

SOLIDARITY IN WORLD RELIGIONS: A PERSPECTIVE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion lies at the centre of the lives of humanity. Religions have contributed to the life of humankind in various ways starting with the development of personal and communal faith expressions, the positive impact they have on peoples' civilization throughout history, their influences on contemporary international relations and significant world events. The importance of religions in our world today cannot be underestimated. The followers of the different world religions should strive to work for solidarity among them. People who are concerned about others need to be sensitive to their religious beliefs and practices. Christianity, Indigenous, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Islam religions are widely scattered. This reality calls for solidarity in world religions. Once the world religions are united, there will be solidarity with one another, they will enjoy working cooperation and more understanding among themselves, they will experience a harmonious cohabitation and a chance to peacefully live together. This article, "Solidarity in World Religions: A Perspective of Nigeria", explains how people of different faiths can be brought together and live together peacefully, how they can be more sympathetic and compassionate towards each other despite threats and risks posed by religious multiplicity, and provides reliable and accessible knowledge. The author, who has worked with the Muslims and African Traditional Religions practitioners in Nigeria for ten years, believes that if people are to enjoy a righteousness and transformative life, they are to be aware of the significance of religions' beliefs and practices, they are to respect the mission and importance of interreligious dialogue, and be ready to serve God through humanity. For without genuine interfaith dialogue that promotes unity, leads to a change of heart and subsequently leading to co-existence and promotion of solidarity, our communities will remain in upheavals and underdeveloped. Our communities cannot experience true development when there is no solidarity in world religions. Using a narrative approach the study finding reveal that

solidarity in world religions is essential and it must be genuine and practical to bring forth the fruits of togetherness.

Keywords: Dialogue, Interfaith, Interreligious, Religion, and Solidarity.

Introduction

Religious pluralism is a reality of the present day. The presence of Christianity, Indigenous, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Islam religions in the world prove that solidarity among them is not an option but a must. The term 'solidarity' "expresses the need to recognize in the composite ties that unite men and social groups among themselves, the space given to human freedom for common growth in which all share and in which they participate"⁵⁷. Solidarity in world religions is a necessity in that "religions are subject to internal differences that may be reflected in variations of faith and practice"⁵⁸. As a result, there is a need for everyone to "search for what is and what remains common to people, even in the midst of tensions, oppositions and conflicts"⁵⁹. It is genuine solidarity that opens up people's eyes towards the desire to explore the possibilities of studying, understanding and expanding their knowledge about other religions. Once the correct knowledge of other religions is achieved, solidarity among them becomes possible.

Very often these days, in towns the Catholic Churches are situated in the environment where mosques are available, while in the villages they are surrounded by the traditional shrines. This co-existence creates fertile land for interreligious dialogue that promotes solidarity among the followers of the different religions. Nevertheless, most of the people, despite the conducive environment for interreligious dialogue, seem not to make any effort to reach out to people of other faith beliefs. This points to the fact that "exclusive attitude towards other religions is still rampant in the mindset of the people"⁶⁰. Thus blocking themselves from the possibility where someone can experience one's own limitations as well as the possibility of overcoming them. Through working for genuine interreligious dialogue, a person can discover that he does not possess the truth in a perfect and total way but can walk together with others towards that goal. In consonance with Owen R. Jackson, "the fact that millions of people throughout the world identify themselves with one or another of the

⁵⁷ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004, p. 194.

⁵⁸ Patrick Desplat. The Articulation of Religious Identities and their Boundaries in Ethiopia: Labelling Differences and Processes of Contextualization in Islam", in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35.4, 2005, 483.

⁵⁹ B. Sherwin and H. Kasimow, (eds.). *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books 1999, p. 33.

⁶⁰ Mathew Thomas Thazhathukunnel. *Interreligious Dialogue at Grassroot Level*, Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2013, 100.

major religions is sufficient reason to acknowledge the importance of those religions and to understand them as the embodiment of people's search for meaning"⁶¹.

Understanding the term 'Religion'

Perusing through various scholars' definitions of the term 'Religion', one come to discover that it is quite complicated to get a common agreement on what could really be a definitive understanding of religion. According to Gustave, the word 'religion' is "elastic and difficult to define in such a way that it will suit all men and be adequately applicable to all the phenomena which men label as religious"⁶². It is difficulty to come up with the understanding of religion that fits every religious person. Nevertheless, George F. Thomas defines religion as a "relationship between man and that which he regards as holy or divine"⁶³. For Biddle, religions are "the social institutions which are designed to help men achieve the realization of personal God and establish a positive relationship with Him"⁶⁴. While Alward Shorter meant that, "Religion is a social reality, which powerfully affects human thought and behaviour"⁶⁵. Sahaya Selvam understands religion as a "system of information that provide individuals with knowledge and resources for living a life of purpose and direction"⁶⁶.

For Taliaferro and Marty, religion is "a body of teaching and prescribed practices about an ultimate, sacred reality or state of being that calls for reverence or awe, that guides its practitioners into what it describes as a saving, illuminating, or emancipatory relationship to this reality through a personally transformative life of prayer, ritualized meditations, and moral practices like repentance and personal regeneration"⁶⁷. Many things needed for good human life living is found in our religions. We are to be faithful adherence of what we believe in because it sanitizes us and determines our way of life. We cannot really underestimate the vitalness of religion in our societies. There is a great need to pay attention to whatever is going around us and find solutions from the teachings of our religions.

