tremendously affected by the Usman Dan Fodio jihad. The second part is called the Kanuri land. This was the area covered by the former Kanem-Borno Empire and it comprises the Borno and Yobe axis. The final part of the north is the vast land that is not under the two above. This includes part of Kebbi, Kwara, Niger, Taraba and Adamawa states. Others include Kaduna, Nassarawa, Benue, Plateau and southern part of Borno. This area is popularly known as the Middle Belt where the jihad had not greatly affected the people. The people of this area have resisted the encroachment of Islam. According to Takaya and Tyoden in Kadala said: *Native communities which hitherto had minimal or no contacts with Islam, particularly those located in the less accessible forest, Plateau and hilly surroundings however remained outside the emirates; the areas being impregnable to the invading Fulani Cavalry* (Kadala 23).

In order to exercise control over Islam and to dominate non-Muslims, the north is divided into three geo-political parts. These are Northeast, Northwest, and North central. The Northeast is the core of the old Borno axis of the North or the area covered by the former North East State. It covers the present day Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi and Gombe states. The Northwest covers the so-called core-North. This area covers the region which was directly affected by the Dan Fodio Jihad. These states include Sokoto, Kebbi, Zanzara, Katsina and Kano. The agitation for the implementation of the Sharia is fierce in these areas (Kadala 24).

Religions In Nigeria

Emergence of Islam in Nigeria

Islam infiltrated Nigeria through the Northern Part of her borders. Islam predates Christianity in Nigeria. Metuh (28-30) asserts that Islam came to Northern Nigeria about five or six hundred years before Christianity. Enwerem (48-49) points out that Islam arrive Nigeria sometime between 1000A.D and 1100 A.D., it first come in contact with the town Bornu in the North-eastern Nigeria before it overtook the entire Hausa States between 14th and 15th Centuries (Trimingham 641-643). Ekeopara (1996) opines that initially, Islam was propagated only among City dwellers and was chiefly patronized by the upper class for economic, social and political reasons. It was not until the time of Uthman Dan Fodio’s Jihad that Islam spread to Northern Nigeria and was forced upon the people. In his studies, Ekeopara observes that from:

1750 AD, Islam in Northern Nigeria entered into a new phase. It became militant and intolerant of the Traditional religious system. By this time, Muslims were no more satisfied with receiving tributes. They were now bent on wiping out all associations of pagan custom with Islam. The infidels or unbelievers were forcefully converted by the military might of the Jihadists and not through preaching (12).

Historical evidence shows that upon capturing a place, the Jihadists immediately introduced Islamic system of Law and government in order to cement their stronghold in the region.

Emergence of Christianity in Nigeria

Christianity entered Nigeria in three phases. In the first phase, Christianity is reported to have made its appearance in Nigeria in the 15th Century. Historical facts abound that Benin and Warri in the Niger Delta region are the first cities to witness missionary presence in Nigeria. The earliest known Christian Mission that first showed up in Nigeria is the Portuguese Roman Catholic Mission which came to Benin in 1485 at the invitation of Oba Uzolua and later in 1514 by Oba Esigie, Kings of Benin (Agha 90-99). Njoku asserts that Roman Catholics were the first to send missionaries to Southern Nigeria. By 1487, the Portuguese, who had already opened up trading connection with Benin City two years earlier, sent out Portuguese Catholic Christian Missionaries to Benin City and Old Warri. These early missionaries laboured under difficult conditions. Despite the initial good reception, the mission to both Benin and Warri collapsed due partly to inadequacy of the numerical strength of the missionaries and partly to the cold feet which the Obas and their people developed later (25). History shows that the initial attempt in planting Christianity in Benin failed because "The Kings of Benin City remained strongly attached to their indigenous religion" (Baur 75).

The second attempt in the 16th Century under Oba Esigie succeeds to a certain extent as the Oba himself and most of his chiefs did submit themselves for baptism and actually professed and practised Christian religion fairly in their own terms. Ultimately Christian churches were built but unfortunately the Benin Mission appears to have remained confined to the royal court. Much later, it is reported that Some Spanish Capuchins, some Augustinian monks and some missionaries from the Sacred Congregation de propaganda Fidei had their turn in the Benin and Warri Mission field with both positive and negative responses each time. How far this Benin mission expanded is not known. But it is most

likely that the crucifixes, mutilated statues of saints and several Catholic emblems that were discovered within the Benin royal court several years later reveal that some measure of success was recorded in the Benin missionary work. Njoku affirms that, "When the British came to Warri in 1897 they said that they saw people with rosary beads like that of the Roman Catholics. The Chief, the Olu of the Jekris (Itshekris) had a silver crown with cross in front which was sent to his forefather by the king of Portugal. He wears a garment resembling a Dalmatic and wears a chaplet with a crucifix attached (rosary beads) round his neck" (26).

