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Cover Design Benjamin Watters
Introduction:

The African continent is dominated by the two largest religions in the globe, Christianity and Islam. The mentality of religious pluralism, which is fundamentally ingrained in the African cultural ethos, has benefitted the missionary expansions of Islam and Christianity (albeit often exploited by each of these two religions) on the continent. While, the indigenous African religions have comparatively been more accommodating than both Christianity and Islam, the two religions have not only been vigorously offensive toward the indigenous religions but also literally locked up in violent antagonism against each other. The story of Christian-Muslim conflicts is worse in some parts of Africa than others.

Duquesne University, a Catholic university in the Spiritan tradition has demonstrated significant interest in promoting and advocating progress and development in Africa. Its current five-year development plan leans strongly toward African development in different life disciplines, especially from the academic perspective. Consequently, the Committee of Christian-Muslim Dialogue was established to promote and advocate major a breakthrough in Christian-Muslim relationships, especially in those parts of Africa, where such relationships are at their ebb or at best at the edge of explosion. In pursuance of its objectives, the committee held its first symposium on Christian-Muslim dialogue on October 22, 2010. An event that attracted scholars, students, and people interested in Muslim-Christian dialogue from different parts of the United States.

This edition of International Journal of African Catholicism is especially dedicated to highlight some of the major discussions at the symposium as well as accommodating relevant scholarly ideas from other contributors to the topic of the Muslim-Christian relationship in Africa. One of the papers of this edition therefore, will critically examine the role played by Spiritan missionaries in some parts of Africa, where they have existed side-by-side both indigenous religions and Islam. In the analysis and narrative of such experiences, as articulated by Elochukwu Uzukwu, some lessons emerge for both the appropriate missionary approaches and models of relating with Muslims in the fertile African missionary landscape. Joseph Mamman’s
article comprehensively presents the Catholic Church’s support and promotion of authentic interreligious dialogue and what constitutes such dialogue. Marinus Iwuchukwu, on his part takes us through the often neglected aspects of the different incidents of Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria, namely the economic and human costs. Chris Vervliet focuses on an insightful analysis of parallel terms for human and communal development in African *Ubuntu*, European personalism, and Arabic *Shakçânyya*. The three terms respectively rooted in African indigenous religions, European Christian, and Arabic Islamic worldviews, but alluding to same or identical goals of simultaneously upholding the dignity of the individual and the value of the community. Therefore, expanding and substantiating the discussion of interreligious dialogue in African beyond merely Muslim-Christian conflict. Finally, Sandra Keating reflects on the importance of the relationship between the dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of life. She identifies as well as recommends the indispensability of both in today’s pluralistic societies (especially in African and Middle Eastern societies where Muslim-Christian relations are on the brink) toward fostering healthy interreligious dialogic relationships that will result in balancing the extremes of theocracy and secularization.

Marinus Iwuchukwu, Ph.D.

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The Spiritan Mission to Africa: Clues to building appropriate relationships with Islam

Elochukwu Uzukwu C.S.Sp.
Associate Professor, Department of Theology, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

The overriding assumption of Spiritan mission, i.e. the mission of Spiritans as bearers of the Gospel of the Kingdom, is best described as “prophetic witness”. Therefore, Spiritan missionary activity worldwide assumes “different styles, determined by the times and the places” Spiritans find themselves (SRL, 15)\(^1\).

The Congregation of the Holy Ghost (Spiritans), founded in 1703, was devoted to the formation of indigent seminarians to the priesthood, and mission to the poor of rural France and the missions. In 1848 the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary merged with the Spiritans, reinvigorating the older Spiritan congregation, with Francis Libermann as its 11\(^{th}\) superior general. The founding members of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, Eugène Tisserant, Frédéric Le Vavasseur, and Francis Libermann, more than any group in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century, were committed to the “work for/among/with Blacks”, \(l'œuvre des noirs\) (work of the Blacks).

This evangelical witness of living in the world of the poor and changing the world with the poorest of the poor, the enslaved or liberated slaves, is the prism through which one can understand the Spiritan mission: the prophetic witness to the Kingdom (Evangelii Nuntiandi).\(^2\) It is the prism through which one, today, tries to understand the Spiritan approach to Muslim-Christian relations in Africa and anywhere in the world. This article illustrates this approach with a few examples from the Spiritan missions in several African countries.

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\(^2\) Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), art. 8, wrote: “Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative.” See \url{http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html} [accessed, 12/18/10]
Mauritius:

The first missionary of the new congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary (that later merged with the older Spiritan congregation) was Blessed Jacques Desiré Laval. He took up his mission appointment in Mauritius in 1841. He was the first Spiritan to be declared “Blessed” (*beatus*). His was the first beatification presided over by Pope John Paul II, in 1979. It will not be presumptuous to think that Laval covered the pontificate of John Paul II with his shadow of love, peace, reconciliation and dialogue. (John Paul II was the first Pope in the history of the Catholic Church to convene, in the Assembly of Assisi, 1986, the meeting of religious leaders to pray together and bear witness to God’s “mystery of unity”. Justifying this interreligious meeting, John Paul II believed that “the differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive.” When John Paul II visited Mauritius in 2009, ten years after his installation as Pope, he met all those who found peace and concord (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians) and found the inspiration to dialogue at the tomb of the one known all over the isle as Père Laval. Laval’s popularity among all these groups is radically rooted in the Spiritan absolute, the work of, with and for the Blacks. No pastor wanted to come into contact with Blacks; but Laval touched them profoundly, touched their families, and through the empowered Blacks he embraced and transformed the differences and contradictions of Mauritius. He died in 1864. But his commitment to the Spiritan charism or mission absolute endured. Working with the poor and abandoned Blacks, opened up many people to God’s Holy Spirit, who “in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery.” [Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22] This action of the Holy Spirit facilitates, in the context of Mauritius and elsewhere in the world, the engagement in dialogue and human action together between Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.
Bagamoyo-Zanzibar:

Mission theologians, Bevans and Schroeder, rightly see mission of the future not only as reconciliation but as prophetic dialogue. For, as Romanian born Mircea Eliade mused in his journal entry of 15 June 1952, the “prime phenomenon of the twentieth century” has been “the discovery of the non-European man and his spiritual universe”. The encounter of the other and diverse religions is the major challenge of the 20th and 21st centuries rather than ideologies such as communism, socialism or capitalism. This makes the question of prophetic dialogue a mission imperative. Spiritan history, especially in East Africa, has not always shown that Spiritan missionaries made dialogue the priority of mission. Surveying the 19th century Spiritan mission in Bagamoyo and Zanzibar, Paul Kollman scored Spiritans low on prophetic dialogue; in other words, they failed to realize this important charism. Under pressure from competing colonial interests, and also under frequent Muslim threats, they did not display the courage of witnesses to the Kingdom. Those were the times when dependency on the goodwill of local African kings and chiefs and intruding colonial administrators was the rule. A comparable situation in West Africa shows a more resolute Spiritan option of prophetic witness.

Dakar-Senegal:

The story of West Africa was different. Libermann was in Paris and Benoît Truffet was the Spiritan apostolic prefect in Dakar. Truffet was focused on the missionary ideal, witness to the Kingdom: he was not going to play the political game – neither with the French colonial interest nor with the kings and Muslim chiefs of Dakar. When a Muslim king, Damel, held two Spiritans hostage, Truffet refused to be drawn into the use of violence in order to free them: he saw himself as the servant of Ensa or Issa (Jesus), and therefore the embodiment of peace and dialogue. Furthermore, Tuffet was not going to pay ransom to Damel since the Spiritans were

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poor, working for the poor, and if they had money they will give it to the poor not to the rich like Damel. However, his focus on mission as dialogue had enabled him to build channels of friendship with Muslims in Dakar. His friends, the Muslim king and chiefs led by Suleiman, wrote to Damel threatening a 30 year war if any harm came upon the missionaries (Arragon and Simeon). Eventually, the missionaries were released without harm. There was also the threat of the French marine who possessed control of the movement of Spiritan priests in Dakar, but Truffet made no mention of this in his letter to Libermann. The important lesson is that between 1846-47 when the common attitude of relations between Christians and Muslims was that of disputation, controversy, trying to prove the other wrong, and trying to convert the other. However, Truffet displayed the missionary ideals of prophetic dialogue and good relationships with his Muslim neighbors. A similar attitude is displayed by Libermann in his correspondence with the Muslim community of Dakar.