Talking about religion and what it does to humanity, Spilka provides the following points:

⁶¹ Owen R. Jackson. *Dignity and Solidarity: An Introduction to Peace and Justice Education*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990, p. 61.

⁶² Gustave Weigel & Arthur G. Madden. *Religion and the Knowledge of God*, New York: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1961, p. 1.

⁶³ Thomas, George F. *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, p. 48.

⁶⁴Biddle, W. Earl. *Integration of Religion and Psychiatry*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956, p. 114.

⁶⁵ Shorter, A. *African Culture: An Overview*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Selvam, G. S. *Pastoral Psychology for Africa; A Guide for Practice*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Taliaferro, C. and Marty, J. E. (Eds.). *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, p. 197.

- 1) A set of meanings for the individual that permits one to make sense out of much, if not most, of what happens in life, especially when naturalistic explanations appear inadequate;
- 2) The wherewithal to feel that one has some control over the course of events through the holding of various beliefs and engaging in certain practices and behaviours; and
- 3) A sense of personal worth, dignity, and esteem, a feeling that one is a special product of creation and continues to occupy a privileged place in the scheme of things⁶⁸.

Following intelligently the different interpretations of religion in this paragraph, what comes out sharply is that feeling someone has towards the supernatural being, the supreme being or anything above him or her. It sounds as if in religion the relationship is established between the unequal, the inferior and superior, man and God or gods. Religion maintains the ultimate values of a society and manages tensions in the personalities of individual members of a society. It functions as an integrative force between groups and within individual personalities. Religion provides what people need to live as human beings.

Religions on focus

This article focuses on three dominant religions found in Nigeria. They are African Traditional Religion, Christian Religion, and Islam Religion. If not mistaken, these three religions also dominates most of the African countries and the African continent at large. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion, though different in some of their faith beliefs and practices, they are all guided by the following elements:

- 1) The beliefs of the community about God;
- 2) The beliefs of the community about God's relationship with the world;
- 3) The ways in which the people of the community worship God and pray to him;
- 4) The rules which the community follows because of their beliefs about God; 5) The places and people which the community believe to be holy and to belong to God in a special way⁶⁹.

The beliefs expressed here if well respected can be the foundation in the promotion of unity among the different religions. Instead of focusing too much on what makes us different from each other, we should rather pay attention to the similarities in existence.

⁶⁸Spilka, Bernard; Hood, Ralph W., & Gorsuch, Richard L. *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985, p. 326.

⁶⁹ Brown, A. D. *A Guide to Religions*, Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), 2017, p. 8.

People have different ways of expressing love to their beloved ones. This is as well true to Religion, which is the “external, social, institutionalized expression of our faith in God”⁷⁰. Religion is the best way to express our faith in God. All what pertains religious activities confirms our love for the Almighty Father. It is thus not surprising to see people wearing rosaries, traditional rings or string of Muslim prayer beads. They are all forms of expressing their love for God. This is because religion is a “system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”⁷¹. There are symbols in the Churches, in the Mosques, in the house of the traditional chief, in the far and nearby bushes. All these symbols express peoples’ religion. Within the symbols, if looked beyond the mere symbol your naked eyes are able to see, there comes what is spiritual that can only be seen by the believer with the eyes of faith.

Religions and their challenges

No human face is exactly the same as another human face. But it is like many others in having two eyes, one nose, two lips, and two ears. In the same way, no two people ever respond to God’s presence in exactly the same way. Each person’s prayer is personal to himself, and each person’s response to God has its own individual quality and characteristics. The same scenario applies to religions, though they are all called religions, they have their own way of faith systems and practices. The reason why “any attempt at explaining and understanding Christian-Muslim encounter, both historically and contemporaneously, must take into account the fact that, underneath the external appearances and impressions that had influenced existing perceptions and generalizations, there were undercurrents of tensions, misunderstanding, competition and potential and actual confrontations”⁷². We should remember this whenever we discuss the religious practices of another person, especially when that person belongs to a different religion from our own. The relationship between God and every particular human being is unique, with an individual quality of its own. We should “encourage dialogue across denominational and non-denominational boundaries so as to educate one another and prevent the promotion of wrong perceptions”⁷³.

⁷⁰ McBrien, R. P. *Catholicism*, London: Cassell Ltd, 1989, p. 1254.

⁷¹ Shorter, A. *African Culture: An Overview*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998, p. 41.

⁷² Hussein Ahmed. “Coexistence and confrontation? Towards a Reappraisal of Christian-Muslim encounter in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 36.1 (2006), p. 18.

⁷³ Kawama, Virgilius. *Marriage among the Yoruba People of Nigeria: Its challenges and the way forward from the pastoral perspective*, Beau Basin: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2020, p. 118.

The challenges caused by religious pluralism include claims for the absolute truth, prejudices and biases, and misunderstanding conversion. These challenges instead of building bridges of friendship raise walls of suspicion and selfishness, thus affecting solidarity among them. What is needed is interreligious dialogue that “enables every religion to look at itself in the light of another, promoting the process of internal reform”⁷⁴. This will make people understand each other and believe that the religious tradition of other religions has something to offer the other.

