

Appendix 68:

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DOCUMENT 1

Relations, Dialogue and Co-operation during the BZ Era

Jan H. Boer

I introduced the notion of dialogue in Chapter 3 and indicated there that dialogue had become a veritable industry. Dialogue is, of course, just one aspect of the relationships between the two religions. In this file, I describe that relationship during BZ days, with special, but not exclusive, emphasis on dialogue. while the AZ situation is described in Chapter 3 of the hard copy. This material may not be in as polished a shape as that found in Chapter 3 itself. It is included primarily to give you access to the information.

I have made an exception of Justice Haruna Dandaura, the “Apostle of Dialogue.” Though most of his dialogue work took place during BZ, his work and his person are too significant to hide on this CD. I have placed his materials in the book itself.

Readers of earlier volumes of this series will recall the unrelenting bickering that went on between the two religions. Bala Takaya was tired of it all.

The often-repeated demands for balancing of advantages or public exposure each religion enjoys are not only nauseating but also seditious in essence. Does the average Nigerian need to worry about the number of public holidays [and] mark important dates on any religious calendar? Is it necessary to demand the withdrawal of such colonial, now international, legacies like the Gregorian calendar, the work-free Sunday, the school calendar, etc., whether or not they relate to any religious practices? Do we need

*to count and balance the number of people of each religion serving in public offices, even when such persons were picked on their own merits, even persons who owe no allegiance to their religious organisations whatsoever?*¹

From his BZ perch, Danjuma Byang, in spite of the harsh words he had written about Muslim treatment of Christians, found good grounds for more amicable relationships. Adherents of both religions “need to remember the close affinity that exists between their respective religions. It can be the basis of closer co-operation. Both claim Abraham as a common ancestor. Both revere Jesus Christ greatly. They share many stories in their scriptures. Apart from the Appendix, Byang ended his book on a hopeful note. Referring to all his proposals scattered throughout this chapter, he concluded, “These are all areas that we can explore towards co-operation and dialogue. Such exercises can help us to live together in mutual respect and harmony. Let’s try it.”²

Recommendations about relations with Muslims, as you can imagine, ran a wide gamut from aggressive hostility to amicable cooperation. Christians for the most part have always realized that the two must work together. E. Adeolu Adegbola of the ICS in Ibadan and my boss for nearly a decade, wrote a paper that, true to his nature, was full of ideas and practical suggestions. In terms of co-operation, he wrote:

A government which undertakes to foster without controlling the advancement of religions ought to foresee and take into account the problems of religious freedom and the need for inter-religious cooperation. It is therefore proposed that the Constitution should provide for an inter-religious body or bodies with moral and legal competence to ensure that religious freedom as enshrined in the Constitution is protected, and where the freedom is infringed, to take appropriate action for a redress. It should also be part of the positive duty of the body on its Federal and State levels to promote an active inter-religious cooperation in nation building. Religious groups should together search for a more adequate basis for their contribution to national development, should jointly bring their religious perspective of social concern to bear on development plans, and should cooperate to promote the spirit of selfless service and loyalty to God in the citizenry. Government money is probably better spent in fostering this inter-religious cooperation

¹B. Takaya, 1992, p. 122.

²D. Byang, 1988, pp. 103-104. For his other suggestions, check “Byang” in the Index.

*than in advancing the practices of each individual religion. The new Constitution should provide the basis for this new possibility.*³

A number of such bodies have been appointed since, but, because of their close association with the federal regime of the day, they were shortlived.

Pandang Yamsat, currently the President of COCIN, wrote a paper during his days at TCNN in which he suggested that Christians and Muslims should act in the interest of the unity of the nation. They “should agree and desist from the manipulation” of both sharia and secularism “in the interest of unity.” “Nigerians have come of age and as such we must work out our own Constitution to suit our unique sensitivity to religion and life.” If they are serious about their religions, then all Nigerians “must agree to turn over a new leaf for the good of all.” Anything in the Constitution that can be supported by only one religion should be rejected by all. This holds for secularism and sharia both. Both religions should bring to the table things that are “vital to the faiths and will be of benefit to all Nigerians.” Hence, Muslims must not insist on sharia, for that would amount to “a constitution within the Constitution to serve their own exclusive interests.” Yamsat rejected calls for sharia come what may. “Threats like ‘Either we have sharia in the Constitution or there shall be no Constitution or even peace in this country’ are not only unwelcome but dangerous.” He warned, “A Constitution for a sensitive and multi-religious Nigeria is an awesome task that must not be taken lightly, but must be addressed squarely, cautiously and faithfully, no matter how long it takes and how much it will cost,” for this would constitute “the anchor of poor Nigerians on stormy days,” their only refuge.⁴

B. S. Wadumbiya, a Christian educator, finds that in Nigeria we "are too much ruled by our religious beliefs and philosophy." This brings problems because of the plurality of religions. We should therefore "all understand and obey the rules and regulations of the secular government for a better mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. All groups and religions should be given their due rights, while discrimination should cease." His suggestions as to how to solve the religious crisis include the following: (1) All governments in Nigeria should keep their hands out of religious affairs; (2) Religions are to enjoy equal treatment; (3) There must be a clear demarcation between state and religion. In another lecture, Wadumbiya insists that the government should not be involved in any religious affairs such as pilgrimages and building houses of worship. These should be left to private religious bodies. The role of the government is

³E. A. Adegbola, Mar/77, p. 7. Also in J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, appendix 6.