Libermann and the Muslim Community of Dakar:

Libermann believed that the method of disputation or controversy was a legitimate way of debunking the Islamic arguments against Christian doctrinal positions. His comments on the book of Abbe Bougard in Tunisia (Soirée de Carthage) favored the position that deliberate and informed Christian argumentation countering Muslim errors was the correct procedure. However, his correspondence with the friends of Mgr Truffet in Dakar showed he had another point of view. Following the sudden death of Truffet in 1847, Libermann wrote to the Muslim friends of Truffet, King Eliman and his nephew Suleiman, to the Blacks that he loved so much, the African community in Dakar that was mainly Muslim. They were mourning Truffet. He tried to console and to reassure them that another good Prefect will be sent to Dakar. In the process, he stressed the doctrinal differences and convergences between Islam and Christianity: he and Truffet were the servants of Jesus Christ, son of God, God of the Christians, God of the universe. He recognized that Muslims are not Christians; but he hoped he was causing no offense by talking to them about God in the Christian language; if he thought he was causing offense, he would not have written about such things. Then he said, “les hommes de Dakar sont bons; ils
connaissent Dieu; ils ne sont pas malheureux” (People of Dakar are good; they know God; they are not unfortunate).6 In an incomplete version of the letter that was not signed Libermann’s language was stronger: “Vous n’êtes pas chrétiens, je le sais bien…. Vous et les habitants de Dakar vous êtes bons, vous connaissez Dieu, vous aimez le bien” (ND X: 23 You are not Christians, I am well aware…. You and the inhabitants of Dakar are good, you know God, and you love what is good). Then he went on to say that thousands of people outside Dakar, thousands of Africans, do not know God, which explains the mission of the Spiritans: to bring the message of God to the thousands, the hundreds of thousands of Africans who do not know God. One must remember that Libermann was writing in 1848, and not after Nostra Aetate of Vatican II (1965). To say to Muslim leaders, “you are good”, you “know God” was quite prophetic at the time. However, Libermann was hugely mistaken in his estimation of the knowledge of God among Africans. Forty years after his death, Mgr le Roy, the Superior General, will say exactly the opposite about Africans who were not Muslims.7

**Consequences for Spiritan Mission Today:**

The openness to dialogue displayed by Libermann and the early missionaries is retained in Spiritan mission to Africa and elsewhere in the world:

a. In Senegal & Gambia, Christians are in the minority, but the relationship with the Muslim majority is one of the best in Africa. Indeed Gambia, which is inserted into the heart of Senegal, is a success story of mutual interrelationship that should be emulated anywhere. Spiritans came to the Gambia in 1849. There has always been only one diocese, led by Spiritans, in the small country that is 90% Muslim. St Augustine’s secondary school Banjul, founded in 1857, whose present site dates to 1877, was established for education and not for proselytization. In a recent interview Robert Ellison, the incumbent Bishop, describes the Spiritan and Christian presence:

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6 A. Cabon, ed., *Notes Et Documents Relatif À La Vie Et À L’œuvre Du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Libermann*, vol. VII (Paris: 1938), (ND) X: 25
...we are evangelizing all the time but not proselytizing, and I think we have to be clear about this. The Muslims in Gambia, by and large, are a very peaceful people. They are moderate Muslims. They want peace. ... I think there is far more to evangelizing -- proclaiming the good news of the Gospel -- than merely wanting to add more adherents to our own Catholic institution and some people might not quite agree with that, but I think the main goal or purpose of Jesus in his work of preaching the Gospel was to convert people in the heart first of all.... I think Gambia is a very, very small country but it has one marvelous thing to export. I can’t find the right word.... It is the spirit of two major religions especially Christianity and Islam living side by side in the spirit of respect and understanding. You know the world that we live in is so torn apart, so divided, and in so much conflict particularly in the Christian and Muslim world that Gambia has something to give witness to; it is a living example that this is possible. Most of that is due to the nature of the Gambian people. They are a peace-loving people. They call themselves the smiling coast of West Africa and there is a lot of truth in that.  

b. Spiritans also carry on this prophetic dialogue today in Zanzibar and Algeria that are majority Muslim, and in Central and Northern Nigeria. In places, despite the low number of Catholics, discrete presence is the rule. As the Spiritan Rule of Life states, “our presence is witness and service in the name of the gospel of the Kingdom” (SRL, 15:3)

The above notes try to indicate the justification for the interest of the Spiritans and Duquesne University, a Spiritan university, in giving leadership and in facilitating reflection on dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Muslims in Africa, the United States and across the wide world.

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8 Robert Ellison, Interview, by Marie-Pauline Meyer for "Where God Weeps," a weekly TV & radio show produced by Catholic Radio & Television Network in conjunction with the international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need - BANJUL, Gambia, AUG. 23, 2010 (Zenit.org).
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Catholic Dialogue with People of Other Religions

Rev. Dr. Joseph Haruna Mamman

Associate Professor in Religious Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

Introduction

In his opening address to a conference on Jewish-Christian-Muslim “dialogue” held at the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute, New York, Authur Gouthro spoke of the factors, which are urging the great monotheistic faiths into conversation with each other.

These are:

(i) the growing awareness of living in an increasing interdependent world, wherein community ignore each other and live in isolation at their peril

(ii) a growing desire among major religions to create a more humane world order of justice and peace, which requires co-operation

(iii) an eagerness and willingness to recognize truth, however it is experienced and wherever it is found;

(iv) a greater understanding of the role of history in influencing ideas and culture; history gives us all –Jews, Christians and Muslims (we add Hindus, Buddhists) a form for self-examination; it calls us humility and forgiveness for our past sins against one another. (Shepherd, 1981:19)

The effort to promote understanding between Christians and Non-Christian religions since *Nostra Aetate* has been well documented. Although the declaration sparked a significant turning point, dialogue between Christians and other faiths had already begun and borne fruit (Flannery 1975). Dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths has its own relevance because of the common good which most religions share.
First, is the belief in and worship of one God, Creator and Judge of humanity and history. Such a faith demands that we recognize all men and women as brothers and sisters, respecting their dignity and freedom. Second, is the belief that history has a goal. All religions work towards the ultimate coming of God’s kingdom – a kingdom of justice, peace and unity. Third, all are called by God in a union with him through a particular way of life. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism for example, stress the special calling by God of Noah, Abraham and Moses – a calling, which was not only personal, but related to the whole community. However, each tradition has its own interpretation of history. In the light of the revelation stories in reference to God’s calling and probable difference in the hermeneutics of calling from each tradition, there might be conflict of understanding and interpretation. Fourth, is a shared biblical love and spiritual ancestors. Such biblical stories form foundations, share symbolism and archetypal images. We may not agree with each other’s interpretations, but we possess a firm basis of common knowledge and understanding.

Christians who have been involved in the ecumenical movement have also discovered that learning from each other is both necessary and possible. Many have argued, in practical terms that a position like “I am right and you …well, I know you are in good faith but…” simply do not fit. They have accepted that differences should not get in the way and that in order to survive, we cannot continue to stay apart. We can learn much from the Christian ecumenical experience; once we have been enjoined by ecumenism to question our uniqueness in terms of our place before God or our religious community before God vis-à-vis other Christians.
Similarly, we are obligated to question our exclusive tendency in relation to non-Christian religions, which have demonstrable values.

The situation of interreligious tensions in Nigeria, the middle East or India come as a stark reminder that dialogue between people of different faiths is needed, not because it is interesting or a theological luxury, but because, if it is not attempted, the social and political consequences could be irredeemable.

With this in mind, the topic of this essay will be treated under the following headings: definition of dialogue, its principles or aims, the problems of dialogue, and a guideline for dialogue.

**DIALOGUE: A DEFINITION**

The word dialogue comes from two Greek words, “dia” meaning “through” or “by means of” and “logos”, meaning “word”, “speech”, “reason”. In the New Webster Dictionary, the word is defined as follows: “A conversation between two persons, a formal conversation in theatrical performance; a composition in which two or more persons are presented as conversing on some topic; a frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue in an effect to attain mutual understanding”.

From the above definitions one can see that the word has quite a wide scope of applications, ranging from formal scientific exchange of views on a specific subject to ordinary conversation. Dialogue literally means words exchange between two persons. In common usage, it implies the mutual exchange of views of two free persons in the presence of each other with the
courage to speak boldly and honestly what one feels and thinks about the matters that pertain to him/her, and a readiness to listen patiently and attentively to the views and reactions of the other. Such a conversation provides the opportunity for promoting the right understanding about each other, for correcting any distortions about each other’s perception of matters related to each other and for enriching mutual relationships, which are indispensable for each other’s growth.

In order that such exchange of experiences may be meaningful, mutually enriching and help perfect each other’s religious pursuits, the atmosphere of such dialogue should be free, fearless and frank. Any pre-planned non-religious motivation on either side would certainly militate against the openness that is so need for understanding and recognizing the truth from one another’s point of view and indeed, from every point of view (Manichkam, 1983).

**PRINCIPLES OR AIMS OF DIALOGUE**

Religious dialogue is “seeking together for the truth”. “Seeking” presupposes that we do not yet possess the truth, at least, in full. The truth, though an abstract term, takes many and varied forms of expression corresponding to the phenomenon of pluralism that is actually existing in the world; in the geographical, cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, political, social and linguistic contexts. The truth does not have the same connotation for all people around the world. The meaning is relative to the exigencies of various people. It is in this context of the limitation and relativity of the expression of truth, in the pluralistic contexts of culture and history that we also accept the pluralism of truth-expression in the sphere of religion.
Whatever truth people claim to possess undergoes review, renewal, and transformation in the light of recent discoveries and the law of “natural dynamics.” Humans are limited and their religious traditions need mutual enrichment by way of complementing others. Thus, there is the need and room for honest and humble exchange of our religious experiences by means of sincerely pursued dialogues. For it is a well known fact that there is nothing as opposed to dialogue as the smug of self-sufficiency by people who hold that they are fully satisfied with what they own as truth. Such people are so caught up in their claim to all truth that they are not prepared to enter into the quest for broader truth or other perspectives of truth with others.