Absolute truth

Every religion claims to have the absolute truth. This causes the followers of one specific religion to be too dogmatic and exclusive to those who do not belong to their religion. This creates hatred feelings towards other religions, their symbols and places of worship. Nevertheless, religions should “defend and promote spiritual values, even if each religion justifies them differently”⁷⁵. Respect for each other’s truth should be observed. A climate of trust has to be created as one enters into dialogue with people of other beliefs in search for absolute truth. It is in accordance of their “dignity that all men, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and by a moral obligation to seek the truth”⁷⁶. The problem of religious pluralism is that “people are looking for the oneness of all the faith-values in all religions”⁷⁷. This is not possible. Wesley Ariarajah said that “One can only witness to what one knows and not what one does not know”⁷⁸. All religions claim to have the monopoly of the Truth. One’s attitudes in dialogue should express the gratitude for the presence of the Truth in one's own religion and the others.

The moment we realize that we can speak and think correctly about God, and our terms and concepts apply univocally to God and creatures, and yet the reality of the divine nature transcends what we can really grasp, is the moment that we will be able to accept the different faiths around us. We will understand that we do not have a monopoly of faith. Others may not know what we know about God, and others may know what we do not know about God. Our privileges should not lead us into negative judgements that favour ones’ position and not the other. Jordan goes on with his conviction that “in attempting, in

⁷⁴ African Ecclesial Review (AFER); *Reconciliation Through Justice and Peace*, December 2009, Vol. 51. No. 4 - March 2010, Vol. 52. No. 1, AMECEA, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 2010, p. 388.

⁷⁵ African Ecclesial Review (AFER); *Reconciliation Through Justice and Peace*, December 2009, Vol. 51. No. 4 - March 2010, Vol. 52. No. 1, AMECEA, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 2010, p. 388.

⁷⁶ G. Francesco, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church*, (1963-1995), Boston, Paulines Books & Media 1997, p. 30.

⁷⁷ A. Camps, *Partners in Dialogue*, New York, Orbis Books, 1983, p. 19.

⁷⁸ W. Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of other faiths*, World Council of Churches. Geneva, 1989, p. 67.

however limited a way, to understand the nature of God, we must not confine our conception to what the human intellect can imagine or picture to itself⁷⁹. Knowledge of God is not an intellectual faculty alone, it is not limited to our intelligence, to what we read, it goes beyond to personal psychological and philosophical experiences.

Prejudices

Prejudices are a common block to religious solidarity. They do not allow people to enter freely into solidarity with others. The lack of solidarity in religions affects the “attempt to overcome their doctrinal and mutual prejudices and to broaden areas of mutual agreement”⁸⁰. There is a need for persons to go beyond the religious biases, to remove hatred and lack of trust. For solidarity to be fruitful, “both partners should make a positive effort to enter into each other’s religious experience and overall vision”⁸¹. Our consciences should be attuned to what is real and not what we perceive. Rwiza explains that, “A model of formation of conscience that is not in touch with the actual life experienced by people can neither be durable nor can it solve the crucial problems experienced in modern Africa”⁸². Our perception is usually affected and influenced by our past personal life experiences. This sometimes leads us into wrong decisions made on the new experience. It is true that while old attitudes, prejudices, biases and misconceptions die hard, perceptions and interpretations based on them even die harder. We are to make extra efforts to get rid of our old negative perceptions of things to promote solidarity among people with different consciences.

On the point of resistance to face the reality of our different religious beliefs, King strongly advises that “it may be that unless we become ‘babes’ in matters of religion and simply start the journey, there is a whole ‘world’ that we cannot find out about”⁸³. Our deepest desire should be to find out more about the world of religion and not blocking ourselves from facing God’s grace operating in religions different from ours. King continues, “if people do not go on the journey God cannot bring them to confident knowledge of Him”⁸⁴. Knowledge of God can be found in so many ways but we need to move closer to those elements that could help us discover more about God. If what is within our religious belief cannot be

⁷⁹ Jordan J. J. (Ed.). *Key Thinkers: Philosophy of Religion*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p. 9.

⁸⁰ F. N. Mvumbi, *Journey into Islam*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, p. 155.

⁸¹ J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Orbis Books 2001, p. 381.

⁸² Rwiza, N. R. *Formation of Christian Conscience in Modern Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001, p. 103.

⁸³ King, R. *Obstacles to Divine Revelation: God and the Reorientation of Human Reason*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, p. 220.

⁸⁴ King, R. *Obstacles to Divine Revelation: God and the Reorientation of Human Reason*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, p. 221.

understood fully, what of those religious beliefs belonging to the others. Definitely we cannot get it until we go out of our territories, our comfort zones and make ourselves receptive.

Conversion

Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion are suspicious about each other in some matters that brings them together like interfaith encounter or solidarity in community developments. They suspect each other of using common projects as means of converting people to their specific religions. Hussein Ahmed challenges us thus, “the bitter legacy of the past must not be allowed to impede or influence the desire for an open and genuine dialogue between the two communities, a dialogue that will promote understanding of, and respect for, each other’s aspirations, doctrines and practices and enrich and consolidate their religious and cultural identities within a pluralistic society”⁸⁵. Because of the past suspicions and negative attitude towards one another, some followers do not show much openness, eagerness, and interest in participating in dialogue of life. This lack of interest leads them to underline the deficiencies and failures within other religions in such a way that make dialogue unattractive to their members. Others reveal an “exclusionist attitude that leads to lack of respect for other faiths and traditions, stifling imagination and limiting a people’s cultural capacity to respectfully encounter and transcend identity and faith based prejudice and conflict”⁸⁶. What genuine believers need is to establish truth about conversion of hearts so that those who are ignorant of it may have the knowledge and appreciate what we are doing to uplift the lives of many. This conversion of heart is an opportunity for mutual understanding, accepting each other as normal and equal members of the community thereby performing common certain tasks for the benefit of the society.