⁴P. Yamsat, n.d., p. 10.

to "promote religious harmony and mutual respect" by maintaining a peaceful atmosphere. All religions are to be treated equally.⁵

In the 1987 meeting called by Mambula, it was agreed that it was "sensible to work with Muslims, as we cannot rule the nation without them."⁶ This would be true especially, of course, when Christians are in the majority.

Not all Christians have been positive towards dialogue. As among Muslims so some Christians used to refer to it contemptuously as a "dialogue of the deaf."⁷ Wilson Sabiya had problems with dialogue. Though he affirmed the principle, he did not think that Muslims had the right attitude for it. He presented a paper on the subject at a dialogue conference in 1993, held at TCNN, Bukuru, near Jos. In this article he first described the congenial atmosphere between Christians and Muslims that existed in his childhood days. Informal dialogue was taking place everywhere. After relationships became more difficult due to events described throughout this series, Christians continued to be "always ready for dialogue." However, it became increasingly difficult as the various governments in the country began to discriminate against Christians in favour of Muslims. Riots between the two religions made it even more difficult. The FG tried to organize an Advisory Council of Religious Affairs, but it soon stranded on the issue of leadership. Besides, dialogue requires mutual respect, something that Muslims do not have for Christians. In fact, they feel superior to Christians and consider themselves as the "natural leaders." Dialogue requires cooperation in society, which Muslims are not interested in, according to Sabiya. He concluded that "dialogue is relevant and necessary, but it is not practicable." He ended his lecture with the suggestion that the Interfaith Dialogue Centre "go into deep research to discover how we can make dialogue practicable, meaningful and fruitful."⁸ He presented the same paper a few months later at the First International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations held in Miango, near Jos. That conference agreed on "the obvious and apparent difficulties in achieving sincere dialogue." They also agreed that the Centre should take up his challenge and that these

⁵ B. Wadumbiya, 1991, pp. 4, 8; 1993, p. 24.

⁶J. Mambula, 29 June/87.

⁷S. Ilesanmi, 1997, p. 171. He borrowed the term from M. Kukah, *Religion and Politics in Northern Nigeria since 1960*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1989, p. 1. For Muslim usage of the same term see ch. 3, p..xxxx.

⁸W. Sabiya, 23 June/93. J. Boer, vol. 7, 2007, p. 279.

difficulties should not discourage people.⁹ And with this encouragement, we move over to more positive voices.

In spite of Wilson's later hesitation about dialogue, in his earliest publication available to me, he spoke of discussions among religions. He suggested that "we can help the adherents of such religions to see how others understand their religion," provided they are "conducted with concern for the stability, unity and faith, peace and progress of our beloved country,"¹⁰ an important insight I have stated several times in earlier volumes.

During the BZ years, a number of Southern scholars, mostly Yoruba, wrote significant papers on dialogue and related topics. Prominent among them was the late Yoruba scholar Sam Babs Mala of the University of Ibadan. The lone Ibo I have come across is V. C. Chukwulozie of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their papers were wide-ranging. Herewith a selective summary of their contributions.

Babs Mala began his lecture on "Christian-Muslim Dialogue" with reference to the dialogue programme of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that "sponsored dialogue among people of living faiths." He described it as a "genuinely open and free dialogue" that had the potential "of bringing together African Muslims and Christians in an atmosphere of love, respect for one another's faith, and actively engaged in trying to solve the burning issues of life." Mala then proceeded to explore "areas where dialogue can help eliminate tension in order to bring about the realisation of a truly united community of believers searching for the truth." Implicit in his discussion is the notion that dialogue covers the entire range of relationships between the two religions. It is not confined to explicit events organized specifically for purposes of dialogue. In the next few paragraphs I summarize selective features of dialogue as Mala described them and that I consider useful and relevant in our context. That excludes certain signals of relativism found in his papers.

It is interesting that Mala appeared not to share the notion of conflict between dialogue and proselytism that usually surfaces in discussions on such issues. Islam, according to him, got its foot in the West African door through dialogue that included proselytism and trade. Decisive factors were "the tolerance of traditional rulers and the gentle persuasion employed by Muslims." Trade "naturally led to increased communication" between them. Mala presented valuable history about early struggles about dialogue in which he especially highlighted the contradiction between

⁹International Conference, 2-6 Nov/93, p. 104.

¹⁰W. Sabiya, 1978. See J. Boer, vol. 7, 2007, p. 238.

the approaches of certain African missionary pioneers like James Johnson, Edward Blyden and Ajayi Crowther on the one hand and Western missionaries and colonizers. By independence, it was a mixed bag. There was a tension marked by mutual suspicion and hostility, but also cooperation between the religions in government, politics, trade and in social life. Nevertheless, mutual fear, hatred and suspicion dominated.¹¹

Mala cautioned that sometimes dialogue has led to “unwarranted self-criticism” on the part of some Christians for their historical participation in aggressiveness. Though self-criticism has its place and is even a “necessary technique in dialogue,” it “must not be pushed too far.” It will “give Muslims the undue advantage of doubting our sincerity and the illiterate *malams* [Muslim teachers] a potent tool in their unnecessary attacks on and confrontation with Christians.” And if I may add to this, self-critique in this context is useful and genuine only if it is mutual—but it seldom is!

