Fostering Dialogue and Engagement: The Role of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

Tony Terwase Famave

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FOSTERING DIALOGUE AND ENGAGEMENT:

THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NIGERIA

A Thesis by

Tony Terwase Famave

presented to

The faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology

of Santa Clara University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Degree of

Licentiate in Sacred Theology

Berkeley, California

December 2019

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Abstract

This thesis entitled “Fostering Dialogue and Engagement: The Role of the Catholic Church in Nigeria,” written by Tony Terwase Famave, seeks to address the long-standing misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims that often lead to the wanton destruction of lives, property, and destabilization of the social order, using Vatican II as a model for Nigeria. The ethnic and religious division in the country is further complicated by a Muslim north which is predominantly of the Hausa Fulani tribe and the Christian south which is mostly of the Igbo and Yoruba tribes, with a number of minority tribes counted among the two major religions. Because of this, managing diversity has become a major problem in the country.

This thesis traces the origin of the problem from the country’s very beginning and attempts to proffer a solution using the ethos of the Second Vatican Council because of the council’s ability to manage diversity well, both before the council and during the council. Convoked by John XXIII and completed by Paul VI in 1964, Vatican II: demonstrated openness to the world by making a broad consultation before and during the council; employed democratic principles like voting; and called for the need to update Catholic teaching and return to the sources of Christianity. The suggested solutions are then classified under the aforementioned ethos of Vatican II. The paper concludes that there is a need to return to the African understanding of religious diversity before the advent of both Christianity and Islam in the country. There were diverse African religions on the continent of Africa before the arrival of Islam and Christianity but the attitude was more of tolerance and acceptance without compromising the differences. However, the arrival of two religions brought about the idea of evangelism which led to the present conflict
between Christianity and Islam. This thesis, therefore, calls for a return to the African mindset about other religions before the advent of Islam and Christianity.

George Griener, Director
Dedication

To All Those Who Strive to Improve Interreligious Understandings
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General Conclusion

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General Introduction

The misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims that have consistently degenerated into violence against one another continue to gain global attention. The media keep reporting that hundreds and thousands of people have been displaced, malnourished or killed as a result of this conflict between Christians and Muslims in the world. Most disheartening are the “situations where the precise number of victims, widows and orphans is unknown.”1 Extremists of both religions continue to promote exclusivism, thereby serving as threats to peace, life, comfort, development and prosperity of peoples and their nations. The consequences of these misunderstandings have been: an increase in poverty because many resources have been wasted; the continued widening of divisions caused by the interpretation and promotion of exclusivist philosophies and ideologies; the displacement of people from their homes; the killing of human beings; and an increase in suffering.

Nigeria is one of the countries plagued by the Christian-Muslim conflict due to its peculiar origin coupled with a mixture of politics and religion, as well as issues of ethnicity and ignorance and the use of religion to promote political and personal agendas. Vatican II serves as a model for the Catholic Church in Nigeria to deal with diversity for these reasons: (1) There was wide consultation before the opening of the council. Consultations are necessary when dealing with diverse peoples and cultures to get their consent and opinions while preserving their sense of belonging. (2) The council demonstrated her readiness to

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reconcile and dialogue with adherents of other Christian denominations and other religions, especially Islam. The Church in Nigeria may imitate this by showing a sincere desire to dialogue with other Christian denominations and the Muslims. (3) The council changed the Church’s understanding of culture to embrace the different cultures of the world and not just one culture. In this way, the African worldview of other religions, which is generally tolerant of other religions without compromising the differences, would then be able to play a role. The resolution of the conflict continues to elude Nigerians of goodwill, who seek to promote interreligious understandings between the two major religions in the country. This thesis argues that Vatican II can serve as a paradigm for dealing with diversity in Nigeria.

The Document on Human Fraternity says “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved.” As such, the situation in Nigeria speaks to a loss of the essence of religion around the world. This is particularly evident in Nigeria where it is manifested in the everyday crises that lead to the shedding of innocent blood and displacement of people from their homes and families. As rich as Nigeria is, full of natural and human resources, she has not been able to take advantage of these resources in order to grow and become a great nation. As Canci and Odukoya say, Nigeria “is synonymous with deep divisions which cause major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. Nigeria is high on the list as one of the most unstable countries in Africa.”