There is a problem concerning the lack of preparation for people to appreciate and promote their religions and the religions of others. The believers are not sufficiently formed to live in multi-religious societies in a spirit of cooperation at all levels of life. There is an urgent need for them to “seek understanding in difference, in a sincere esteem for convictions other than their own. It leads both partners to question themselves on the implications for their own faith of the personal convictions of the other”⁸⁷. We are to give enough educational awareness to people about their religions. We must form them to accept the value of other religions, which can contribute to the welfare of the national unity, peace and justice. We

⁸⁵ Hussein Ahmed. “Coexistence and confrontation? Towards a Reappraisal of Christian-Muslim encounter in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 36.1 (2006), p. 20.

⁸⁶ African Ecclesial Review (AFER); *Reconciliation through Justice and Peace*, December 2009, Vol. 51.No. 4 - March 2010, Vol. 52. No. 1, AMECEA, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 2010, p. 386.

⁸⁷ J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Orbis Books 2001, p. 378.

are to explain why we meet and mingle with other religions, and why we want to remain united with them despite our differences.

Reasons for Solidarity in World Religions

All human beings, may it be Traditionalists, Christians, or Muslims, are sons and daughters of the same Heavenly Father. We belong to one Divine family. We have mutual obligations to promote the rights and development of all people. This can only be achieved through the principle of solidarity that recognizes the value of every human being. Solidarity is needed for the survival, dignity and quality of life. It must be lived and promoted by all people regardless of their religious affiliations. Solidarity must be realized through assistance with one another and especially “solidarity with the poor who cannot live without work, and who, even though they may work, still frequently need the providential help of their brothers and sisters”⁸⁸. The poor are found in all religions. Solidarity has profound consequences for the development of individuals and communities. It helps people to open up oneself to the reality of others and work for a better change in every issue that affects negatively humankind. Solidarity challenges all world religions to cooperate in responding to personal and communal issues that cry out for just actions.

According to John Paul II, solidarity is Valid when its members recognize one another as persons. Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all⁸⁹.

Solidarity in world religions should be promoted at all levels to realize human common interests through mutual and cordial support. There are areas where world religions should come into agreement and act as one for the better development of persons and the world at large. This article is interested in the protection of human dignity and promotion of human rights. This is because “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”⁹⁰. Human dignity and rights takes preeminence in all that concerns good human life living.

⁸⁸ Pope Francis, *Seeking the Face of God: Apostolic Constitution “Vultum Dei Quaerere”*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2016, p. 28.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (The Social Concern of the Church)*, Ndola: Mission Press, 1989, p. 39.

⁹⁰ Quataert, Jean H. *Advocating Dignity: Human Rights Mobilizations in Global Politics*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 1.

Solidarity in the Protection of Human Dignity

All genuine religions in the world are founded on values which protect and promote human dignity. This is because human dignity is conferred by God. In accord with Soulen and Woodhead, “because human dignity is conferred by God, its measure and norm is to be discovered not in social convention but in God and in the pattern of God’s action toward humankind in creation and redemption in Christ. Dignity consists not so much in self-possession as in dispossession, not so much in entering into oneself but in reaching out in love and care to the other”⁹¹. It is therefore necessary that every religion “resist tendencies which are harmful to the dignity, security and welfare of the citizens”⁹². The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, “the dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good”⁹³. Consequently, anything that promotes the common good and human dignity is to be encouraged and embraced regardless of whichever religion it comes from. There should not be division among world religions in the mission and vision of protecting and promoting human dignity. Religions should work closely with other religions, if not for anything else, but for the sake of human dignity that needs to be protected in every situation. Human beings stem from one and the same God, being created in the image of God make them equal whether men or women, educated or uneducated, Muslim or Christian.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that, “the equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities”⁹⁴. Human beings possess rationality and conscience specifically for that function of controlling the inequalities in the society. People are meant to experience justice and peace, love and truth, righteousness and honesty in the world. Human solidarity and the respect due to every human being by virtue of being created in the image of God should be always treasured. People are to be moved by the Golden Rule found in almost all religions, “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” (Mt. 7:12). The option for the poor, obligation to help the oppressed, liberate the enslaved, free the imprisoned, care for the widows and orphans, should be at the centre of every solidarity exercise because of “the divine presence in every created human being. This divine presence is inseparable from the individual being”⁹⁵.

⁹¹ R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead. “Introduction: Contextualizing Human Dignity,” in *God and Human Dignity*, edited by R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, p. 6.

⁹² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, The Fellowship of the Family, *Familiaris Consortio*. Nairobi: Catholic Bookshop Publications, 1982, p. 81.

⁹³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, no. 1926.

⁹⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, no. 1947.