Furthermore, though dialogue is not mission, according to Mala, it does not “presuppose neglect of mission.” The real core of dialogue is “to be more open to other.” But this “should not make us less committed to Christ. “Humility, love and concern for others as displayed by Christ Himself is what should be paramount in our minds when talking about dialogue.”

I find it interesting that Mala felt “it is up to us Christians to take the first step to initiate a dialogue.” However, this does not rule out the possibility of the initiative coming from Muslims.” The Qur’an authorises dialogue,” but it limits “its scope very carefully.” In fact, he pointed to various occasions where Muslims did take the initiative as in, among others, the “Islam-Christian Congress in Cordova, Spain. Similarly in Tunisia and in October, 1974, a visit of a delegation of Saudi Ulama to Geneva. Unfortunately, he does not explain why Christians ought to take the initiative.

A number of crucial principles of dialogue are the motivation of love, willingness to learn from each other, avoidance of denunciation and blame, abstention from injuring each other. Here he condemned, for example, an incident he witnessed where a group of Christians in front of some Muslim *malam*’s house in Jos were “hurling abusive language and assuring him of everlasting fire if he does not repent now.” On the other side, Christians were not allowed to live in the centre of Bauchi town because of the Muslim fear of being polluted by Christians. “Our sacred books contain copious examples of toleration of one another.”

¹¹B. Mala, “Christian-Muslim...,” pp. 1-8.

Mala then embarked on an exploration of various topics and activities that might be covered in dialogue. They include issues like the community versus the individual, holding joint prayers, exchange of goodwill messages at feasts, exchanging information and research in the context of centres established for such purposes, joint publications, teaching of the two religions in schools, challenging situations of injustice and other forms of suffering.¹² In his 1992 paper, he enlarges on this feature. Quoting from the ecumenical Indian dialogue leader, S. J. Samartha, he called upon both religions “to take a firm stand together on the side of the poor, exploited and oppressed in their struggle for social and economic justice” as a “significant contribution religions can make to the search for a most just global community.” Mala considered this a “clarion call” to the Nigerian faithful, where “verbal or written proclamations or declarations of support for peace without active involvement to create conditions for peace and work for peace” are common, a tendency to which I have also called attention elsewhere.

Again following Samartha, he recommended dialogue for “providing significant opportunities ‘to demonstrate how people of different religious persuasions can live and work together in a manner which goes beyond mere co-existence to the sharing of community life in all its aspects.’” Both religions had “yet to make a very serious and genuine effort to engage in true dialogue.” This was a dangerous failure, for there were “powerful skeptics within and outside the two religions, who consider Islam and Christianity irrelevant in the desire for peace” because of a dismal record of intensifying conflicts and dividing people.” Religious leaders from both sides must heed these warnings and “start *now* to utilize their various institutions to plan for and execute inter-religious dialogue meetings.” They should do so “without government pressure as in the [FG’s] Advisory Council on Religious Affairs.”

A related joint effort should be to “maintain constant vigil against the misuse of power, be it of a state” or economic powers or “the power of religion itself, its institutions, authority and affluence with a sense of self-sufficiency and exclusively marching forward while rejecting fellow pilgrims on the way.” Muslims and Christians must bear “in mind the guilt of religious bodies in this regard.” “The resources of Christians and Muslims are richly and firmly based in their scriptures.”¹³

¹²Unfortunately, though the paper continues, that is the end of the pages in my possession. All attempts to contact Mala have failed.

¹³S. B. Mala, 1992, pp. 104-105.. S. J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Interreligious Relationships*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981, pp. 124-126.

V. C. Chukwulozie disseminated an undated lecture on dialogue that I introduced in Chapter 3 under the section on “Dialogue.” I will summarize selected parts of it at some length. His aim was “to examine the various ways in which religions can begin a dialogue, thus contributing towards achieving true national unity.” At the same time he described the context in which he presented his lecture as pluralistic, peaceful and tolerant. “Tolerance in religious matters is a feature of our life that often impresses foreigners,” he asserted.¹⁴ “The time has come,” he proposed, “to go beyond this mutual tolerance and engage in real dialogue, if we are to make progress at mutual understanding and national harmony.” It would appear that his description of Nigeria’s tolerance was less a matter of fact than an effort to create a positive and receptive mood among his audience.