Closely related to “seeking the truth” of one who engages in dialogue is the attitude of complete openness and respect for the faith traditions of other people. In any meaningful dialogue, there should be no “hidden agenda”, no subtle attempt to convert or proselytize. It requires willingness to listen and to learn as well as the ability to teach effectively. It also requires readiness to criticize and compare without making unnecessary value-judgment, while all the time remembering clearly where one stands, the root from which one’s own faith has grown.

There must be genuine sensitivity to each other as human beings otherwise no kind of inter-religious dialogue is possible. The ‘other’ in dialogue should always be considered precisely as a person, never as mere object for research. True dialogue takes place between living persons not just between systems of thought. To see the other as a person implies that I see in him/her
as one worthy of being respected and appreciated. If one does not respect the other partner, then there can be no dialogue.

What must underline every sincere dialogue is the aspect of giving and receiving. Each one must be willing to share with the other the totality of his beliefs. It is, therefore, a sharing not only of beliefs but of lives.

In order to be completely present to others, one must first of all be willing to share the others’ lives, to psychologically and physically experience their world, while remaining faithfully to oneself and to one’s faith. According to each individual’s ability, each must realize this presence in the world of others, by acquiring a knowledge of the other’s language and culture, both past and present, and the actual conditions in which they live along with their hopes for the future... (Borrmans, 14).

For dialogue to be possible, each partner must be willing to overcome any difficulties, particularly the difficulty of freeing oneself from the many prejudices that there are regarding the faith of others, which prevent us from seeing the others in Christ.

Dialogue may entail for some of us a complete change of attitude. For dialogue makes us look upon others in a new light. We must not consider them as enemies to overthrow, nor as disciples we have to teach or even indoctrinate, as candidates to be won over, nor as people to be interviewed and made to talk, but as companions and equals with whom we wish to share the very best there is in our common existence. We must adopt the attitude of servant. Louis Massignon says: “if we want to understand somebody, we must not try to take possession of him, but become his guest” (Borrmans, 17).
In the journey of seeking together, each partner must act with responsibility, with lucidity and tact. The situation of the partner and his degree of preparedness must be taken into account. That means that the initial dialogue should consist in the breaking down of prejudices, “in the concrete demonstration of respect and love, rather than in an explicit conversation over a particular issue of faith” (Mason: 3).

For the dialogue not to degenerate into controversy there is need for serious and profound preparation. Responsibility and respect are ways to true openness towards the other and sympathy with him or her.

But to dialogue responsibly requires the ability to listen and to try to understand the other. Listening respectfully and thoughtfully to the religious insights of the other can bear much fruit, not least the deepening of one’s own faith. The World Council of Churches has stressed this point and articulated that dialogue must allow participants to describe and witness to their faith in their own terms, for self-serving descriptions of other people’s faith are one of the roots of prejudice.

We must be ready to have our way of life questioned, for this will give us the opportunity to explain more clearly both our outward actions and the way in which we envisage truth in our minds. All religions have something to teach us or to recall to us. They all invite us to reconsider the way in which we manifest our faith by words, concepts, feelings and acts. They reveal to us new ways of being which will lead us to discover insights which we have so far been left in obscurity or not sufficiently put into practice. (Bormans, 21-22).
To engage in dialogue is to accept the other just as he/she shows and expresses himself i.e, what he is and what he wants to be. Kenneth Cragg has nicely described this point thus:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else, we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. We must ask what is the authentic religious content in the experience of the others, not judging from outside his religious situation, but trying to sit, to enter sympathetically into the pains and griefs and joys of his history … We have in a word, to be ‘present’ with him”. (Cragg, 1979, 30).

The ability to listen to and learn from the other is particularly vital for any meaningful dialogue. Christians are called to tell their story and to listen to learn what others hear in it. They are also called to listen to the stories of other traditions in an attempt to discover what their understanding of salvation is, why it is linked to particular persons, events and teachings and how it can be meaningful in terms of their own experience.

Another principle is to seek together for the truth. Here, it must be pointed out that what we are seeking is not just truth-as-knowledge, truth-as-concept, but truth-as reality. The dialoguing partners come together to bring the truth of a thing, to cause truth to grow in its very being, so that the thing might respond ever more closely to what it is called to be. “A point that needs to be recognized here is our faith in the promise of Jesus Christ about the Holy Spirit of truth when he comes, he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (Jn. 16:13). The promise not only makes it necessary for us to enter into dialogue, but also to continue in it without fear, and with full
expectation and openness. It is not claimed that dialogue is the only way in this quest for truth, nor is it forgotten that discovery of truth is not inevitable. Possibilities of error, distortion and confusion are present in situation of dialogue as in any human situation (Samartha, 1971).

**PROBLEMS OF DIALOGUE**

The changes in the attitude and outlook of Catholics towards other religions in recent times are indeed welcome. Since Vatican II the Church’s attitude towards other religions has been positive, hence dialogue with people of other faiths has grown. However, it is not all smooth sailing yet. Many problems still persist, hindering effective dialogue between Catholics and other religions.

In view of the limitation of this article, two major problems will be discussed, namely: intra-religious problems and inter-religious problems.

**A Intra-religious problems**

There are problems arising in Catholicity because the move for dialogue comes into conflict with certain aspects of core faith and tradition of the Catholic Church. For example:

i. the uniqueness of Jesus Christ;

ii. the uniqueness of the church

iii. missionary vocation of the church

**(i) The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ**

This is the one truth, which is fundamental to the Catholic faith, a truth which is authoritatively taught in the New Testament and developed in the early centuries of the Christianity. This truth is the universal sovereignty of Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus the Nazarene, the God-made-man, who
is the one mediator between God and humanity that “men [and women] can find the fullness of religious life” (*Nostra Aetate*, Art. 2). Therefore, any religious tradition of humanity can be judged and justified only in relation to Jesus Christ.

The problem is: can such belief be in harmony with present day dialogue? We have maintained that any true dialogue calls for a sincere esteem and respect for the other and recognition of his/her distinct characteristics. If the Catholic Church is to justify her move to dialogue with people of other faiths, she must accept other religions as valid means of salvation. If, on the other hand, she retains her faith in the uniqueness of Christ, should she judge and justify other religions only in relation to Jesus Christ? The crux of the matter is: how is the Catholic Church to accept the authenticity of other religions and yet retain the unique revelation and universal salvific value of Jesus Christ?

(ii) **The Uniqueness of the Church**

Closely connected with the Catholic claim to the uniqueness of Christ is her claim to the uniqueness of her nature in relation to other religions. The secretary of the Papal secretariat for dialogue recently made the following observation:

> Each of the parties in dialogue has the right to adhering to these absolute, of feeling basically sure of his own position. He has the right (and the duty, if he is a Christian) to think that the other is not achieving human and religious fullness as willed by God. A Christian cannot place his own faith and other religions on the same level. He cannot hold that the Holy Spirit dwells equally in the church, in Hinduism and in the Dar-es-Islam. There cannot be agreement that each party in the dialogue is equally in truth, or that different
religions are only cultural and historical experience of a transcendent. (Rossano, 1979, 104).

From the above it is clear that the church still claim her position of uniqueness, even though she is trying to be sincerely open to other religions and ready to grant them the same right. The tension is between the church conserving her own unique identity and her present openness to other religions.

(iii) Missionary Vocation of the Church

In addition to the Church’s claim to the uniqueness of Christ is the realization of her vocation to be essentially “prophetic, missionary and evangelizing community”. That is why it is said that even the “dialogue takes place only in the ambit of the evangelizing mission” (Rossano, 1979, 104). That is why the various activities of the Church such as mission, evangelization, witness, and dialogue are all said to be derived for the same vocation of the Church and that the differences among them depend on the priorities and aspects, which are underlined in the various historical context and situations.

If essentially, the Church’s understanding of dialogue is as an activity connected with her evangelizing mission, the dialogic partners may be suspicious of the motives of the Church participating in dialogue. They may view it as a political or proselytizing mechanism – another dubious move toward conversion. And if the Church tries to remove such misconceptions from the minds of dialogue partners, in order to show total commitment to dialogue, her members may entertain the fears that the Church is compromising her essential missionary calling. (Push
Parajan, 1983). In either case therefore, the sincerity of the church is bound to be questioned by either the partners in dialogue or by the members of the church.

B Inter-religious Problems

Catholic dialogue with other religions has problems – not only because the exercise of dialogue may be in conflict with the Church’s own claims, but also because those claims themselves come into conflict with those of other religions (Rossano, 1980). The Church’s teaching on the Trinity and the person of Christ and His special role as the only Mediator of our salvation is a case in point. One approach to this problem is for Catholics to establish good dialogic relationships with people of other religious traditions by emphasizing the areas of agreement between the Catholic Church and other religions.