⁹⁵ Kawama Virgilius. *Igwebuikwe: Towards an African Indigenous Ethical Theory*, Nairobi: Tradecraft Enterprises, 2023, p. 154.

Solidarity in the Promotion of Human Rights

Solidarity in world religions should pay much attention to the various aspects of human rights. Religions are to realize that “the basic qualification for holding human rights is to belong to the human race”⁹⁶. These human rights include the right of workers, the right to private property, the right to development, the right to peace, the right to justice and fairness, the right of women, the right of the child, the right of family and the right to environment. The Catechism of the Catholic Church encourages that “everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life”⁹⁷. Every religion has a dual mandate to respect and promote human rights. Every religious leader has a duty to know these rights, teach them and witness them in our lives. Anything that violates human rights is to be frowned at. What is not to be entertained in any human society include slavery, superiority complex, intolerance, and disrespect. These mistakes should be avoided. People are to be critical regarding the manner in which their religions respects and promotes human rights. We should never be complacent. The task is big and has to be done in every age, place and culture by all people regardless of their religious affiliation.

The promotion of human rights is a responsibility of everyone. Rules and regulations should not be made without reference and regard to the human rights. This is due to the fact that “a right is an entitlement you own. It is a claim by you against another to the extent that by exercising your right, you do not prevent someone else from exercising theirs”⁹⁸. We should always remember that human rights are guaranteed for every human being in every locality. According to Vincent, “the subjects of human rights are not members of this or that society, but of the community of humankind”⁹⁹. No human person or religion is above human rights. Let us not fail to respect the rights of others in the name of religion. The promotion of human rights is not for the privileged few but for all people belonging to different religions. This is due to the fact that “human rights are everybody’s business, an ideal which must be lived out daily by all, individuals and institutions, Christians and followers of all religions and persuasions, a dynamic force which should draw us all together”¹⁰⁰. One person’s right

⁹⁶ R.J. Vincent. *Human Rights and International Relations*, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 10.

⁹⁷ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, no. 1926.

⁹⁸ Kathryn English and Adam Stapleton. *The Human Rights Handbook*, United Kingdom: Juta & Co., Ltd., 1997, p. 1.

⁹⁹ R.J. Vincent. *Human Rights and International Relations*, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Francois Six. *Church and Human Rights*, United Kingdom: St. Paul Publications, 1992, p. 119.

is another person's duty. Where one's right ends is where another person's right begins. Your right to swing your arm ends where the other person's nose begins.

Concretizing Solidarity in World Religions

The fact that we live with people of different religions, we are required to be totally committed to what we believe in. This helps us to enter into true and meaningful solidarity with world religious people and experience mutual opening up of persons to each other with the desire to learn and enrich one another. It presupposes that "each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge"¹⁰¹. The intention is to promote a genuine exchange of ideas, convictions and values, each side running the risk of being affected by the position of the other. Concretizing solidarity in world religions through daily living, social action, spiritual matters, theological exchange and search for truth brings out the desired results which becomes solutions to religious challenges of absolute truth, prejudices and conversion.

Solidarity in daily living

Solidarity in daily living will help "people to strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations"¹⁰². Solidarity in daily living involves personal visits, participation in family events such as weddings, funerals, religious gatherings, community meetings, markets and feasts like Christmas, Easter, and Ramadan. This brings about respect for each other, mutual and moral support and strong bonds between people. People become aware that they are meant to "carry one another's burden and in this way fulfill God's law" (Gal. 6:2). Their good relationships will enhance peaceful living, good environment for interreligious dialogue and the understanding that social background is "indispensable in the public life"¹⁰³ for it promotes social interaction and mutual care. This achievement will be made possible because people are exposed to the real environment in which they interact with others, they "cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history"¹⁰⁴, each one bringing in unique characteristics, interests and abilities for the benefit of all.

¹⁰¹Vatican Council II. Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. (28 October 1965), no. 5.

¹⁰² Dialogue and Proclamation: *Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, p. 42.

¹⁰³ African Ecclesial Review (AFER); *Reconciliation Through Justice and Peace*, December 2009, Vol. 51. No. 4 - March 2010, Vol. 52. No. 1, AMECEA, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 2010, p. 390.

¹⁰⁴Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. (7 December 1965), no. 1.

Solidarity in social action

Solidarity in social action is through daily human sharing, the cooperation between the neighbors in which “Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people”¹⁰⁵. People will stand together to defend human values, taking up the cause of the least and oppressed thus contributing to the harmony among humanity. They will work together in human development projects like building schools and hospitals to improve people’s living conditions. Each person “participates in his or her capacity as a member of society”¹⁰⁶. Solidarity in social action only requires the realization that “the problem of tolerance and intolerance, inclusivity and exclusivity becomes part of a process of negotiation on the social level and situated in a historical and socio-economic context”¹⁰⁷.

Solidarity in spiritual matters

Through solidarity in spiritual matters people are able to “share their spiritual experiences”¹⁰⁸. It is both the inner experience of the individual and the mutual affirmation of shared insights by the community. It is dialogue of religious experience where persons “rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God”¹⁰⁹. God’s manifestation in their encounter fosters deeper unity and enriches them. They will start appreciating dialogue as an obvious process of learning from each other’s heart as the spirit of God speaks through them. Members of different religions will know one another, identify matters of faith and practices which they share and points on which they differ. Partners in dialogue will “discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimensions of the Divine Mystery that they have had perceived less clearly”¹¹⁰. They will seek to understand the roots of such differences and assess to what extent they constitute a real obstacle to a common faith and find ways to overcome them in the light of those points of faith which they already

¹⁰⁵ Dialogue and Proclamation: *Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ Terje Ostebo. “The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), p. 425.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Desplat. The Articulation of Religious Identities and their Boundaries in Ethiopia: Labelling Differences and Processes of Contextualization in Islam”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35.4, 2005, 483.