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2 Ibid.
After due consideration of Nigeria’s present reality as a country and the resources that abound in the world to help reshape its people’s thinking in the way they see their religions and those of others, it is important to refocus attention on the true essence of religions, which can be understood as such:

The first and most important aim of religions is to believe in God, to honour Him and to invite all men and women to believe that this universe depends on a God who governs it. He is the Creator who has formed us with His divine wisdom and has granted us the gift of life to protect it. It is a gift that no one has the right to take away, threaten or manipulate to suit oneself. Indeed, everyone must safeguard this gift of life from its beginning up to its natural end.4

The wrong usage of religion in Nigeria has impaired “efforts at democratization, stability, economic transformation and national cohesion.”5 Therefore, there is a need to dialogue with not just the Islamic religion, but also to have ecumenical dialogue among Christian Churches so that the Nigerian Catholic Church can position itself to be of better service to the entire country. Nigeria, with more than 15% of the continent's population, is the largest country in Africa, almost evenly divided between Muslims (primarily in the North) and Christians (primarily in the South). Long-standing historical and political tensions, global and local, between the two religious communities present a major challenge to the unity of the country. New developments regarding dialogue stemming from the Second Vatican Council can provide the Catholic Church with resources for addressing some of the outstanding issues between Christianity and Islam, as a contribution toward social healing in Nigeria.

5 “Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria.”
The first chapter of this thesis concentrates on the origin of the country Nigeria, its land features, natural resources, food crops, non-food agricultural produce, its people and way of life. This gives the reader an understanding of the area so as to better understand various factors that contribute to interreligious conflict. The paper then discusses colonialism in Nigeria, its motivation and the subsequent effects, followed by a review of Christianity as well as Islam in Nigeria. The significance of providing this background is to expose the reader to the Nigerian context and explain the dynamics that make Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria a herculean task. Because the situation in Nigeria is multifaceted and not solely religious, this paper reviews the historical, cultural, political, ideological, social and economic issues that make this much more than just a religious issue; looking at the issues from just one perspective would lead to only a partial diagnosis of the situation in Nigeria. The historical precedent to the post-colonial world of Nigeria is very important because it highlights the origin and precursors of what has become the current life experience of the people in that country, some of which history dates back to the political and administrative decisions made by the British. The First Chapter concludes with a discussion of religion and politics in Nigeria.

Chapter Two reviews Vatican II and the historical events that led to the call for the council. The chapter deliberates about how the council managed diversity within the Church and how it provided room for the accommodation of diversity, both before the council opened and during the time the council was in session. It also looks at how the council made room for mutual respect, reconciliation and accommodation of diverse cultural and religious views. The chapter explores the constitutions and the general disposition of the council to reconcile with the world and to pursue not just ecumenical
dialogue, but interreligious dialogue. Particular attention is paid to the document *Nostra Aetate* and the council’s readiness and openness to dialogue with Muslims, the subsequent Vatican and papal initiatives taken by various Popes to encourage, promote and convince both Christians and Muslims to take that dialogue seriously. A discussion on the Muslims’ invitation to dialogue with Christians entitled “A Common Word” is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion on religious pluralism, which is then recommended for the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

Chapter Three discusses how the teachings of Vatican II can be implemented in the Nigerian context. In the current religious and political climate of Nigeria, the prophetic value of *Nostra Aetate* and indeed Vatican II have become ever more important, making the call for the implementation of the council’s teachings a matter of urgency. The theologian Gerald O’Collins puts it this way: “The world situation supplies a political urgency for any project aimed at presenting Vatican II’s teaching on other faiths.” Pre-colonial Nigeria did not have exclusivist theologies that led to the demonization of religious others; therefore, the problem of religious violence was absent. Just as the Second Vatican Council called for the return to the sources, so too, we shall call for a return to the African value system that existed before the arrival of the exclusivist theologies from both Christianity and Islam.

In addition, because the problem in Nigeria is not simply due to differences of religious doctrine, the need for the creation of a national identity in order to promote integration and national cohesion is recommended as a way to ameliorate ethnocentric

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7 Ibid., ix.
ideas that are often mixed with religion and further complicate the crises. Both ethnicity and religion are very important identity markers in Nigeria, and it would be almost impossible to resolve the problem of religious crises without considering both ethnicity and religious conflict as one. The context in Nigeria presents itself in this way, requiring that both issues be tackled together for a better result.