All these attempts are praiseworthy, but unless the fundamental problems are solved by the Church, we cannot hope for any success. And that fundamental problem is, whether the Catholic Church can appreciate the equality of status with all major religions of the world with whom it enters into dialogue. For unless religions in dialogue are prepared to accept each other as equally authentic, there cannot be any meaningful dialogue. In addition, there is the tension that exists between openness and faithfulness, between willingness to learn and the need to preserve the Catholic identity. While the Church’s universal mission of witnessing to Christ remains at the centre, Catholics need to uphold a deep respect for other religious traditions as genuine ways of salvation.
Guidelines For Dialogue

As stated above, the fundamental problem which the Catholic Church needs to significantly address in her dialogue with other religions is whether she is prepared to accept the equality of religions. If so, how? Here, one may briefly suggest some guidelines for such dialogue:

(i) Each partner must believe that the other is speaking in good faith

(ii) Each partner must have a clear understanding of his own faith

(iii) Each partner must strive for clear understanding of the other. And this means that each must be willing to interpret the faith of the other in its best rather than its worst.

(iv) Each partner should humbly accept responsibility for what his/her group has done against the goals and mission of dialogue.

(v) Each partner must recognize that all that can be done in dialogue is to offer it up to God. Offer it to God because He alone knows and has the truth. As the search of all truth those in dialogue must seek enlightenment from Him.

Every now and then, it is necessary to realize that we do not know everything about the ways of God. Our faith, like any relationship is not perfect. It must be remembered that no religion is wholly true or wholly imperfect.

Immutability and absoluteness are categories of the other world, the divine realm. If, thus, Christianity is bound to be perfect, and is in need of growth, then it can never claim absoluteness vis-à-vis other religions. All religions are there equal in this that all have the truth but mixed with imperfections in varying degrees (Push Parajan, 1983:267).
Therefore, contact with the non-Christians may be another suitable catalyst. We all need to realize that there are “elements of revelation,” that other religions “are all impregnant with innumerable seeds of the world” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 53) and that our understanding of Christ and the Christian life can be enriched by such contact.

CONCLUSION

Anyone who engages seriously in dialogue will soon discover that he learns as much about his/her own religion as he does about that of others. But in dialogue, one is not out to convert the other, nor even to convince him/her of the coherence of one’s own position. The sincere effort of the Catholic is to share his/her faith with another person which is itself an act of witnessing to Christ. The other person is not a superstitious infidel who needs to be rescued from inevitable damnation.

The Catholic conviction is that he/she is also an object of God’s love and who knows that his/her contact and dialogue with the non-Christian may be a renewed source of God’s grace in some mysterious way, which we do not understand.
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Root Causes and The Human/Economic Costs of Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria in the Last Two Decades: A Theological, Social, and Political Evaluation

Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

Introduction:

This article sets out to accomplish three primary goals, namely to attempt at giving some monetary value to the costs of the religious conflicts in northern Nigeria, to provide what might be considered the root causes of many of the religious conflicts, and to provide a theologian’s response to the prevailing social violence in the name of religion. While other parts of Nigeria including the south-south (the oil rich region of the country, which has experienced long running violence from local militia) areas have had ongoing conflicts and violent disruption of normal social lives, most of those are purely for political and economic reasons. The cases of orchestrated violence in northern and middle belt areas of Nigeria have, for the most part a combination of economic, political, social, and religious factors. Moreover, the religious factor

has been a single feature that arouses not only local and national interest but more importantly international and indeed global attention and sympathy.

**Table 1. Violent Conflicts before 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>City or State</th>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th># of Lives Lost</th>
<th># of Injuries</th>
<th>Material Losses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maitatsine riots</td>
<td>Kano city</td>
<td>December 1980</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitatsine riots</td>
<td>Maiduguri</td>
<td>October 1982</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitatsine riots</td>
<td>Jimeta and Yola</td>
<td>February 1984</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>N/A¹⁰</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitatsine riots</td>
<td>Gombe</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-Muslim</td>
<td>Kafanchan</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20 cars, 1 church, 1 mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-Muslim</td>
<td>Kaduna city</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>14 churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-Muslim</td>
<td>Zaria</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>152 churches, 5 mosques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁰ According to the record contained in the work of Edlyne Anugwom (2008, p. 173) “It is instructive that, while 30,000 people were rendered homeless, more than 170,000 were displaced from their businesses, and the multi-million Naira modern market in Yola was completely burnt down.”
Religious Conflicts Since 1990

The phenomenon of religion motivated violent conflicts up to 1990 consisted mostly of Muslim and Christian college students or Muslim youth in conflict with one other. Beginning in 1990, there was a paradigm shift from university campuses being the epicenter and source of the conflicts, to the active involvement of Muslim and Christian youths between the ages of 14 to 25 in the cities as warriors on both sides. The incidents recorded in the table below resulted in significant loss of life and in considerable destruction of property. Each of which cost millions of dollars in damage and economic losses not counting the human victims and emotional trauma that painfully and significantly changed the lives of thousands and even millions of people.

Most of the primary and secondary sources of information for this essay reported with approximation on the human losses and some statistical information on economic losses in terms of the number of houses of worship, homes, and businesses that were destroyed or damaged. It has been hard to get any accurate data on the monetary equivalence of the losses. The lacuna in providing comprehensive financial data of the economic loss is symptomatic of the lack of depth and thoroughness on the part of the government to investigate and assess the damages and losses.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>City or State</th>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th># of Lives Lost</th>
<th># of Injuries</th>
<th>Material Losses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonnke riot</td>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>200?</td>
<td>100s</td>
<td>20 churches, 100 vehicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akaluka riot</td>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprisal religious riot</td>
<td>Kano</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zango-Kataf riots</td>
<td>Zango-Kataf</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>100?</td>
<td>100s</td>
<td>133 homes, 26 private farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharia riot</td>
<td>Kaduna city</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1000s</td>
<td>961 homes, 105 mosques, &amp; over 200 churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss World riot</td>
<td>Kaduna city</td>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100s</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-Muslim riots</td>
<td>Jos</td>
<td>2001-2003</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1000s</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-Muslim riot</td>
<td>Jos</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 Tables 1 and 2 above show incidents of religious crises in different parts of northern Nigeria. The number of lives and properties lost are approximate. Most of the records available did not provide specific records of injuries and monetary values of properties lost or destroyed. However, it is common knowledge that in these cases private as well as public properties are looted and destroyed in addition to the destruction and vandalism of places of worship.

12 This riot was a reprisal attack by Muslims on Christians in Kano after news of the heavy losses suffered by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims living in Jos, Plateau state. About 30,000 Christians living in Kano were displaced as a result of the attacks.

13 A very significant number of the casualties of this conflict were people who trace their ancestry to the south. Consequently there were reprisal attacks of Muslims from the north in some southern cities particularly Umuahia and Owerri. The attacks led to the death of about 31 suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslims residing in these cities.

14 There were series of violent conflicts in Jos metropolis and its environs primarily between the indigenous ethnicities of Jos and Hausa-Fulani settlers. However, conflict was dubbed Muslim-Christian conflict resulting in the burning of churches and mosques. Over 250,000 people are recorded to have been displaced.
More Recent Incidents of Violent Religious Conflicts

The so-called religious violence in Jos has not seemed to dissipate as there were a number of incidents in 2010. In March 2010, an estimated 500 people were killed in rounds of violent clashes between the Christian dominated indigenous ethnicities and Muslim Hausa-Fulani settlers. Earlier in January about 200 people were reported killed in similar circumstance in the city of Jos.\(^\text{15}\)

To evaluate the loss suffered as a result of these violent encounters, it is important to know that although there are many commissions set up by the government to access the damages, most of the data collected about those who suffered and what was lost are often from the various organizations whose properties were vandalized, religious groups, the media, The Red Cross, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and other NGOs. The government sponsored investigations and commission are still not easily accessible to the public. Moreover, the bulk of the loss suffered by the masses are neither fully documented nor even accounted for. Consequently, any figures we have are only rough estimates. Yet the losses suffered by private citizens through these crises in a conservative estimate should run into hundreds of billions of dollars. Unfortunately, for most of the affected private citizens, there are no forms of sustainable compensation from the government or effective prosecution of those who promote and participate in these orgies of violence.

The last incidents of violent conflicts, before this publication, took place again in the city of Jos beginning on Christmas Day, 2010. Three incidents of bomb blasts were reported at different locations in the city of Jos. Those bomb blasts resulted in the death of about 80 people, injuries to over 100 people, and the destruction of both private and public properties. It was reported that this round of attacks came 10 days after a Nigerian court convicted 15 persons to 10 years in prison for their involvement in the March 2010 rounds of violence.\(^\text{16}\)

A 2004 government report shows that between 1999 and 2004, over 50,000 Nigerians lost their lives in separate religious, ethnic, and politically motivated violent incidents. It is estimated that over 60% of the total number of casualties resulted from religious motivated conflicts. Approximately 90% of those religious motivated clashes took place in the northern Nigeria. The report also showed that over 800,000 people have been displaced for the same period due to the different incidents of violence.\(^\text{17}\)

In addition, there is profound emotional trauma and other intangible effects that such gruesome violence inflicts on the psyche of victims and survivors. This explains the massive displacement and subsequent relocation of people from cities were they risked dying or experienced unbearable trauma inflicted on them and others by fellow country people.