¹⁰⁸ W. Jeanrond and A. Lande, (eds.) *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books, 2005, p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ Dialogue and Proclamation: *Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, p. 42.

¹¹⁰ J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Orbis Books 2001, p. 382.

hold in common. And finally, there will be “interreligious participation in religious rituals”¹¹¹.

Solidarity in theological exchange

There is an urgent need for solidarity in theological exchange where “specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values”¹¹². The parallel traditions rooted in different faith, for example, the Christians belief in a God who is a community of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, while the Muslims believe in God without the second and third persons, can only be appreciated if the two are able to come together and argue theologically on the implication of the Trinity. It is a pity that many religious leaders are not interested in the dialogue of theological exchange. The theology has not yet fully been harmonized in all our religions thus living some aspects of it marginalized.

Solidarity in search for truth

Solidarity in search for truth demands respect for each other’s faith system when dealing with religious issues. People fundamentally disagree because of “differing conceptions of religious truths, not always, or even often, because of wickedness or foolishness. What respect for another viewpoint entails is surely not a belief that the person who disagrees with me is right, as to do this would make invalid all disagreements, but rather to accept that his beliefs are as real to him as mine are to me”¹¹³. This is an excellent approach to every discussion, discussing not to win but to listen and learn from other peoples’ views. We should not run away from our natural inclinations to discover the truth in everything. According to Jackson, “healthy religion is open to a constant search for truth and meaning. It is a way of pointing the human family, individually and collectively, toward the liberation and freedom for which it yearns”¹¹⁴. We are rational human beings; we reason for ourselves but also invited to reason with others. Every good religious person, whether Traditionalist, Christian, or Muslim, is meant to move beyond his or her comfort zone or territories, evangelize others by zealously expressing what one deeply believes in, and embrace the

¹¹¹ Patrick Desplat. The Articulation of Religious Identities and their Boundaries in Ethiopia: Labelling Differences and Processes of Contextualization in Islam”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35.4, 2005, 486.

¹¹² Dialogue and Proclamation: *Congregation for the Evangelisation of peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, p. 42.

¹¹³ Wilkinson, B. M. *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, p. 220.

¹¹⁴ Owen R. Jackson. *Dignity and Solidarity: An Introduction to Peace and Justice Education*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990, p. 70.

test one's faith faces before the other. Today, encounter with other faiths has become a daily event and we cannot avoid it.

Positive consequences of Solidarity in World Religions

If solidarity in world religions is embraced wholeheartedly, there will be good dialogue of life, of action, of religious experiences and of theological beliefs. With the idea of Jacques Dupuis, "The members of the various religious traditions will make a common commitment, from a point of departure in their respective religious convictions, to the promotion of a more humane world"¹¹⁵. The desire for cooperation among the world religions will "foster mutual understanding and tolerance, promote collaboration and friendship, serve the purpose of mutual transformation and growth"¹¹⁶. It appears obvious that because of the "tremendous variety of religious beliefs, practices, convictions, truths, moral positions, and forms of worship, we will develop a degree of flexibility in approaching the subject of religion"¹¹⁷.

Desire for common good

One of the positive consequences of solidarity in world religions is working for the common good. The common good comprises of "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily"¹¹⁸. The religions will work together in encountering human issues that hinders the common good. They will pay more attention to "respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members"¹¹⁹. This is because "the effort towards the pursuit of the common good comes from one's identification and solidarity with the group"¹²⁰. Their reactions will be a fulfillment of the dream that:

Every society worthy of the name can be sure that it stands in the truth when all its members, thanks to their ability to know what is good, are able to pursue it for themselves and for others. It is out of love for one's own good and for that of others

¹¹⁵ J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, New York: Orbis Books 1993, p. 236.

¹¹⁶ W. Jeanrond & A. Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books, 2005, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Owen R. Jackson. *Dignity and Solidarity: An Introduction to Peace and Justice Education*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990, p. 70.

¹¹⁸ Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. (7 December 1965), p. 26.

¹¹⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, no. 1925.

¹²⁰ Kawama Virgilius. *Igwebuikwe: Towards an African Indigenous Ethical Theory*, Nairobi: Tradecraft Enterprises, 2023, p. 156.

that people come together in stable groups with the purpose of attaining a common good¹²¹.

People will enter into a corporate and collaborative way of responding to human needs. They will insist on the primary role of the dialogue of life that concerns with respect, hospitality, reconciliation and unity. People will believe that “the common good of the society consists in the sum total of those conditions of social life which enable men to achieve a fuller measure of perfection with greater ease. It consists especially in safeguarding the rights and duties of the human person”¹²². People from other religions will adopt positive attitudes towards others and work. They will be socially conscious, self-controlled and motivated to participate actively in managing and sustaining the common good. The “different human societies will establish among themselves relationships of solidarity, communication and cooperation, in the service of man and the common good”¹²³.