For the Catholic Church in Nigeria to respond to the problem of religious conflicts using Vatican II as an example, she must ensure that the teachings of Vatican II are implemented by taking care of the internal issues. First, the Church must ensure the proper education of her clergy, seminarians and laity; second, the Church must promote ecumenical dialogue with members of other Christian denominations and then promote interreligious dialogue with Muslims. Using her influence in the country, the Church can promote political harmony and national unity as well. The recommendations in Chapter Three are broadly classified under the key elements that we consider to be the ethos that make the Second Vatican Council a model for Nigeria. They are the broad consultation and involvement of the people, attentiveness to history while fostering openness to the world, and then the commitment to updating as well as returning to sources.

The need to take concrete steps and absorb some virtues as we engage the religious others as a Church is highly encouraged using the guidelines proposed in “The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue” by Catherine Cornille, an Associate Professor of Comparative Theology at Boston College. She recommends a number of virtues necessary for those ready to take on the task of dialoguing with the religious others.
A Pew Survey projects that there will be more Muslims than Christians in the coming years in Nigeria. This means that dialogue between the two religions is very important and must be taken seriously for the good of not just the present but the future generations.

The general conclusion argues that Vatican II serves as a model for the Catholic Church in Nigeria to deal with diversity. Like Vatican II, which called for a return to the sources, a call for a return to African ethics and values through the family is a way of facilitating the implementation of Vatican II to allow openness to diversity, dialogue, and reconciliation in Nigeria.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Roots of Violence in Nigeria

1.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain that the complex causes of violence in Nigeria are not limited to religious differences only. It introduces the context and the dynamics specific to Nigeria, which give rise to complex issues. These include ethnicity, culture, politics, economic and social factors. It is also important to understand the role of the British in the colonization and “creation” of the country of Nigeria and how that has made it difficult to unite the country using democratic principles as opposed to force. This chapter describes the diverse peoples who inhabit the Nigerian territory, the natural resources, the origin and the spread of both Christianity and Islam as well as some of the socio-political reasons that exacerbate ethno-religious conflicts in the country. It is pertinent to understand the historical background for there to be reform of relations between Christians and Muslims, because it is from this backdrop that such reform can be undertaken. The last part of the chapter deals with religion and politics and explains how religion is mixed with politics in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country like Nigeria, resulting in conflicts that occur due to the clash of opposing ideas.

The implications of the encounters between Christians and Muslims have not always been only of violence. There have also been occasions of peaceful cooperation between the people of both faith adherents. Some denominations/sects in Christianity and Islam are open to dialogue while others are not. The unfortunate thing is that the extremists and fanatics are more forceful in carrying out their agenda, be they Christians or Muslims. Exclusivism is the order of the day and both religions are guilty of it.
In some cases in Nigeria, religion is not directly the reason for the violence, but religious violence is used by some people as a means of: (1) expressing other grievances about the irresponsibility of politicians or government officials, (2) showing disagreement or dissatisfaction with a particular leader or his or her policies, (3) reacting to fear of being dominated by another group, or (4) creating conditions for negotiation with those in authority. The failures of successive governments have continued to impoverish Nigerians, causing harsh living conditions, unemployment and an increase in crime. It is unfortunate that it takes a tragedy to draw the government’s attention to issues of marginalization and injustice that a particular group of people might be facing. For example, some groups create a violent situation just to call attention to the kind of maltreatment they may have been experiencing, using religious violence to do so.

1.2 Historical Background

1.2.1 Pre-Colonialism

Archeological findings in the Late Stone Age “indicate that human societies have been constantly present in all regions of Nigeria for several thousand years. Initially, their societies were decentralized in nature, focusing on small village or village-group units.”9 There were empires like the Kanem and Borno in the north, Ile-Ife and Benin in the south. For centuries, people had been living in this huge region. It included kingdoms that had gone through cycles of war and peace, “captured slaves, traded with each other, risen and fallen.”10 Some of the kingdoms that existed before the advent of the Europeans were the

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Benin Kingdom, the Egba Kingdom, the Oyo Kingdom and the Sokoto Caliphate. The different kingdoms and villages ran their businesses unhindered. No kingdom attempted to dominate and impose its rule and way of life on its neighbors. The people practiced different religions without the concept of evangelization so the problem of religious conflict was not even an issue. Over time, the Europeans came into the country for various reasons.