\(^{16}\) See “Death toll of bomb blast reaches 80 in Nigeria’s Jos.” Xinhua News Agency.

Prognosis, Recommendation, and Conclusion

At this juncture, this essay will focus on some of the root causes of the conflicts and suggestions for effectively eliminating them:

1. The indigene-settlers mentality, which is legitimized by the constitution and the setting up of the Federal Character Commission in 1995. The federal character principle, which first came into use in the 1979 constitution, albeit with a good intention of preserving and promoting the minority ethnicities, has become the raison d’être to perpetuate and promote organized discrimination in every part of the country. Therefore, although the federal constitution guarantees citizenship rights and benefits to every Nigerian, the indigene-settler mentality based on the federal character policy has alienated millions of Nigerians in their own country. Consequently, those adversely affected by the principles are denied equal access to government employment, education, and other benefits, specially reserved for indigenes. Religious violent conflicts are sometimes the direct outcome of people’s attempt to address the indigene-settler legislation. The incidents in Jos are certainly typical cases of the fallout resulting from indigene-settler legislation. The Hausa-Fulani communities, who are predominantly Muslims, have stated in a clear and vociferous manner their objection to being denied political opportunities because they are legal treated as settlers. Inversely, the Hausa-Fulanis who dominate places like Kano, Zaria, Katsina, and parts of Kaduna city are using the same indigene-settler legislation/policy to deny non-Muslim people of other ethnicities who reside in those areas the right to social, political, and economic opportunities in those cities and states.
2. There is an obvious lack of will from the political authorities to appropriately use legal instruments of law to redress ongoing violent conflicts. While the problems of violence, which have very strong ethnic and cultural roots, reflect the pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria, the attempts at solutions have not reflected the development in law and governance in Nigeria. Victims of these acts of violence are hardly acknowledged or supported, nor are the perpetrators of the different incidents of violence duly prosecuted.

3. There are studies to show the correlation of the economic downturn Nigeria faced in the early 1980s to the upsurge in religious fundamentalism and extreme ethnic bigotry. During the economic crises, according to Chidi, “many people found refuge within their religion ... Religion becomes a very powerful force during adverse condition.”

4. There is need to extend the invitation for active religious dialogue to all major stakeholders in the society, which will include, civil servants, students, academic institutions, scholars from different disciplines, economists, social activists, people who are neither Muslims or Christians, non-religious people, NGOs involved in community activities and all other stakeholders in the society. This opinion is borne out of the fact that many of these groups of people are immediate victims and suffer different levels of casualty from religious riots. Secondly, some of them are willing or unwilling

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instruments used by instigators of the violence to perpetuate the instigators’ vicious plans.

5. In addition, this author proposes that religious organizations in Nigeria engage in more aggressive pursuit and promotion of dialogue of action as well as dialogue of life. These two forms of dialogue are indispensably necessary for the religions bodies that operate in Nigeria to regain respect and friendship among each other. There are many projects promoting the common good that will be accomplished if Muslims, Christians, and other religions represented in Nigeria collaborate with each other. Collaborations of Muslims and Christians are common in the southwestern parts of Nigeria. Northern Nigerian Christians and Muslims can learn from this. Indeed, nationally, jointly sponsored programs by Christians and Muslims will promote the healing necessary to ameliorate the hate rhetoric and polemics that have often provoked violent responses and reactions from groups of people from the two dominant religions.

There is need for government and independent organizations to thoroughly investigate and provide comprehensive data of the cost of every religious motivated conflict that has and will occur. It is not enough to give only the number of lives lost and number of physical structures damaged or demolished. It will help to quantify all the economic and human losses that result from these conflicts. There is no doubt that the different levels of government, corporate and religious organizations as well as private individuals have suffered financial losses that amount to hundreds of billions of dollars in the last twenty years. If the public and interested organizations actually see in print the dollar value of each religiously motivated conflict, the
sensitivity and sense of responsibility of those entrusted with the duties of security of lives and property in these cities may be seriously challenged. In addition, the public and relevant authorities will be strongly persuaded to demand for more accountability and appropriate litigation of all perpetrators and facilitators of the violence.\footnote{19}

Many have benefitted either from the conflicts or because of the conflicts. Those who loot and steal, those who feel intimated by the presence of the other, hate mongers, and religious fundamentalists, as well as those whose political successes thrive on such conflict or because of such conflicts and violence help to advance their own selfish goals. That is why a government policy or legislation that will address the root causes of the sectarian conflicts is crucial toward ending ongoing religious and ethnic motivated violence in different parts of Nigeria.

We have certainly not seen the end in these incidents of bloodbaths and mindless destruction until the root problems of these crises are critically and definitively addressed. While some of the solutions need direct government legal involvement, there is much work that Muslim and Christian organizations in Nigeria can do to end the conflict in the name of religion. They can all start by disassociating themselves from all forms of violent response to political, social, and cultural matters.

\footnote{19} It must be noted that a huge size of research and literature have been committed to highlight most of the incidents of religious violence in Nigeria from renowned authors like Toyin Falola, Pat Williams, John Paden, and Matthew Kukah. In addition, both electronic and print media have huge dossier of information on religious violence in Nigeria, most of which focus on enumerating or approximating the number of lives and properties lost. The red cross, Human Rights Monitor, Amnesty International, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, many government sponsored panels, and several NGOs that are interested in such sectarian conflicts equally have their own statistics and figures of lost lives and properties. In my research, which has been quite extensive, I have yet to get comprehensive records of the economic and human losses suffered resulting from such religious conflicts with details on the monetary values of the loss and the impact of such losses on the economy of the different cities as well as the national economy at large. There is certainly a lacuna in the reports from all these credible sources. The government, especially, should not only have the facts of the security cost and losses but also the economic costs and losses suffered from these perennial religious conflicts.
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Dr Chris Vervliet


Introduction

This article compares the (South) African Ubuntu philosophy, European personalism and Muslim Shakçânyya. While these philosophies originated in different settings, they share common concerns about the human being – the “Person” - and the relation of individual and society. It will also present a brief description of these three philosophies, the context in which they originated and their principal viewpoints. It is argued that they share common approaches along three dimensions:

1. the tension between the individual and the community;
2. the tension between traditionalism and modernism;
3. the human status: elevated or subject to nature.

We believe that European personalism, African Ubuntu, and Muslim Shakçânyya have the potential of providing a synthesis on the first and second dimension. At the same time, they share on the third dimension a common elevated approach to the Person.
Across centuries and civilizations, these three types of tension have stimulated political and philosophical thinking (or alternatively fuelled conflict). Hence, we believe that the awareness of common concerns and common answers may contribute to the dialogue of civilizations.\(^{20}\)

History today is at a watershed. Looming in front of us is the menace of a clash of civilizations, as predicted by the American academic Samuel Huntington. Luring our hopes is the perspective of an ultimate convergence of civilizations, as predicted by a variety of authors, ranging from Léopold Senghor to Francis Fukuyama. This is what this article is all about. In an age when much is being said about the clash of civilizations, we have discovered concerns that transcend the boundaries of civilizations and answers that are remarkable through their similarity.

Central in our analysis is the notion of the human person, as embedded in the European personalist tradition and the Thomist-catholic legacy. However, we believe that this notion of the human person is not confined to the European tradition, but is also implicitly present in the African Ubuntu philosophy, where it arrived at from another, equally unique perspective. Moreover, we will point at similarities with a forgotten brand of Muslim personalism, called Shakçânyya.

Ubuntu

In the context of colonization and decolonization, prominent African writers, thinkers and politicians felt the need to think about the dignity and authenticity of African civilisation – as contrasted to Western society. Africans, often being more spiritual and communal than their Western counterparts, are more likely to express these prominent themes. The thinking of authors such as Senegalese and Tanzanian presidents Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) and Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) demonstrate this. These ideas got a political translation into concepts such as African socialism or African communalism. The Tanzanian Ujamaa policy, for example, was derived from it. This African socialism was said to differ from European socialism in that it was not derived from “class conflict” but from the communal nature of African society. Nyerere and Senghor explain below:

Ujamaa, then, or ‘familyhood’ describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man (Nyerere, 1962).

And,

Because the Negro Africans have kept a sense of brotherhood and dialogue, because they are inspired by religions that preach love and above all, because they live those religions, they can propose positive solutions for the construction of the international as well as the national community (Senghor, 1964, 148).

The South African Ubuntu thinking is related to this tradition, but originated in a different context. It came to prominence in the nineties, i.e. nearly thirty years later. Just like the communalist thinking of the sixties, Ubuntu finds the answer in harmony of the individual and the community. The philosophy of Ubuntu is reflected in the proverb “umuntu ngumuntu
ngabantu,” meaning a person becomes a person through other persons. Ubuntu itself means humanity, human nature. Uluntu, the Xhosa-word for community and umuntu (person) are related to the same root. The complementarity of umuntu (person) and uluntu (community) is said to be inherent to African society, as is demonstrated by the fact that both words are derived from the same root.