In the second phase, Christianity is reported to have penetrated Nigeria through Western Nigeria. Lagos as at 1841 had developed into a notorious slave market with its King Kosoko as the Principal promoter of the trade (Dike n.p). Evidence indicates that it was after his deportation by British administration that real missionary enterprise began in Yoruba land. Among the earliest missions that evangelized Yoruba land are the Wesleyan Methodist Mission and the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) ably represented by the Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman and Catechist Henry Townsend respectively in 1842. Samuel Ajayi Crowther became the first Yoruba man to get converted at Sierra Leone as a freed slave. He became instrumental in reaching his own people with the gospel (Dike n.p).

Calabar Mission followed in 1846 with the Scottish Presbyterian Mission taking the lead in evangelizing the Efik people. Essien Ukpabio, a native of Greek town emerged the first convert and was baptised by the Reverend Hope Waddle, the first pioneer missionary to Calabar after being to Ethiopia. Other missionaries like Mary Slessor joined later in the missionary work in Calabar. King of Greek town, King Eyo Honesty was one of the main actors that helped missionaries to plant Christianity in Calabar. From Calabar, the Presbyterian Church spread to the other parts of the former Eastern region (Ajayi 35). According to Ajah, "Christian Missions came to Eastern Nigerian mainly through two angles. The first angle was through Lagos area or from Western Nigeria, and the second angle was to the eastern end of the country through a sea port" (40).

In the third phase 1885, the researcher wills intentionally choose the mission of the Irish Catholic missionaries in Onitsha, the Lower Niger Mission. This mission to Onitsha was providential in the sense that the primary destination of the missionaries was Lokoja in order to begin the Upper Niger Mission. The

missionary team was led by Father Joseph Lutz, a French Alsatian priest who had served previously for over ten years in Sierra Leone, a man of apostolic dynamism and experience. His colleagues were Father Johan Horne, a newly professed priest and two Brothers: "Hermas and Jean - Gotto, formerly of the station at the St. Coeur de Marie" (Metuh & Ejizu 12).

Encounter Between a.t.r., Islam, And Christianity In Nigeria

Undoubtedly, some values, institutions and world views that are at variance with those of the indigenous religion are introduced into Nigeria through Islam and Christianity. These obviously, appear to create some serious conflicts with the already existing values in Nigeria. According to Danfulani, "Islam and Christianity constituted a threat and a disruptive force to African tradition and custom" (28).

It is observed that at the beginning, the propagators of both Christianity and Islam never saw anything good in African Culture and her religion. Those values and customs Nigerians guarded zealously from birth were all despised by the propagators of the new religion. They hated all their traditional religious practices. The Christian Missionaries, particularly condemned polygamy and other cultural custom of the Africans as akin to idolatry. They frowned at human sacrifice, the killing of twins, blood bath and other cruel aspects of African Culture (Iwe 79). This posture of the missionaries has some implications on the life of the African Christians who eventually became dissatisfied with the Europeanised Christian traditions, culminating in the founding of the historic African Independent Churches (AIC).

As it happened at the initial stage, Islam and Christianity really suppressed ATR, almost to the point of strangulation. But as time went on, there were some kind of give and take from each of the religions in Nigeria. For instance, in the predominantly Muslim area in Northern Nigeria, the Muslims' ways of dressing have influenced the general mode of dressing in a way which seems to be the general culture of the Northerners. Islam has equally been infected with the traditional belief and practice of magic and medicine. Christianity too has borrowed heavily from some of the traditions of the Africans (79).

Christian-Muslim And ATR Interfaith Dialogue

According to Hosea, the grounds and reasons for dialogue are to impress the implication of exchange of views of two or more free and religious persons in the

presence of each other about their beliefs. The Interfaith Dialogue is done in boldness and honesty about the other person with readiness to listen patiently to the views and reactions of the other faiths. This enables room for peaceful coexistence in a country or given community especially in setting straight with some hard and difficult issues or crises (10).

Interfaith Dialogue is not only designed for tolerance but can be utilized to bring about mutual understanding to enhance respect for the faith and beliefs of other people. With mutual understanding, attitudes can be determined and approach made right toward people of other religious persuasions or faiths (10).

Although, we do not all belong to the same religion in all given communities, we share things in common. This therefore, it is very important to live with mutual understanding in order to be of service to one another in the community. Unless there is mutual respect we may not serve one another effectively (Hosea 10).

Interfaith Dialogue as a ground for mutual understanding can be an effective tool for witnessing of the faith. This is for the Christian not all people and faiths believe in Jesus Christ. Again, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mtt. 5:16). We have every reason to be mutual with people of other religious faiths to enhance our witness (11).