Europeans who had got to know the coastline in the sixteenth century, then traded slaves on a large scale and moved on to palm oil…by the middle of the nineteenth century there was an acceleration of competitive European interest. The Portuguese had been overtaken. The competition was now between the British and the French, with late-starting Germany annexing the Cameroons in 1884 and encroaching on Calabar and Benue from the east.11

1.2.2 Colonialism

Nigeria was non-existent as a country until 1900, when the British government took over the regions of the Niger Coast as their colony and later merged both the northern and southern protectorates as one. As the British scholar, Anthony Kirk-Greene notes, “the British Government took over the territories of the Niger Coast Protectorate and the Royal Niger Company and the geographical expression Nigeria was first used officially for the two protectorates now established.”12 The announcement of the name of the new country was made in Lagos on the first day of January 1914 by Fredrick Lord Lugard, who was the

11 Ibid., 5.
Governor General of the colony. The name ‘Nigeria’ was coined by his wife, Flora Shaw, colonial editor of *The Times* in a letter she wrote to her paper in January 1897.\(^{13}\)

It is important to know that Nigeria became a British colony by the use of force and violence: “Colonization was achieved in Nigeria either by the use of war or by surrender because of the threat of war.”\(^{14}\) Kings who dared to oppose the British were dealt with severely. For example, King Jaja of Opobo was crushed and exiled in 1887, the Ijebus in present day Ogun State were attacked and defeated in 1892, Oba Ologboshere was defeated and executed in 1898 for attempting to regain Benin’s independence, and King Nana Olomu of Itsekiri was attacked and defeated in 1894.

1.2.3 *Demography and Geography*

“Nigeria’s large population is very diverse, consisting of over 200 different ethno-linguistic groups. Three main ethnic groups make up the majority of the population, namely the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.”\(^{15}\) The country is “situated on the western part of Africa with a land mass of about 356,668 square miles.”\(^{16}\)

“It is bordered to the south by the Bights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. On the West Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the north by Niger, and on the east by Cameroon. In its extreme northeastern corner, Lake Chad separates Nigeria from the country of Chad.”\(^{17}\)

“Nigeria’s diverse geography yields a broad assortment of natural and mineral resources.”\(^{18}\) They include large deposits of coal, copper, columbite, tin, iron, lead,

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
limestone, and zinc. Some amounts of diamonds, gold and silver have also been found in various places. The country is, however, most famous for petroleum. The various human and natural resources available in Nigeria were the motivating reasons for colonization.

The present geographical boundaries and the composition of the different people in Nigeria were the results of the British having taken that large area as their colony. The conglomeration of the different peoples in Nigeria resulted from the British desire for easy trade and governance. In 1914, the British, under the leadership of Lord Lugard, made the decision to amalgamate the northern and the southern protectorates to become one country and named it Nigeria, simply meaning the ‘area around the Niger,’ which is a major river that enters the country from the northwest and pours out into the Gulf of Guinea. The historian, Richard Bourne says that, “Without the British there would never have been a “Nigeria.”

1.2.4 Motivations

The motivations for the ‘scramble for Africa’ were, of course, the natural and human resources that Europe wanted to take advantage of to enrich the economies of their countries. British merchants saw that the region was lucrative and rich in palm oil, rubber, ivory and so on and, as such, were ready to unleash violence on any community that constituted a challenge to the pursuit of colonial interest. The majority of Nigerians were farmers and agriculture sustained the economy, as observed by historians Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, who note that “until recent years, agriculture formed the basis of the

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19 Ibid., 3.
economic activity and lifestyle of most Nigerians.”²¹ The struggle for revenue from agricultural products, as well as crude oil, continue to contribute to the crisis situation to the present day.