As such, Ubuntu is part of an encompassing movement of reappraisal of the African heritage. At the same time, however, it tries to get to grips with the hindsight of history. The focus is no longer on the ownership of the means of production, but rather, for example, on how to introduce an Ubuntu-inspired management-style in corporate life. Issues that pop up in this context are participation and consultation within enterprises, corporate culture, but all of this with a favourable inclination towards the concept of entrepreneurial activity as such.

The Ubuntu philosophy is referred to in a variety of areas, for example in welfare politics and with regard to self-help organizations and community participation in the development process. Finally, a very specific contextual aspects needs to be mentioned. Most of the literature on Ubuntu appeared in the nineties, i.e. in the aftermath of the dismantling of apartheid. This also explains some of the themes being discussed. Desmond Tutu contrasts Ubuntu with racism, but at the same time relates it with forgiveness. Ubuntu was one of the major principles underlying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which accompanied the transition to a post apartheid South Africa.
This is not to say that Ubuntu is without its critics. The first critique boils down to the question: was traditional African society really as idyllic as Ubuntu wants us to believe? A second critique raises a totally different question. Even if traditional societies were really as communal as Ubuntu claims, is that really what we want? The role of the group, according to these critics, can be overwhelming. Hence, innovative creations of intellectual African intellectuals or refusals to participate in communalism are stifled. We will return to this issue later on in this article.

**Personalism**

From Africa, we now expand the debate. In the nineteenth century, the scientific and industrial revolutions challenged the traditional views on what being human meant. Later, the upheavals of the early twentieth century, the First World War, economic crisis, and the rise of totalitarian ideologies provoked an intense philosophical debate on the essence of human dignity and on the relation between the individual and the community.

In this context, personalism arose. In the personalist tradition, human beings are endowed with an inalienable human dignity. Human beings attain their dignity by being part of the community; although the personalist tradition is swift to add that they retain a proper identity and should not be reduced to collectivity.

The personalist tradition is associated with the French philosophers Jacques Maritain (1882 – 1973) and Emmanuel Mounier (1905 – 1950) and the lesser know Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev (1874 – 1948), who wrote from exile in Paris. The personalist tradition draws upon
the Thomistic legacy. Maritain in particular, saw himself as working in line with the thinking of Thomas Aquinas.

Common themes in the writings of these philosophers, who influenced one another are:

- the dignity of the human person, as reflected in the use of the word “person”, rather than “individual”
- the belief in a legal and moral order common to human beings and all cultures – as reflected in the Universal Declarations of Human Rights;
- the importance of interpersonal relations.

While the personalist authors were clearly influenced by their Christian conviction, (Catholicism in the case of Maritain and Mounier; Orthodoxy in the case of Berdyaev), they did not consider their views to be relevant only for a Christian audience. Maritain cherished the notion of natural law, a moral order governing all human beings. He believed that this natural law was ‘written’ into human nature by God. However, certain basic natural rights can be recognized by all, without an agreement on their divine foundation (example: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

In Western Europe, which is increasingly becoming a secular society, personalism is equally becoming secular, maintaining its essential assumptions about the dignity of the human person, yet without recourse to God. Some of the themes that were introduced by personalism have in the meantime been picked up by other strands of thinking. The focus on the complementarity of the individual and society, for example, also prevails in Amitai Etzioni’s
“communautarianism” (Center for Communautarian Studies at George Washinton University) and in the notion of “social capital.”

After the Second World War, European Christian-democracy tried to translate personalist thinking into political practice. Christian-democracy recognizes that people are engaged in a diversity of social relations. We are part of a family. Through our children, we are part of the school community. At work, we meet our colleagues. Those who are practicing believers are part of a church community. We may be part of a hobby club. We may feel affinity to those whom we consider to be our cultural peers. We are citizens of our country: and so on.

In political terms, this is done by invoking the principles of subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty. Subsidiarity means that political competencies should be transferred to the lowest level of government, unless there are good reasons to assume that a higher level of government is better placed to carry out a particular task. The notion of sphere sovereignty implies that the state, society, family, school, church…. comprise different spheres of responsibility and autonomy and are inviolable by one another.

The reader will remember that one of the objections raised at Ubuntu was the fear that the community would exert too stifling an influence on the individual. By recognizing a diversity of communal circles, this dilemma can be avoided. Does the coercive nature of society not follow when one sphere of society is becoming all-pervasive: the nation in nationalism; religion in religious fundamentalism; class in Marxism?
The personalist authors who wrote in between 1930 and 1950 were confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, there was a sense of disillusionment with capitalism —after the 1929 crash (is there a similarity here with today’s financial crisis?). On the other hand, there was the experience (for some the lure) of totalitarian ideologies, such as Stalinism and national-socialism. Christian-democracy tries to come to terms with this dilemma by favouring a slightly regulated market economy with a comprehensive system of social security and consultation. The market economy is preferred, not only because of its efficiency, but also because it is considered to be an alternative against too much state power. However, the dignity of the human person implies that he or she should neither be a victim of state power, nor of anonymous market mechanisms. Hence, there are policies to curtail the risks inherent to the market economy and to protect the weak.

*Shakçânyya*

A little known brand of personalism is associated with the Moroccan author Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi (1922 -1993). With Lahbabi, we return to the African continent. Throughout his life, he lectured at various universities, particularly at the Mohammed V University in Rabat (Morocco). In 1987, he was nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Prize of Literature. A particular focus of his work is the synthesis of Arab-Islamic and Western-humanistic ideas.

In his 1964 book “Le personnalisme musulman” (Muslim personalism), Lahbabi introduces the word “Shakçânyya” as an Arab translation of “personalism”. “Shakçânyya” is derived from the Arab “Shakç”, meaning person. According to Lahbabi, Islam values the person in many respects.
First of all, the human being is a sacred being. In saying so, Lahbabi introduced the notion of religious freedom and tolerance.

By calling people to testify about God, Islam incites people to a personal quest for truth: “The yes of those who testify can only gain validity if there is also a possibility to say no” (Lahbabi, 1964, 68-70). He continues, “Personalism starts where the person refuses the blind submission to anyone or anywhat and recognizes the supreme value of reason and spirit (...) There is no constraint in religion” (Lahbabi, 1964, 7).

Just like Ubuntu and the European personalists, Lahbabi points at the need for interpersonal relations. Yet at the same time, he warns for the potential coercive character of society and potentially of the state. He explains, “Every person is a creature created in a divine masterpiece, yet a unique creature. The human universe presents itself as a book of infinite size, where the pages complement one another yet remain different: autonomous and interdependent” (Lahbabi, 1964, 7).

Additionally, “The person is an autonomous reality, yet in an interdependence – a communautarian. To say I or me, also implies others. It means introducing an irreducible relationship. The I is autonomy in the interdependence of the ‘us’ “ (Lahbabi, 1964, 23)

(The human person) derives his autonomy from his reasoning. Initiative, autonomyn reason, all constitute the human person and allow him to transcend the determinisms of nature, the social disorder and the tyranny of individuals and groups. Let us take the example of the State. This is constituted by human beings, but it may happen that it dehumanizes. The State depersonalizes people from the moment that it destroys the autonomy of the individuals (Lahbabi, 1964, 55).
The essence of personalism is the dignity of the human being and its fellowman. The dignity consists herein that we all become conscious of being worthwhile, that we have to embark on an adventure in our own universe, the adventure of a ‘liberation’ in the respect of the other. These freedoms imply our responsibility: solidarity and equality with all other persons. For the authentic Islam is, and could not be something else, than personalist” (Lahbabi, 1964: 104).

Lahbabi’s personalism is not uniquely focused on abstract philosophical and religious matters but also introduces an engagement in the ‘material’ world. He explains,

Islam today should confront the industrial civilization with a realistic mind, with new insights, engaged in the earthly problems. To the extent that they can reconcile ‘heaven’ and earth, religious beliefs and daily secular practice, Muslim believers will be followed (Lahbabi, 1964: 118).

In this respect, he also argues for the equality of men and women and for the recognition of the full rights of (religious) minorities.

**Common questions, common answers**

In the preceding paragraphs, attention was paid to three distinct brands of thinking: African Ubuntu, European personalism and Muslim Shakçânyya. Although being rooted in three different civilizations, they display some remarkable similarities. Central to all three is the dignity of the human person and the complementarity of the individual and the community. Can these common concerns, arisen in different settings, contribute to the dialogue of civilizations? Please allow me a personal touch. I believe that across centuries and civilizations, three fundamental fields of tensions have stimulated political and philosophical thinking.
The first one is the tension between the individual and the community. What prevails: the rights of the individual or those of the community? While there may be subtle differences, there is common ground between African Ubuntu, personalism and Shakçânyya. None of these three are situated at the extremes of the bipolarity. All three emphasize that personal autonomy goes hand in hand with interpersonal relations and interpersonal solidarity. At the same time, there is scope for cross-fertilisation to alleviate the common concern that personal autonomy be not sacrificed to the collectivity. In this respect we refer to our remarks above. By recognizing that social relations comprise a plurality of spheres (examples: state, society, family, school, church…) which all have their proper role and autonomy, the complementarity of person and community can be achieved without sacrificing the person to the collectivity. As we pointed out, the coercive nature of society follows when one sphere of society is becoming all-pervasive.