Chukwulozie spoke about different levels of dialogue. Being a Catholic, it was natural to him to give pride of place to the clergy. Everyone is called to dialogue, but he should recognize his proper place and the limits of his capacity. Dialogue is to be conducted “in a spirit of fraternal charity and intellectual honesty,” but since it easily degenerates into controversy and “sharp exchange of views where one’s most cherished beliefs are concerned, this type should be engaged in only by experts such as priests and others theologically trained. It requires “a mind at the full strength of its powers” and a “sensibility engaged in and enriched by the coherent multiplicity of the Christian tradition.” He emphasized the need for openness to the contemporary world and a readiness to learn not only from Christian colleagues and tradition, but also from Muslims. It is possible that “some new aspects will be revealed to us by our discussion with out non-Christian brethren. So, we should come to the dialogue with open minds to receive all the new aspects of the Truth which the Lord may be showing us by means of the dialogue. It may well be that by the grace of God which is in them, they are emphasising some aspects of Christian Truth which are providentially suited to our times.”

First of all, dialogue is not a matter of philosophical or religious systems so much as one of relationships. Comparing systems is not dialogue, since it does not “lead to an encounter. Ideas may be compared, but that does not established relationships between either people or with God. We usually “find it much easier to study religious systems or to compare one social-cultural environment with another than to contact the people living within these systems.” Doing so is not illegitimate, but it is not dialogue because of relationship vacuum.

¹⁴Chukwulozie’s paper is undated. His reference to Benue-Plateau State (p. 12) and to a 1974 date (p. 15) places his paper in the second half of the 1970s.

These afore-mentioned relationships are at two levels. There is that personal contact between individual humans. It is meant to facilitate “encounter of minds” with a view to “lessening prejudice and eliminating obstacles” to understanding. But that relationship presupposes a relationship with God. “This is an intimate and deep relationship, which is difficult to analyse, but which is the basis of all dialogue, particularly religious dialogue. It is a relationship which is extremely important for us all, as it establishes the fundamental link uniting every intelligent being with the supreme Truth and ultimate Goodness which for us means God Himself.”

Dialogue must deal with current reality, “with the real problems of life and is actively engaged in trying to solve them.” “Man as he is today and as he would like to be is both the subject and the object of every form of dialogue.” “We should not waste our time bemoaning our past history and emphasising our past hatreds and bitterness. We should rather seek to repair whatever was not good by removing prejudices and other offending characteristics on both sides.”

Chukwulozie preferred dialogue to concentrate on current common problems like materialism, secularisation, abortion, nepotism, bribery and corruption. “Surely these are enough problems to exercise any man of faith. The dialogue can afford us all a common platform, where we can concert measures to meet these and many other evils plaguing society today.” Perhaps it could be said that Chukwulozie preferred working dialogue to talking dialogue.

Furthermore, dialogue presupposes a sharing of the lives of our dialogue partners. This is a fundamental feature all too often ignored. “We must admit that all too often both Christians and Muslims are strangers to each other. Few have taken a real interest in the other. We must break down this wall, if real dialogue is to be possible. Until this has been done, no intellectual knowledge of each others’ faith or ideology will be productive of much good.”

At this point, Chukwulozie asked, “In what spirit then must this task be undertaken?” Somewhat contrary to earlier statements of his, he acknowledged that the relations have “too often been marred by opposition and conflict. The two communities have tended to go their own separate ways.” To rectify that situation, he charged that *Christians must take the first step* “under the impulse of divine hope.” Dialogue “must lead to some sort of communion of mind and heart. Without a minimum of goodwill towards others and sympathy with them, there cannot be any real dialogue.” In addition, participants must have “sufficient knowledge” of each others’ culture, language, values, etc. and not be satisfied with outmoded ideas about the other. “We

ourselves are put out when we meet a well-intentioned Muslim who clings to ideas about Christianity and the Church which we find grotesque. The Muslim is equally pained to discover how little we know about him and that we misinterpret the little we do know.” “We must listen to the explanations the Muslim gives us about his faith.” “Unless you know these people, you can have no respect for them, and without respect, you can have no sympathy or openness towards them.”

Another component to the spirit of dialogue is that all thought of conversion be rejected. Where proselytism has entered in, it is preferable to avoid all semblance of dialogue, for it will end in a stalemate and misunderstanding. Dialogue “is not essentially a means of converting others. Its main purpose is to make us accept, in peace and joy, other people just as they are, so as to help one another to proclaim more perfectly the existence in all mean of that truth and goodness, which God has revealed in His creatures.” This is likely to result in “finding that we share certain religious affinities and that to a certain degree we are spiritual cousins, if not yet brothers.”

Chukwulozie embraced the spirit of Vatican II with its “sincere respect for those ways of life and conduct, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.” Yes, there is an “element of risk in all dialogue” from both sides and “there are plenty of people to warn us of the dangers!” Only frankness and respect can see us through.

The paper concluded with the problem of government takeovers of Christian schools and turning them into Muslim institutions. Chukwulozie suggested that it would be “in the interest of peace, justice and fair play between Christians and Muslims” for everyone to “insist on keeping the religious values that existed in each school prior to the take-over.” Then he proposed that Christians and Muslims work together to achieve this fair play in the schools.¹⁵ Since this was more of a Christian than a Muslim problem and, in fact, a problem that *favoured* Muslims, it was not likely that Muslims, for the sake of

dialogue, would be interested in rejecting the advantage offered them. Perhaps that is why the project as a whole never got off the ground. It was almost a foregone conclusion.

¹⁵V. Chukwulozie, “Christian-Muslim Relationship...”