In Interfaith Dialogue we establish mutual understanding that can perfect in Christians the royal law of love and build up or enhance our values especially of love, tolerance and forgiveness. In other religions are found moral values which if respected would make Nigeria and the world move on and be a better place to live in. This is because we need not be separated into various communities; we have to appreciate political systems and ideologies coming from other living religious faiths. This would enhance the building of sound economic policies, educational and cultural policies. Our unity shall drive well the social and health matters in the right direction all toward a national unity. We must cultivate the Israel mentality and that of the African philosophy that says "I am because we are" and "we are because I am" (11).

Dialogue In Management Of Conflict In a Pluralistic Society

According to Dajwan Conflict managers use the term "dialogue" in a variety of ways. Most dialogue processes, however, involve people who are engaged in a

long-lasting, deep-rooted conflict sitting down together with a facilitator who will help them explore their feelings about the conflict and each other, and develop an improved understanding of the concerns, fears and needs of the other side. Sometimes, the goal of such a process is to develop approaches to conflict resolution: sometimes the goal is simply improved interpersonal relationships, understanding and trust- at least between individuals, if not between the groups as a whole (38).

Conflict theorist Jay Rothman in Dajwan (38) describes four different kinds of dialogue as in conflict management. The first is positional or adversarial dialogue. In this situation, disputants, meet with a facilitator to talk, but the conversation continues in the same adversarial (I'm right and you are wrong) mode that conflicts typically take. In adversarial dialogue, disputants engage in positional bargaining (that is they focus on firm, usually mutually – incompatible, positions) and blame each other for the problem. The second is human relation dialogue. This approach has disputants meeting with a facilitator to explore their feelings about the conflict and each other. They break down negative stereotypes [Alhaji Sabo Mangu 2001 issue of arna].

Rothman's as in Dajwan (39); third type of dialogue in management of conflict is activist dialogue. This form of dialogue provides a foundation for action. Disputants from opposite sides of a conflict get together to rebuild a war – torn city, form a bi-partisan school, or deliver health care to the sick and injured a practical example is [Stefanos Foundation in Jos South-Mark Lipdo]. The purpose of such dialogue is not just talk and understanding, but Mutual Corporation and assistance. (Mutual understanding and trust are often by-products, nevertheless). The fourth dialogue in conflict management is problem solving dialogue – referred to elsewhere in these notes as an analytical problem solving workshops. Such workshops bring disputants together to explore their feelings about the conflict and each other (as it is done in human relations dialogue), but special attention is focused on the parties' fundamental needs, the absence of which is seen to be deep – rooted conflicts. An intense effort is made to jointly reframe the conflict in terms of needs and then engage in joint problem solving to develop ways to meet those needs and hence, resolve the conflicts.

Dialogue processes are becoming increasingly widely used. Some (especially human relations dialogues) are typically facilitated by therapists, religious leaders and mediators. Problem solving workshops are typically facilitated by mediators and/or conflict scholars. As originally conceived, these workshops

were to be highly analytical. Thus, conflict scholars with an expertise in conflict theory as well as the particular conflict at hand were considered the best facilitators. Many problem solving workshops are still carried out by academicians, but others are facilitated by mediators and other practitioners with less of a scholarly background. Great challenge is the unresolved conflict in Assemblies of God Church because of leadership, all forms of dialogue is used but yielded no result- lets continue to pray (Case study is dialogue in Kwaghas Lahir Mangu Alhaji A Sabo initiative experienced of 2001).

Contextualizing Acts 15:1-15 To Contemporary Nigerian Society

Early Christianity in Jerusalem witnessed a very controversial case that nearly rocked the unity of the church. It was dialogue that saved the situation. This section therefore discusses the relevance of the method adopted for resolving this crisis in the early church to Nigeria. There are several methods and strategies there are to solving a crisis. The method adopted in Jerusalem Council was identification of the problem, having understood the nature of the problem; it was extensively and freely discussed. This strategy involved dialogue, debate, tolerance, resolution, and recommendation. The resolution was given immediate implementation.

Different steps were observed taking by the council in resolving the conflict. Acts 15: 1-15:

1. First, there was identification of the nature of conflict and the cause, and then a meeting was summoned for debate and dialogue.
2. The issues involved were extensively discussed with open mind by listening to different opinions and suggestions.
3. There was good understanding among the members of the Council.
4. A practical positive step was taken to implement the resolution and recommendation arrived at by sending emissary with a letter for immediate implementation. It is to be noted that the recommendation was not put in a cooler and there was no begging the issue. A letter was sent and two people; Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brethren, as emissary to explain in detail the decision of the Council.