The second concept is the tension between tradition and modernism. Ubuntu, personalism and Shakçânyya have the potential to position tradition and modernism as complementary to one another – not as opposites. Shakçânyya argues in favour of an intellectual quest for truth, devoid of any formalism. This clearly is a modernistic stance. Yet at the same time, Lahbabi states that this is an inherently Islamic right and duty. In other words: modernism is legitimized by referring to the tradition.

Ubuntu’s community focus is derived from the African communal way of living. However, at the same time there is an endeavor to match this romantic enchantment with modern day
requirements: such as corporate life. This synthesis not only enhances the legitimacy of today’s requirements but also facilitates the transition from the past to the present.

Personalism for its part has linked concepts borrowed from the Thomistic and Catholic social tradition with concepts of wider societal and secular relevance, such as subsidiarity, social capital, and free market economy with social corrections. 

Finally, there is the view on the status of men and women: do we consider them as elevated or subject to nature? Ubuntu, Shakçânyya and personalism clearly share an elevated view on the men and women, a view, which by the way, is also shared by secular humanism.

Just to illustrate the omnipresence of each of these tensions: a far as the tension between the individual and the collectivity is concerned, we stated that personalism, Ubuntu and Shakçânyya share the potential to reconcile personal autonomy, interpersonal relations and interpersonal solidarity. In this respect, we referred amongst others to the plurality of spheres, but also to free market with social corrections. However, throughout history, different ideologies have given different answers to this question. In this respect, we have referred to doctrines where one sphere of society is given an all-pervasive meaning as example of systems where the collectivity prevailed. In the economic field, one could refer to the bipolarity of the theoretical uncorrected free-market theory on the one hand and collectivism on the other. 

As far as the tension between modernism and traditionalism is concerned, some historical examples may illustrate the omnipresence of this tension. In Europe, the French Revolution (1789) overthrew the traditional vestiges of power and introduced a whole set of administrative innovations (modernism). However, the introduction of these new structures
often provoked local insurgencies (traditionalism). In Mozambique, the ruling party Frelimo transformed itself after independence into a Marxist-Leninist party. Adhering to the laws of “scientific socialism”, it considered the existing traditional authorities as feudal and retrograde (modernism). As the euphoria waned, so did the belief in the ability to transform society according to the laws of scientific socialism. The mere fact that this tension is so omnipresent, illustrates the potential contribution of Ubuntu, personalism and Shakçânyya which, as we have discussed above, have the potential to position tradition and modernism as complementary to one another, rather than as opposites.

Finally and more difficult is the third tension: what is the status of men and women? Do we consider them as subject to or elevated above nature? Today, few philosophers, scientists or politicians wittingly doubt the status of the human person. I believe that such a reduction is much more an unintended consequence of different influences. For example, there was the spectacular progress of science, which started in the sixteenth century. On the one hand, science offers the human person perspectives, which he could never have dreamt of before: the capacity to cure diseases, to create welfare, to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. On the other hand, it has dethroned humans from their pedestal. The human person has been reduced to a tiny piece of ‘dust’ in the endless vastness of the universe. The question here is not to contest the scientific contributions, but rather: does the fact that we are just a tiny dust in the endless vastness of the universe mean that all our life’s, emotions, meanings, values, loves, compassion, pains... can be reduced to being meaningless as well? The potential contribution of Ubuntu, personalism and Shakçânyya is their common endeavour to promote the dignity of the
human person as a central concern – while at the same time being fully aware of “physics and chemistry”. This is not a merely theoretical issue. Was not scientific socialism based on the premise that history followed a predetermined path, determined by economic relations and class struggle (in other words, in this view history was not made by men and women, but by a mechanism dependent on abstract categories)? Also, in human sciences in general, there are ample examples of efforts to find analytical categories that may be helpful to explain (and sometimes predict) society, the economy... by trying to analyse society in terms of analytical categories, the particular is sacrificed to the generality of categories, thus implicitly reducing the value of the particular.

In this article, we compared Ubuntu, personalism and Shakçânyya - philosophies that originated in different contexts, in different continents and different civilizations. Despite the different settings in which they originated, they invoke similar concerns and similar questions. Moreover, we also discovered similarities in the answers they provided.

Former Senegalese president Léopold Senghor was both a passionate advocate of “négritude” (African cultural identity) and an admirer of French culture. By inter-fecundating one another, cultures all over the world can contribute to the construction of the “Civilisation of the Universal”, so he believed: “It is a question of placing our nation not only in the Africa of today, but also in the Civilisation of the Universal yet to be built. The latter, as I repeat, will be a symbiosis of the most fecundating elements of all civilizations” (Senghor, 1964, 83). I hope that the awareness of common questions and common answers may contribute to this dialogue of civilizations.
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Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims: Reflections on Yesterday and Today

Sandra Toenies Keating, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Theology, Providence College, Providence Rhode Island

The past decade has seen tremendous change in the Middle East and North Africa, which has had a direct effect on the relationship between Muslims and Christians worldwide. This effect has by no means been uniform, and ranges from violence against Christians in Egypt and Iraq and legal restrictions on Muslim practices in Europe to increased dialogue and coalitions of Muslims and Christians in the US and Canada, as well as Indonesia, parts of Africa and Lebanon, to name only a few. Much of the positive groundwork for improved relations between the two communities had been laid in the last century and is just now bearing fruit. We should not, however, ignore the deeper roots of dialogue in past exchanges. Most people tend to think of interreligious dialogue as a very recent phenomenon. Particularly for Christians with European roots, official dialogue with Muslims (as well as with adherents of most other religions) has taken place with regularity only in the past fifty years. Indeed, for Roman Catholics, the first official dialogues were sanctioned with the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate, 1965) at the Second Vatican Council, and clarified by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Dialogue and Proclamation (1991). But a

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21 (Second Vatican Council 1965).

narrow understanding of dialogue as official interactions between two communities neglects the wide variety of rich exchange that has occurred throughout history between Christians and others.

From a broader perspective, interreligious ‘dialogue’ can be understood as those relations between members of religious communities that enrich each and bring about mutual understanding. Thus, any interaction that moves the two towards deeper self-reflection and respect for the other is a form of dialogue (DP 9). In light of this, *Dialogue and Proclamation* outlined the now well-known varieties of dialogue: of life, of action, of theological exchange, and of religious experience (DP 42). Of these, the third, dialogue of theological exchange, is most often questioned for a variety of reasons and is frequently avoided by experts and non-experts alike. One might legitimately ask what its purpose can be, given the general goal of dialogue to seek common ground for practical cooperation, while avoiding compromising doctrine or traditional beliefs. Since it is clear from the outset that doctrinal disagreement is the source of the separation between the two religious communities, can any constructive good come from drawing attention to differences? Is there not a danger either that the differences will be deepened, causing more tension, or that compromise will weaken both religious communities?

In light of these questions I would like to take this opportunity to reflect briefly on the importance of the relationship between the dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of life. One can see the interaction between these two forms (even when it has not been made
explicit) wherever Christians have lived side by side with those who are adherents of other faiths. In its most simple manifestation, dialogue occurs when practical questions of living together in diverse communities need to be answered in a manner consistent with religious convictions. The failure to resolve conflicting answers to these questions can, and all too often do, result in hostilities or bloodshed. There are, however, alternatives with deep roots in the traditions of Muslims and Christians alike that can provide avenues for peaceful resolution and growth in mutual understanding. These alternatives include dialectical exchange and debate, as well as legal negotiation, which support conversation within the religious community itself and discussion among representatives among communities. The current situation in which rapid change is taking place in the governing bodies of several countries in the Middle East and North Africa is a good example of this phenomenon, as it brings with it the potential for either religious strife or the creation of the kinds of power-sharing that allows peaceful communities. It is here that a dialogue of life that including theological exchange is most important. Knowing, understanding and valuing one’s neighbors is perhaps the most powerful incentive for creating communal structures that sustain the plurality that is necessarily a characteristic of modern society.

But in the longer-term it is critical that the basis for governmental structures be seen by religious adherents as coherent, or at least not in direct conflict, with their deeply held religious convictions. Although a state’s religious indifference may be regarded by those who advocate a strong separation of religion and state as contradictory to the democratic ideal, the failure of governing structures to create an environment where religious communities can flourish has
consistently resulted in tension and reactionary movements. These movements, which have been labeled by some as ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘radical’, can be found in a wide variety of cultures and religions, including Hindus in India, Muslims in Afghanistan and Iran, Christian Evangelicals in the United States, to name only a few of the most well-known. Very often, what drives individuals to reactionary movements is the impression that religious ideals and their cultural manifestations are under attack by a combination of the state and the wider culture. In rejecting any attempt at secularization that puts limits on religious influence, these groups seek solutions to everything from the economy to law within their particular religious system, driven by the feeling that ‘living according to the divine order’ will result in peace and prosperity.