In the year that Sabiya expressed his doubts about dialogue, Matthew Kukah affirmed it under the heading “The Imperative of Dialogue with Islam.” Let’s hear him out:

For democracy to take roots, the churches must strengthen the bonds of dialogue. So far, Islam has been portrayed in too negative a light. However, as Christians, we are called to greater ideals beyond those offered by the fleshpots of political expediency. It may seem convenient for politicians to went to reinforce the otherness of Muslims or Christians as a means of building up their constituency. This question was well addressed by Professor Adebayo Adedeji, erstwhile Executive Secretary of the Africa Economic Agency. Emphasising the imperative of dialogue,

He urged Christians and Muslims to form the vanguard together to “save Nigeria from decay and collapse and give its people hope, dignity, integrity and prosperity.”¹⁶

One of the reasons Nigeria is not moving forward, according to Kukah, is “that there are certain seeming irreconcilable difference which we need to deal with.” He sought the answer in dialogue. “Elsewhere in the world, there are great steps in Christian-Muslim dialogue,” but that is hardly so in Nigeria. The Catholic Church has moved on to dialogue with other religions, but Nigeria is the only country where the Muslim refused to dialogue with the Pope during his visit in 1962. He warned, “We really need to make progress in this regard as we strive towards a viable polity. And time is not very much on our side.” Muslims have moved from negatively rejecting secularism to “talk of Nigeria being a multi-religious state.” That may seem like a small step, he suggested, but such moves are really “stepping stones to dialogue.”¹⁷

Onaiyekan defined dialogue as “the readiness to allow other have their say and to listen with an open mind.” It is “communication which dispels misunderstanding, leads to a recognition of the real differences and to a discovery and appreciation of the areas of agreement.” It includes the expectation that “basic differences will remain. The task is to identify and define which differences are indeed basic and which are non-essential and, therefore, negotiable.” This process lays the foundation “for cooperation in mutual trust and confidence. The more people lay aside

¹⁶M. Kukah 16 Nov/93.

¹⁷M. Kukah, 24 Feb/94.

needless squabbles and quarrels, the more will they be able to collaborate in making the world a better place.”¹⁸

Also in the same year, B. S. Wadumbiya of the College of Education, Hong, Adamawa State, affirmed that, “above all”—in other words, very important—

there is great need for open amicable opportunity for serious dialogue between the top leaders of the two religions. Such dialogue will aim at arriving at mutual understanding and not that of disapproving each other's belief or faith practices. It is not to judge or evaluate the faith of one's partner, but, rather, to clarify and state positions. It is to understand and be understood, but not to gain a victory or win points. Such a dialogue does not require to underplay differences or dilute them. Participants must be honest partners that can speak out of deep conviction and commitment. They should be people of scholarship and self-knowledge. Such dialogue may bring about the development of a spirit of acceptance of differences as a desirable goal. Dialogue can bear witness that religion has a stake in society, that it is a relevant and powerful force for social betterment. The common moral and social attitudes of religious groups must result in a complete religio-political partnership. The abolition of religious misunderstanding is a necessary precondition of an existential partnership in a pressing problem of our country.

A number of things could be discussed through such dialogue, e.g. constitutionality or what is a secular state? How can we fight for human rights, against poverty and all forms of prejudice and inequality? All along our problem has been lack of communication between the two faiths. A famous humourist described this situation as “knowing so many things that aren't so.” It is also said, “for that which makes you in my eyes a Muslim, makes me in your eyes a Christian.” Dialogue can enable us to work together toward “perfecting this our country, Nigeria, under the Kingdom of the Almighty God.”¹⁹

Speakers at the conference convened by Jacob Olupona dealt extensively with various ideas about dialogue. It was a unique conference in that it was not dominated by the usual clerical class. Instead, professionals from other fields formed the majority—economists,

¹⁸J. Onaiyekan, 1985, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹B. Wadumbiya, 28 July/93, pp. 23-25.

sociologists, linguists, political scientists, lawyers—, so that there emerged a much wider range of opinions with their consequently wider ramifications.

Starting off with Olupona himself, he described traditional dialogue as nothing more than an academic exercise by clerics, who get together to discuss religious and theological issues. These occasions are usually devoid of openness to each other. They are based on a reductionist view of the scope of religion that excludes “most of the relevant constituencies in our national life” and the main actors in other fields of endeavour. We need to involve specialties such as history, politics, economics and law. His conference was an embodiment of this insight in that it included a majority of non-clerics.

Olupona’s second consideration was the already oft-mentioned “practical aspect” of dialogue. Yes, it must include trans-religious discussions at every level, but also “joint participation of different religious organisations in social services and economic development as a symbolic expression of common concern for the freedom, dignity, social and moral growth of all people.” He may not be quite true to his own vision by his apparent restriction to “religious organisations.” Why this restriction? And why mere “symbolic expression,” when the need is for actual, real expression?