It is to be noted here that good understanding and workable agreement was reached that satisfied both parties in the conflict. This satisfaction confirms the statement or belief that conflicts are better settled or solved through dialogue and not in the battle field. Onaiyekon (2011 p.10) asserts that "Dialogue calls for

understanding among the conflicting parties." If two opposite parties understand each other, they would be able to settle their differences through genuine dialogue. This was the suggestion of Paul to numerous conflicts of interest in the Church in Corinth. It was the argument of Peter and James at the Jerusalem Council for a conflict that was capable of destabilizing the early Christian Church (Acts 5: 6-21).

The Council and the Issue, (15:1-12)

The question was whether Gentiles could be saved apart from circumcision and the legalism of the Mosaic system, 1, 5. That they could, and had been so saved, had been fully demonstrated on the first missionary journey, as Paul had reported to the Antioch Church. The door of faith opened to the Gentiles (14:27) was an announcement that the gospel, apart from circumcision and Mosaic legalism, had been divinely authenticated as the medium of salvation to the nations. It was a summary declaration that Christianity was an international religion, completely separated from the legalism and narrow isolationism of the Hebrew faith, reaching out to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). The church at Antioch was to send a delegation to the mother Church at Jerusalem, 2-4, and thus also witness the struggle of Christianity with Judaism (cf. Galatians 2:1-10). Peter saw the futility of insisting that Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved, 7-11. He comprehended the irrationality of the Judaizers who desired to open the door to the Gentiles only halfway, admitting only those who in addition to faith in the Messiah submitted to Jewish rites, notably circumcision. Paul and Barnabas added their testimony, 12 (Unger's 583).

The Council and the Decision

The question of the first Church council was happily settled in the form of the gospel of free grace Paul had seen so signally authenticated. James summarized the decision: "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,"¹⁹ (RSV). They were merely enjoined to abstain from idolatry, from fornication, and from things strangled and from blood, 20-21. The decision was communicated by a delegation of the Jerusalem council to Antioch (Unger's 584).

The Importance of the First Church Council

Unger's affirmed that the immense significance of the first church council consists, first, in saving the gospel from Judaistic mixture, thereby setting

Christianity on its own course as a universal as a universal spiritual movement transcending all social, racial and religious barriers, offering spiritual regeneration to everyone who believes; and second, in the revelation of God's gracious purposes for the present age and to come, 14-18. The purpose of the present is to take out of the Gentiles a people for God's name, 14, the "called - out" ones, the church, the Body of Christ. "After this I will return," 16, that is, Christ's advent. When the called - out number is completed, Christ's will return. Then Israel will be restored: "I will build again the tabernacle of David... I will set it up," 16 (cf. 1:6; 3:21). The kingdom will be established - the world converted, 17 and God's plan for the ages will be fulfilled, 18 (584).

The Survival Of The Church In Nigeria: Recommendations

The survival of the Church from all the insecurities of our nation and injustices are as indicated below:

1. Ministers of the Gospel must be ready to jettison gifts that could distract them from saying the truth. They should be ready to contend and having self-reliance like Prophet Amos, Patriarch Abraham and the Apostles as in Acts 6:1-7.
2. Interfaith dialogue and religious peace-building are urgent need for the survival of the Church, if the Church must continue in this era of insecurity in the nation. Because Acts 6:7 says "So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too".
3. The Church must unite in order to fight and pursue a common goal wholistically, because united we stand and divided we fall Matthew 12:25 ESV.
4. The cry for Masses and the poor should not be assignment of few people like in the days of Prophet Amos and the Apostles and people who are seen as opposition to the government when they talk. It must be a collective vision and passion.
5. Restructuring of the Constitution is extremely necessary for the survival of the Church, as the current Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not in favour of non-Muslims.
6. Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peace-building must start from the house of God. The Church universal must first of all reason together as in Isaiah 1:17-18. For Christians to make a reasonable impact in the society, justice, peace and equity are needed.

7. The Godly values are missing in the Church and Nigeria State. Truth is the bedrock of Justice towards the survival of the Church and peace-building. There is need to revive all of our distorted values.

Conclusion

There is a peace-making force in religion that can help us to mutual understanding, joint efforts for peaceful coexistence and genuine humanity. The Gospel calls Christians, and the Quran calls Muslims, to be witnesses for God. The Bible speaks of the God who is merciful, just, sovereign and forgiving. If mission, is in God's name, it must be carried out in God's way. This means dialogue, fairness, respect and the opportunity to respond freely. God's attributes in Christianity provide a basic understanding of the peace making force in religion. Again it is explained that the first attribute to understand is what prompts God to be merciful. In Islam it is his goodness and his generosity, while Christians believe it is motivated by God's sharing in human suffering and his compassion. Christianity perceives the need to be reconciled with God and to be saved by him. It is also important to understand the role of love in each religion. Emphasis is that Love in Islam is conditional, while Christians understand God's love in an overwhelming and personal way.

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