In my opinion, the answer to this widespread trend must come from the results of the interaction between those involved in the dialogue of life and those engaged in theological exchange for the purpose of articulating coherent theologies that can accommodate the many demands of modernity. While it is true that this interaction often occurs on a small scale locally, the existence of an international ‘community’ and the phenomenon of globalization have placed increased pressure for secularization on governing structures, often leaving religion to play a minor role. But our pluralistic societies of today can afford neither total secularization nor theocracies if they are to foster peaceful, thriving communities of diverse individuals where religious beliefs and practices can be fully expressed. Societies that balance social order and pluralism with deeply held religious convictions will be our best bet for the future.
Interactions in the Past

The uncertainty of how to build such a community has led us to sift through history to identify a model. But, when one considers past relations between Muslims and Christians, it is tempting both to idealize the success of particular communities and to paint failure in broad strokes. Neither is helpful, however, when we seek to find ways in contemporary society to address particular problems. Throughout the Middle East, North Africa and other areas, Christians and Muslims coexisted, in more or less prosperity depending on a multitude of economic, political and social factors. At different periods of time and in different places, the recognition of the protected status (*dhimma*) of monotheists under Islamic law (*Shar’iah*) afforded Christians and Jews a legal, albeit secondary status, in Muslim societies (for an excellent study on the early period of this phenomenon, see Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* [PUP, 2008]). Much depended on the attitude of the local ruler and situations could change rapidly when conflict arose. Yet nearly everywhere and in every age, trade, intermarriage, intellectual and cultural exchange can be found somewhere between the two communities. Well-known examples are to be found in scholarly exchange of the translation movement of the early medieval period in Persia, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, as well as ongoing influences in the sciences and medicine, art, architecture, music, manuscript production, and many, many other areas. But these are not the only occasions of encounter.
At the root of these exchanges was the common theological conviction that God had created the universe and given humans a special place in it – the order of creation could be understood, and utilized for the benefit of all human beings. Both Muslims and Christians claimed that the extent to which human society could be ordered according to God’s plan would determine its success, requiring all believers (in the Muslim formulation) to ‘command virtue and forbid vice’ and ‘love one another’ as Jesus had loved his disciples (in the Christian formulation), thus requiring reflection on the practical implications of divine revelation. Without a clear understanding of the theological principles put forward in scripture, no person could be certain that he was living according to God’s will.

One of the most common ways that coherent answers to this challenge were worked out was through apologetical exchanges. Although today the term ‘apologetics’ has a negative ring about it, the notion that it was incumbent on the believer to give an account of his adherence to a particular religious community was not seen as unreasonable in the past. Apologetics in this sense are not to be confused with ‘polemics’ which can deepen divisions and make common goals more difficult to achieve. In apologetical discourse, challenges were issued during debates or formulated into a series of questions to be answered by competent scholars. Sometimes the questions were very abstract (e.g., is Trinitarian faith polytheism and to be punished as such?), sometimes very practical (e.g., are there any circumstances in which a Muslim woman can marry a non-Muslim man?). As the communities responded to these issues, legal precedent was set and solutions were tested for their consistency with scriptures and traditions. Such an activity was understood by nearly every human culture to be necessary for
creating a functioning community coherent with its most deeply held beliefs. Apologetical writings served to engage contradictory views and to put forward the best defense possible of a particular idea or teaching. Over time, cultures and religions were formed as their members sought to most clearly express what they believed to be true.

While this activity was not dialogue in the strictest sense of face-to-face conversation, it certainly contributed to the dialogues of life and theological exchange, giving more or less power to those being regulated by the outcomes of the debate. A dialectical approach allowed for the development of common culture and communal flourishing, and in some cases sustained empires for centuries. Two important factors, however, distinguish these past exchanges from the present. Firstly, governmental and legal regulation was generally focused on protecting the population from enemies, both internal and external. In return for the burden of taxation and some limits on autonomy, communities expected safety and a few larger practical benefits, such as the maintenance of roads or trade. Today expectations of governing bodies by citizens are much, much greater. Secondly, and closely related to the first point, the primary concern of a particular community was its own success. There was no obligation to follow a wider moral code (as is today expressed in international laws) and local communities often established whatever relationships were most expedient for the most powerful or for the majority. Individual rulers and religious figures might encourage cooperation and accommodation of plurality, which was the case more often than is generally recognized, but the primary emphasis remained on the prosperity of the community. Communal success or
failure was often regarded as signs of divine approval or punishment, causing leaders to continue or abandon their policies.

If one can make a generalization about this phenomenon it might be that apologetics and the dialectical approach to the religious identity of communities sought to engage practical questions and problems and develop responses within a larger theological framework. The common goal of apologists, whether it was made explicit or not, was to uncover the truth about human beings and God, and to forge a coherent theology that could provide the basis for consistent practice. Apologetical activities were concerned with offering arguments for how to ‘get it right’ for the benefit of all members of the community, not just those who were believers of a particular group. This is an art which has unfortunately gone by the wayside and which, adapted to present needs and expectations, I believe would have great value for addressing serious contemporary problems.

Questions in the Present

At a time when it is needed most, the dialogue of theological exchange has lost its value in the eyes of many people today. The widespread view that religion is a source of division rather than unity, and suspicion that scriptures and traditions are too exclusivistic has caused many to turn to non-religious or even anti-religious sources for solutions. It is certainly possible to point to a multitude of policies and practices grounded in religious ideals which have brought suffering and oppression, and it is important that scholars of religion and theology continue to investigate the relationship between cultural practice and authentic religious teachings. To the
extent that practice is inconsistent with doctrine corrections should be made. Only constant self-reflection and correction can keep the religious community faithful to its own highest ideals.

Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that religions and faith necessarily must be subordinated to state interests in order to achieve peaceful communities. It is here that theological exchange and the dialogue of life can play an important role. I argue that religious communities must take up the challenges of religiously pluralistic societies as they are found ‘on the ground’ so to speak and make sense of them within a larger theological context. The results and methods of this theological investigation will necessarily be different for each community because of differing starting points and premises. Even so, this is a task that cannot be left undone if religious adherents are to see their role in community as uniting rather than dividing. When a unifying governmental structure or ideology is imposed upon communities from without, they are less likely to feel themselves to be fully invested members of society. Thus, for example, it is important that religious communities living in a democratic society find a foundation (not necessarily a precedent) for democracy within their own traditions. Without such grounding, the suspicion of forced compromise will, in my opinion, continue to spawn radical movements as religious communities seek to ‘purify’ themselves from external influences. From a different perspective, the struggles with secularization and reactions to it noted above have shown that repression of religion and limitations of religious practice have a negative effect in the long-term on communal cohesion. One need only to look at the various opposition movements that have radicalized when faced with overwhelming hostility in the
form of secularizing governments, such as those in France, Spain, Afghanistan, Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, and a host of others to see the splintering effects of religious repression. In contrast, those communities that have been able to accommodate a plurality of religious practices and support freedom of religious adherence have been most successful in maintaining stability and prosperity.

My own experience in dialogue with Muslims over the past fifteen years is that the concern for freedom of religion has risen to the highest priority in many places. Religious communities, especially where they represent minorities, are acutely aware of the secularizing trend towards limiting the influence of religious belief and practice in the public arena. This is the case both for Muslims and Christians. Many people are concerned about losing the right to public expressions of religious beliefs (such as wearing a headscarf or crosses, the building of mosques and churches, public prayer, etc.), and especially about limitations put on passing on religious beliefs and traditions to the next generation. These are not concerns that are limited to one religious community, or to a single area of the world, but are at issue in nearly every part of the globe. In order to ensure that religious belief and practice are protected in contemporary society for all, not just for one’s own community, full religious freedom must be guaranteed by the wider community. Again, Dialogue and Proclamation states that “There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims.” (44)

As a consequence, religious believers who may have been in conflict in the past are called to a
new relationship that preserves the autonomy of each community while building a pluralistic society with a common purpose.

An integral part of such a community must be the freedom to express one’s religious beliefs, to bear witness to them, and to allow for conversion to another religious tradition. As the Qur’an emphasizes, there can be no compulsion in religion (Sura 2:256). The conviction that adherence to religion can only be authentic when it is done freely is one that is shared by many, many believers, and here again, we can identify the usefulness of the dialogue of theological exchange in conversation with the dialogue of life as religious communities come to articulate the role religious freedom plays in a pluralistic society. This is an issue that is still in its earliest stages of exploration and which should be at the center of current discussions among religious believers.

**Conclusion**

The current unexpected upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa has presented an unprecedented opportunity for local communities to build societies that allow both a great deal of autonomy and cultural and religious diversity. It would be a mistake, though, to simply relegate religious practice and belief to a minor role in the conversations about how to build a peaceful and prosperous society. Now more than ever, the discourse between the practical dialogue of life and more theoretical theological exchange must take place in order to articulate common goals and to ensure that the rights and obligations of religious communities are protected within the wider pluralistic society of today.