Olupona appears to have regarded inter-religious borrowing and adaptation as an aspect of dialogue. He recognized that it was taking place “without necessarily showing any sign of syncretism.” Christians adopt and adapt the Muslim tradition of pilgrimage. Muslims copy and adapt Christian songs. Such adaptations in themselves can be considered quite trivial,²⁰ but they *can* degenerate into more serious cases that may be considered syncretistic, that is, combining two antithetical perspectives into a new unity, but one that inevitably contains serious tension. This was a conference of mostly Yorubas who, by their own confession, easily succumb to syncretism, as even a conference speaker admitted and detailed²¹

A more blatant example of such syncretism was the lecture by His Royal Highness, the Olufi of Gbongan, Dr. S. Babayemi, formerly Research Professor at the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ibadan. He declared, “I make bold to say that now I am a Christian, a Muslim and a worshipper of Ogun, Obatala and other traditional deities. That is the essence of being Oba, the essence of preserving and promoting inter-religious dialogue

²⁰J. Olupona, 1992, pp. 2-6.

²¹J. Boer, 2004, vol. 3, pp. 66-68, 82, note 12. See also J. Boer, 1992, p. 120. See also ch. 3 of this volume, p. xxxx R. D. Abubakre, 1992, pp. 124-125.

Yoruba style.” He described the Yoruba style of religious toleration as “the earliest form of secularism of the state in Nigeria.” The Yoruba chiefs or *Obas* participate “actively and piously in the worship of God Almighty in the shrines, in the mosques and in the churches.” They also “actively protect the interest of all the religious groups and constantly seek their involvement in efforts at ensuring economic, social and political order in the domain through prayers, sacrifices and fasting.” Part of that approach is the Obas’ function to foster dialogue. “Traditional rulers have a responsibility to this nation in enhancing inter-religious dialogue. We in Yorubaland have long recognized this responsibility and have been most active in promoting religious harmony, freedom and tolerance.” “Ours,” the Oba boasted, “as you will readily acknowledge, is the best guarantee against the eruption of fratricide. It is this approach that I recommend to this conference to examine with the possibility of its adoption by the government and its extension to those parts of Nigeria where traditional rulers would seem to be sitting on a keg of gunpowder which could explode without a warning and over which they do not seem to have any control.”²² Olabiyi Yai, author of the Postscript to the report, described the above presentation as a “model in ecumenical academic discourse.”²³ I suspect that at least some non-Yoruba Christians and Muslims must have cringed at the Oba’s statement and even more at Yai for dubbing it a “model.” When dialogue is discussed, fusion is usually far from anyone’s mind, at least, in Nigeria. As Olupona put it, “It is not the purpose of interfaith dialogue to seek to displace or absorb other’s religions by ours.”²⁴ But I do laud the pluralism component of the Oba’s presentation. Whether that could be retained in the Yoruba environment without the syncretism, I am not sure.²⁵

Emmanuel Oyelade, a Yoruba Christian student of Islam, without using the term, argued that syncretism is widespread throughout Nigeria and Africa, not just among the Yoruba. He affirmed the “desire of Africans to cherish and uphold their cultural heritages,” but I detect a confusion here in the relation between religion and culture. Just how does Oyelade see that relationship? He seemed to almost identify them. The confusion does not

²²S. Babayemi, 1992, pp. 199-200.

²³O. Yai, 1992, p. ix.

²⁴J. Olupona, 1992, p. 5.

²⁵There is at least one model of neutral pluralism that requires neither secularism nor syncretism. I refer to the Dutch model, one that has recently been accorded high international accolades and that is based on the Christian-inspired pluralism of Abraham Kuyper (H. ten Napel, “*Het Dooyeweerd-Kabinet: DeOverheidsvisie van het Kabinet Balkenende*,” *Beweging*, Summer, 2007, pp. 5-9).

clear up any with what followed: “This is important because both Islam and Christianity see them as unbelievers who do not count for much good. This is unjust. God is the Lord and King of all mankind in spite of their religious differences.” Is this lack of clarity leading Oyelade towards a vague undefined syncretism? He favoured us with a free translation of the following significant Yoruba lyric:

We shall observe our family rituals.

Islam does not, O, yes!

Islam does not stop us from observing our ritual rites.

Christianity does not, O, yes!

Christianity does not stop us from observing our ritual rites.

*We shall observe our family rituals.*²⁶

Ikenga-Metuh, a Catholic theologian, was concerned with the question how Nigeria’s three major religions can “contribute towards minimizing the dangers of conflict and promote the cause of peace.” His solution was: “The greatest contribution religion can make to peace is discovering and harnessing the motivations in all religious traditions for promoting peace and taking stock and putting together all its powers and resources for the promotion of peace.” He repeated the popular truism that any attempt at imposing a specific religion on the people “will breed disharmony and threaten the cause of peace. The only road to harmony and peace in a pluralistic society is the path of dialogue.” Due to the tension, dialogue was more necessary than ever. This could be done through education at different educational levels, where people would be taught to “know about and respect other people’s faith.” He also recommended the FG-initiated pre-NIREC Consultative Council of Religious Leaders to advise government on matters that have religious implications.” However, it needed greater autonomy than the government allowed it. He also proposed a “Panel of Experts on Inter-religious Affairs” that was to “be a standing committee, which should meet regularly to ensure smooth inter-faith relationships to pre-empt inter-faith conflicts.” “Dialogue,” Ikenga-Metuh concluded, “breaks down preconceived notions and artificial barriers among religions. Solidarity and common action will minimize the sufferings and misery of the people and bring joy and peace to all.”²⁷

²⁶E. Oyelade, 1992, pp. 189, 178-179.