The huge population of Nigeria, which makes it the most populous African country, is one of its natural resources as well. Nigerians are generally hard-working people and they are found in all walks of life and in different parts of the world. A good number of people were kidnapped from Nigeria during the era of slavery to supply labor until the British abolished the slave trade in 1807. During the Second World War, the British recruited more people from Nigeria into their armed services than from any of their other colonies. “With over 161, 552 people recruited for the war, Nigeria became the center of human and material resources. This number surpasses any military mobilization effort in all of the other British colonies.”²²

1.2.5 Effects

It is a fact that “the imposition of colonial rule and the British governance of Nigeria created conditions for violence from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early 1950s.”²³ The British saw violence as a legitimate way to achieve conquest and ensure domination so the “conquest of Nigerian groups was an exercise in humiliation, domination made possible by violence.”²⁴ The Nigerians also saw violence as a legitimate way of resisting British domination. This kind of attitude went deep into the psyche of the people.

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²³ Falola, Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria., ix.
²⁴ Ibid.
such that presently, successive governments and their agencies continue that trend. “Modern Nigeria is, to a large extent, a product of violence.”\textsuperscript{25} From the South to the North, the British used the same strategy to capture the people and rule the land. In the North, “in one bitter exchange between the caliph at Sokoto and British agents, the king and religious leaders said that Muslims could not accept cohabiting with unbelievers.”\textsuperscript{26} The people went through forced domination with respect to their social, political and religious life and it is from this backdrop that there is a sudden attempt to impose dialogue without considering the historical past in this era of democracy.

Coming from this kind of history, it is, therefore, not surprising that the country broke out in civil war just seven years after independence. “The fact that each force sought to reshape Nigeria into different forms partly explains the reasons why it was inevitable for the infant nation to be plunged into civil war barely seven years after independence.”\textsuperscript{27} The primary challenge of the country was the inability of the first nationalists to manage diversity in a democratic way. The British had maintained the unity of the country predominantly by the use of force, but this was no longer fashionable for a civilian government serving its own people.\textsuperscript{28} As soon as the governor of the Eastern state, Ojukwu, declared the independence of the State of Biafra for the people of the southeast, due to overt acts of injustice and the killing of Igbos, the government of Gowon quickly applied the use of force to keep them in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.\textsuperscript{29} This buttresses the point that the indigenous people, too, copied the acts of violence from the British as the only tool

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 2.  
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 14.  
\textsuperscript{27} Adesina, Nigeria in the Twentieth Century, 25.  
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 7.
they knew to keep the country united, a unity which was cherished more than the precious lives of human beings. In *Fractured Spectrum*, Akintunde Akinade quoted the words of Chinua Achebe on unity: “The most commonly enunciated Nigerian ideal is unity. So important is it to us that it stands inscribed on our coat-of-arms and so sacred that the blood of millions of our countrymen, women, and children was shed…to uphold it against secessionist forces.”

The manner in which the British used the armed forces to suppress the citizens, is the manner in which successive governments in Nigeria presently use the police and the army to suppress its citizens when government officials and the people at large differ in opinion.

The point here is that the culture of violence has been part of the psyche of the average Nigerian for quite some time. All social and political aspects of Nigerian lives are touched by violence. Nigeria recently concluded the presidential election that was held on February 23, 2019, and it was marred by violence and massive vote-rigging out of the desperation to retain the incumbent. The same people who are in the political sphere are equally in the religious sphere; among them, there are both Christians and Muslims and they often bring this culture of violence, to which they have become accustomed, into their public life and into the religions that they practice and preach. “Both religions are militant, and the explosive expansion of Christianity in the North contributes to destabilizing the Islamic political and social status quo.”

A distant observer may find it difficult to understand what is actually going on. To this point, Richard Bourne asserts that: “Anyone

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who claims to understand Nigeria is either deluded or a liar.”