Good spirit of togetherness

Spirit of togetherness will be one of the fruits of solidarity in religions. People will be more sensitive towards their pilgrim brethren, showing compassion in the suffering and happiness of others, extending generosity by offering help and comfort without taking the person’s religion into consideration. This is because true “solidarity speaks, calls, cries, and undertakes sacrifice”¹²⁴. People will relate with each other healthily despite the different religions they belong to. Their encounters will be taking place in an atmosphere of sincerity and faith among them, in their effort to transform the world through their common heritage in God. Living together therefore becomes the starting point in their struggle to discover the faith of the other and look beyond what is only theirs. They will acknowledge that they do not have answers to all the problems of life but being together can provide some valid solutions. People will recognize that God calls them into fellowship, harmonious and constructive living to build together a more just and peaceful society.

Solidarity in world religions can facilitate the coming together of people regardless of their various faith rootedness which is “meaningful to their family of origin”¹²⁵. It will make the partners in encounter ready to learn about other faith beliefs and challenge themselves to deepen their own beliefs. It will be a source of strength of their faith in God that leads to

¹²¹ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004, p. 150.

¹²² Vatican Council II. Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*. (7 December 1965), no. 60.

¹²³ John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Ndola: Mission Press, 1989, p. 26.

¹²⁴ Jozef Tischner. *The Spirit of Solidarity*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Victoria Simon. “Persistence of African Traditional Religion among the Youth in Nairobi” in *African Cultures and Religion*, edited by Michael C. Kirwen. Nairobi: Maryknoll Institute of African Studies, 2003, p. 67.

personal experience of inner liberation. The partners will easily discover the importance of knowing each other and to see one another as brother and sister. Once they are convinced of brotherhood, people will approach each other in times of joy and sorrow.

Personal transformation

Due to solidarity in world religions, people involved in the process of encounter are able to discover tremendous things that help them experience personal transformation. They realize that “faith is an individual matter by which man identifies himself in relation to God”¹²⁶. They start seeing things differently and possibly more affirming than they thought it could be. They are able to understand that dialogue is simply an exchange of views and beliefs between two equals with trust, confidence and openness. That interfaith encounter is not about the outpouring of one’s own opinion, or an intellectual argument with others, but openness to new discoveries. An individual is able to rethink his own faith, willing to adjust, and to give up unworthy old categories that do not facilitate personal transformation.

Solidarity in world religion promotes unity and an attitude of listening to one another. The partners are able to realize that they are true sons and daughters of the same Father. They are able to eat from the same table in love and respect. They discover that “respecting the dignity of others is a virtue in all circumstances”¹²⁷ and that it is the will of God. And that division among the children of God is a scandal to the world. People from different religions are able to stop seeing their faith belief as superior than the other’s faith beliefs. They stop judging other religions based on the values and standards of their own religions. They develop the spirit of acceptance, appreciation, utilization, and celebration of similarities and differences that make different religions mingle freely, peacefully, and equitably. They “begin to listen to each other and to read one another’s books”¹²⁸. They promote the spirit of collaboration and support dialogue with one another without having to sacrifice individual particular identities. They remove mistrust that leads to division and fight sinful structures that hinder full human growth.

Genuine Interreligious Dialogue

Religious diversity is a visible reality in the world today. Solidarity in world religions is a necessity for genuine interreligious dialogue. Christianity and Islam, “whose doctrines and

¹²⁶ Terje Ostebo. “The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), p. 438.

¹²⁷ Watts, Frazer. “Human Dignity: Concepts and Experience,” in *God and Human Dignity*, edited by R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, p. 248.

¹²⁸ J.M Gaudeul. *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica (P.I.S.A.I), 2000, p. 183.

teachings transcend racial, ethnic and cultural boundaries are challenged to counteract those forces aiming at dividing people on those lines. The two communities of faith are called to work hand in hand to bring peace and unity among different ethnic and cultural groups”¹²⁹. People from different religions will be driven by the deeper desire to “seeing that nothing is lacking for the common cause and also of seeking points of possible agreement where attitudes of separation and fragmentation prevail”¹³⁰. People will realize that for both “Christians and Muslims, interreligious dialogue is not an option but a duty demanded by the necessity of peaceful co-existence”¹³¹.

There is wisdom in the saying that ‘If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with others’. Solidarity in world religions will promote genuine interreligious dialogue for effective and united living. It will challenge us to be “peaceful, tolerant and pragmatic”¹³². Christianity and Islam “are not only religions with numerous followers; both religions also have a universalist outlook, and have spread worldwide.....there is hardly any country on the globe where Christians and Muslims are not living side by side”¹³³. Overlooking the importance of solidarity in world religions can be very risking for the people and the world at large. In the spirit of solidarity, people of different faith beliefs are able to come together to bring their hearts closer to one another and to God the Father who inspires us all. People are able to approach interreligious dialogue with an open mentality, an enlarged heart, a frank and sincere concern for the other. They are able to accept that “in some quite mysterious evolutionary way, God has allowed a religious plurality to develop, which, perhaps, was meant to celebrate the wonderful diversity of the human family”¹³⁴. If God has allowed religious plurality, those involved in interreligious dialogue should not be moved by the spirit to convert the other, to refute the other or merely to know the other and his point of view, but to have a genuine brotherly social and spiritual interaction that promotes the economical growth. Once we accept our uniqueness, we will

¹²⁹ Richard Nnyombi. *Islam-Christian Relations in Kenya*, Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica (P.I.S.A.I), 1997, p. 162.