²⁷E. Ikenga-Metuh, 1992, pp. 12-19.

Danjuma Byang advised that in dialogue situations, the participants should be orthodox in their religion. They would emphasize only the positive teachings of their own religion without attacking the teachings of the other. Such programmes should be organized at the national level and could be televised. He held up the example of the published dialogue by the Christian David Shenk and the Muslim Badru Kateregga.²⁸ He also approved of the method used by the Christian Josh MacDowell, an American apologist, and the South African Muslim apologist Amhed Deedat. These gentlemen went further than Shenk and Kateregga in that they also “tried to resolve the misunderstandings of the adherents of the two faiths have about each other’s.” In both cases the audience was placed in a position where they could make their own judgement. “This practice is very good.”²⁹

Habila Istifanus is known to us from Volume 7. More so than most Christians, he had a positive attitude towards Muslims and frequently urged Christians to listen to them. It was natural for him to engage in dialogue and to encourage the same for others. During his years with the Jos office of ICS, he started a “Christians-Muslims Dialogue Programme”. In his own words:

Christian – Muslim Dialogue Programme

Christian-Muslim Dialogue is another special programme initiated with an aim of neutralizing all forms of uprising or conflict in Nigeria that has religious backing. The organ through competent and careful hands of ICD staff liaise with CD officers to map out communities with these uprising to interact with them towards neutralizing these differences. This special arm through dialogue and seminar will widen the understanding of the conflicting communities towards peaceful co-existence and make them take initiative and be creative to develop themselves.

This organ or forum will preach the fact that individuals in a given community should socialize together and share ideas on all economic, commercial, social and political issues towards developing their environments. The following objectives have been carefully framed to help our teeming rural populations in their different religious faiths to harmoniously work together towards improving their rural lives. The programmes are as follows:

²⁸B. Kateregga and D. Shenk, 1997.

²⁹D. Byang, 1988, pp. 102-103.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue Action Plan

By Pastor Linus Bapman

Program	Prospect	Activities	How	Who	When
Public enlightenment services in all zones	To enlighten church elders and workers on the importance of dialogue with Muslims	Discussion and Dialogue	Seminar	C.D. officer and resource persons	Feb – April 1998
Enlightenment programmes in the four zones	To enlighten both Christians and Muslims	-DO-	-DO-	C.D. officers, Christian and Muslim elders	June-July 1998
National Conference	To enlighten Christians and Muslims within Northern Nigeria	-DO-	-DO-	-DO-	Oct – Dec 1998

The Vision of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Habila M. Istifanus

The desire to start a program that would bring Christians and Muslims into dialogue for peaceful co-existence grew stronger and stronger for many years. Within a certain period of time it was dying down as there were no funds to make it a reality. But the challenge continued to strike every now and then as I was confronted with daily misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims. Most of the time these resulted in serious crises and sometimes even terrible catastrophes. In 1994 I came into contact with a group of young boys whose lives were made miserable by the Maitatsine riot of Yola and the Bauchi riots. One evening as a social gathering, as if they had planned to talk to me, they all came up to me at once. After introducing myself as a staff of ICS Jos, they said to me, "Can't an organization like yours do something to bring Christians and Muslims together for mutual understanding?" After I observed the seriousness on their faces, I was able to imagine what prompted them, to speak to me in that way. I noticed there was a genuine desire for peace.

Towards the end of 1994 I started making contacts with individuals and organizations to find out if we could be given moral support to organize seminars and workshops. We could publish the results and distribute pamphlets that will promote peace, understanding and openness between Christians and Muslims.

From the ICS Board the approval was not difficult. The Chairman, Hon. I.S. Gofwen, was even happy and proud to identify himself with such a move to promote peace.

We had planned to go straight into organizing dialogue sessions with the Muslims. However, because of some reactions from certain individuals from the Christian circle, we felt the need to first start an enlightenment seminar with the Christians to open their eyes to the need for such a programme. One of the Christians who happened to be my classmate while in college, an open minded person met me at Bauchi Road motor park, stopped me and asked, "I heard that you people are going into dialogue with the Muslims; kun hauka ne? (Are you crazy?) What has darkness got to do with light?" He demanded an answer from me promptly. I was able to answer right away that the responsibility of the light is to shine in the darkness.

So this very effort is intended to enlighten Christians and the general public to see the need for relating more positively to the Muslims. It is really an eye opener.³⁰

At the 1995 Second International Conference held in Miango, Emmanuel Oyelade at whose feet I sat back in Ibadan in 1967 under the auspices of PROCMURA, formerly known as IAP or Islam in Africa Project, wanted to carry his spiritual proposals discussed in Chapter 3 to a higher and broader level. To this end he presented a novel challenge to the conference about joint prayer meetings. In the context of his talk on forgiveness I referred to, he advised:

*It is only with a forgiving spirit that Christians and Muslims can come together for prayers in order to solve oth national and international issues. Such prayer meetings should be well publicized through the media. The forgiving spirit will spread faszter if church prayer requests include the welfare of people of other faiths. Experiences in Africa have shown atthat the welfare of others ensures our own welfare. The insecurity of others threatens our own security. The function of the Holy Spirit should be seen not only as church-centred, but also as society-centred. The Holy Spirit that breaks the resistance in hearts of Christians can also break the resistance in the hearts of our Muslim neighbours. He should therefore be invited through prayer to spread the love of God into **all** human hearts, not only in the church.³¹*

³⁰H. Istifanus, 1998, pp. 18-19.