¹³⁰ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004, p. 194.

¹³¹ Mathew Thomas Thazhathukunnel. *Interreligious Dialogue at Grassroot Level*, Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2013, p. 100.

¹³² Terje Ostebo. “The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), p. 430.

¹³³ Machael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli. *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, p. 86.

¹³⁴ Owen R. Jackson. *Dignity and Solidarity: An Introduction to Peace and Justice Education*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990, p. 70.

find it easy to be united and work for the common good, and establish “the basic values of tolerance, pluralism and dialogue”¹³⁵.

Oneness in Mind and Heart

We can grow only when we are open to the other, listen to the other and accept correction by the other, for we are not self-sufficient. In the letter to the Philippians, St Paul prays, “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Phil. 2: 2). St Paul’s desire is that we become truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one Mind and Heart, always looking for the interests of others as well as our own. According to Terje Ostebo, “the pattern of shared commonality at grassroots level, a degree of mutual respect and even, in some areas, transgression of religious boundaries, in the form of cross-religious marriages and conversions, have served as important resources in preventing conflicts”¹³⁶. More and more, interreligious marriages and conversions from one religion to the other are becoming common. People are able to sleep under the same roof despite their different religious affiliations.

Every religion will be able to put God on the centre, for He is a central ground that unifies them regardless of who they are. This will make it possible for people from different religions to move forward to God and meet others in Him rather than bringing them to a specific faith belief. Solidarity in world religions involves “a conscious effort to find our common essence beyond our apparent divisions, our temporary differences, our ideological and cultural barriers”¹³⁷. When the partners in interfaith encounter put God on the centre, they will automatically be motivated towards Him, and the closer they come to God, the closer they come to one another. And the more they come to discover that each partner has both material and spiritual gifts to offer the other. They help one another discover these gifts and promote their growth for the benefit of all humankind so that each one may grow better in the life of faith.

Acceptance of the equality of partners

Solidarity in world religions will make the partners in encounter accept each other as equals. There will be no any feeling of superiority or conviction that others have only to receive from us and accept all our views. This is because “human beings are dignified, regardless

¹³⁵Chris Chisoni, Tobias Jere, Jos Kuppens and Celia Swann. *Dialogue between Religions*, Balaka: Montfort Media, 2003, p. 21.

¹³⁶ Terje Ostebo. “The Question of Becoming: Islamic Reform Movements in Contemporary Ethiopia”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), p. 434.

¹³⁷Kathryn English and Adam Stapleton. *The Human Rights Handbook*, United Kingdom: Juta & Co., Ltd., 1997, p. 2.

of their state or condition, by a divine act of communion”¹³⁸. They will realize that “the equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it”¹³⁹. This confirms the fact that we are all persons created in the excellent image of God and hence equal, and that we have to learn from others and draw closer to the Truth. We will feel loved and respected by our brethren of all religions around us. The “idea of human equality is directly linked to its concept of God as the Father of all and that every individual carries the image of God in his or her body”¹⁴⁰. Acceptance of the equality of partners will promote transparency, mutual understanding and enrichment, communion and collaboration.

Because those engaged in the promotion of solidarity in world religions are equal, they are open to sincere critics from the other faith belief. This situation leads the partners to a purification of their own beliefs as well as to a reinterpretation or rejection of all the oppressive aspects of their faith heritage. They realize that every human being has “the right to be considered as an end rather than a means, as a person rather than a commodity, shows the sort of goal for which the whole human community should be ceaselessly striving: to build a same world where each human being is respected in their own right and can live with dignity”¹⁴¹. The reality of life is that “human rights teach us in a direct, straightforward manner that we are at the same time identical and different”¹⁴².

Conclusion

This article finds out that solidarity in world religions is not an option but a necessity. The similarities and differences encountered in religions are not to discourage our cooperation but rather to stimulate us into deeper desire for solidarity. It is through solidarity that our particular worldviews are widened, that we develop an attitude of listening, of welcoming, of respecting, of adaptability and of flexibility that brings about transformation of personal and communal lifestyles. People are able to deepen their faith, recognize and appreciate God’s ways in world religions, thus becoming more open, tolerant and understanding. Solidarity in world religion is an indispensable need because it promotes harmony in the midst of conflicting diversities, builds up unity in diversity caused by religion, colour,

¹³⁸ Hans S. Reinders. “Human Dignity in the Absence of Agency,” in *God and Human Dignity*, edited by R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, p. 138.

¹³⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008, no. 1945.

¹⁴⁰ Kawama Virgilius. *Igwebuike: Towards an African Indigenous Ethical Theory*, Nairobi: Tradecraft Enterprises, 2023, p. 154.

¹⁴¹ Jean-Francois Six. *Church and Human Rights*, United Kingdom: St. Paul Publications, 1992, p. 105.

¹⁴² Kathryn English and Adam Stapleton. *The Human Rights Handbook*, United Kingdom: Juta & Co., Ltd., 1997, p. 3.

language and culture. Solidarity in world religions promotes the spirit of interdependence to solve many social-economic, political and religious problems.

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