³¹E. Oyelade, 1995, p. 91.

DOCUMENT 2

HIV as a Focus for Dialogical Action

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Jan H. Boer

2008

One specific area in which practical dialogue is already taking place extensively is that of HIV/AIDS education and prevention. Kaine Nwashili was/is National Director of the Inter-faith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria. In that capacity he presented a lecture entitled, “Building an Interfaith Coalition Against HIV/AIDS: A Nigerian Experience,” at a round table event on “The Role of Religious Leaders and Faith-based Organizations in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS” organized in the framework of the International Congress on the Dialogue of Civilisations, Religions and Cultures, held in Abuja in 2003. The name and definition of the organization are “Inter-faith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria” and it works as an “interfaith group offering its services to the faith community in Nigeria.” I reproduce sections of Nwashili’s speech to clarify this programme of dialogue in action involving Christians of all stripes and Muslims, all at the highest leadership levels. You will recognize some of the names.

Background/History

On 16 April, 2002, leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria, The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs of Nigeria and the Christian Health Association of Nigeria were convened by The Balm In Gilead to begin a discussion on how the faith community could begin to respond to the challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country. The meeting was held at the Shehu Musa Yar’adua Centre in Abuja.

At that historic gathering of Muslim and Christian leaders to address HIV/AIDS issues, Dr. Lateef Adegbite, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and Archbishop John Onaiyekan, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria,³² endorsed a partnership with The Balm In

³²In July, 2007, Onaiyekan was elected National Chairman of CAN as well.

Gilead to fight HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. They thanked the organisation for building a bridge for Muslims and Christians to join hands as brothers and sisters working together to secure the future of the country.

A unanimous decision was reached by the leadership to establish a joint council of Christians and Muslims to be the leading partner with The Balm In Gilead to address HIV/AIDS issues in the country. The Inter-faith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria was conceived and endorsed by the highest levels of both the Christian and Muslim political structures to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS throughout the Christian and Muslim communities across the country with a Declaration of Unity from the Christian and Muslim communities to address the problems associated with HIV/AIDS.

Project Summary:

The Interfaith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria is committed to building the capacity of the faith community in Nigeria and to facilitating the establishment of a systematic HIV/AIDS service delivery mechanism throughout the country, which will operate via local churches and mosques.

The Interfaith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria is providing training and coordination advocacy and technical assistance to churches and mosques to provide HIV/AIDS education intervention that prevent mother-to-child-transmission, voluntary counselling and testing programmes, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and their family members, including orphans affected by HIV/AIDS in both urban and rural communities.

Organisational objectives of the Council

- 1. To bring the two major religious groups (Christians and Muslims) together to present a common front in the fight against HIV/AIDS.*
- 2. To establish and maintain the pre-eminence of quality capacity building among the faith groups in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS.*
- 3. To advocate for the rights of people living with and those affected by HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.*
- 4. To collaborate with governments and NGOs in the prevention and control of*

*HIV/AIDS and in giving care and support to people living with HIV/AIDS.*³³

DOCUMENT 3

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AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2000

I herewith treat you to an example of a strong consensus reached by our own African leaders on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Only a few years ago many African leaders were in a state of strong denial, but they have come around to a strong consensus to take the bull by the horns.

A. The Consensus

Preamble:

Now is the decisive moment in Africa's struggle to overcome the continent-wide threat of HIV/AIDS. Success in overcoming the HIV/AIDS pandemic demands an exceptional personal, moral, political and social commitment on the part of every African.

Leadership in the family, the community, the workplace, schools, civil society, government and at an international level is needed to halt the preventable spread of HIV/AIDS, and to provide a decent life for all citizens of Africa. Each and every one of the leadership acts necessary to prevent HIV/AIDS and to help those living with HIV/AIDS, without exception, are things we want anyway for a better, more developed Africa, and must be implemented in full and without delay.

*Much has been achieved. Many African communities and several entire nations have shown that it is possible to contain and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. Success is a reality in many places and is possible across the continent. The Africa Development Forum 2000 is a breakthrough. It represents a watershed in national leaders' readiness to address intimate personal beliefs and behaviour in a public and political manner. It marks an unprecedented collective commitment to the struggle against HIV/AIDS. With the required resources and the right leadership at all levels, we will win. Too much time has been wasted. Too many lives have been lost. Now is the moment.*³⁴

³³K. Nwashili, 15-17 Dec/2003. See also *Companion CD* <Misc Arts/Dialogue/2004-08-10 Interfaith...>

³⁴African Development Forum 2000, "The African Consensus..."