This sounds more like an exaggeration of the complicated nature of the Nigerian State, for after making such an assertion, he proceeded to write a book of over 300 pages about Nigeria. The country is not yet privileged to have leaders who are selfless and determined to promote the course of nationhood where religious and ethnic diversity are appreciated and welcomed as the country’s strength. The three leading figures at independence were: Obafemi Awolowo from the west, who was Yoruba by tribe; Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, from the north, who was Hause by tribe; and Nnamdi Azikiwe from the east, who was Igbo by tribe. All three of them were leaders of the independence movement and all three of them founded political parties, thereby bringing ethnic coloration into politics: “Politics was dominated by elite ethnic and regional competition with little regard for broader national interests.” It is surprising that up to the present, Nigeria does not have national heroes that cut across tribe and religion, for the Yorubas regard Obafemi Awolowo as a hero but the non-Yorubas do not regard him as such. It is the same thing for Nnamdi Azikiwe who is revered by the Igbos but not by the Hausa or any other tribe. “The historical dynamics of the spread of Islam and Christianity as well as the politics of the colonial administration in the region prepared the breeding ground for ongoing violent conflict.”

Religion and tribe became the identity markers as enforced by the colonial powers and executed even by the nationalists in post-independence politics. Nigerian citizens only joined the political parties founded by either their kinsmen or founded by a nationalist who belongs to their religion.

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1.3 Islam in Northern Nigeria

Past and Present

Through a slow process of migration, conquest, and infiltration, Islam made its way into Western Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the help of Muslim traders, scholars and the nomadic Fulani people from Senegal. Generally, people travel with their religious beliefs, cultures, and customs as they move around, and it was a similar situation in the case of the spread of Islam in Nigeria. “The adoption of Islam was, however, confined at this time, to the ruling class and it was not until the middle of the fifteenth century that Fulani teachers from Mali came to settle in Hausaland, taught people more about Islamic sciences in a fashion and extent hitherto unknown.”  

“The second phase of African Islamic history, beginning in the 18th century, was characterized by the transition from a class religion to a religion of whole peoples.”

Muslim communities soon developed, and Muslim traders were welcomed by African kings for three main reasons: doing so granted the kings citizenship in Arabia; Muslim scholars served as interpreters and teachers of the Arabic language and Islam; and Muslims served as palace administrators. “The beginning of the eighteenth century saw Islam spread throughout Northern Nigeria as the recognized religion, a unifying cultural force with an established central political-administrative system of government—the Sokoto Caliphate.” After the Hausa-Fulani were sure that they had settled properly and

36 Akinade, Fractured Spectrum, 103.
39 Ibid. 33.
gained prominence in Northern Nigeria, they organized a jihad in the nineteenth century led by Uthman Dan Fodio (1754-1817). Uthman had asked that the Hausa kings should live strictly according to Shari’a law and when they refused, he overthrew them, expanded Islam and dominated the whole of Northern Nigeria. He set up the Sokoto Caliphate, which is presently the seat of political-administrative power.

After successfully sweeping the Hausa States and other cities covering most of today’s northern Nigeria and parts of northwestern Cameroon with his jihad and after establishing his brand of pristine Islamic social structures, Dan Fodio installed mostly his Fulani kinsmen into the new power positions, thus, completely eliminating all the Hausa and minority ethnic leaders from leadership positions.40

Usman Dan Fodio was born in 1754 to a scholarly Fulani Family and is responsible for the jihad, reformation, and creation of the Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria.41 Here we see the reflection of ethnicity, politics and religion playing a role in Usman Dan Fodio’s decision, as it is reported that a good number of Usman dan Fodio’s Fulani tribesmen who joined ranks with him in pursuit of the jihad were not even Muslims. “They were supporting their kinsman, as his victory brought economic and political gains, given that the Hausa often threatened and marginalized them in the Hausa dominated administrations of Hausa states.”42 The Fulani tribesmen “reigned in one form or another, even after the death of dan Fodio in 1817, until they were defeated by the British in 1903.”43

Most scholars have pointed out that the British refused to touch the already existing structure of Islam, but applied the indirect rule system where they used the emirs and the

43 Ibid., 9.
local chiefs; moreover, the British neither allowed Christian missionaries to evangelize in the North nor did they allow the local residents to receive a Western education.

The British continued to fear Mahdist uprisings well into the twentieth century. In their dealings with the Emirs and the Muslim populations, the British approached issues in a pragmatic manner, for instance, denying Christian missionaries like Reverend Miller, a leading figure in the Church Missionary Society in northern Nigeria, the right to carry out missionary activities and establish schools within Muslim communities.44

According to the theologian Isidore Nwanaju, “the history of the spread of Islam in Nigeria would not be complete without a special attention to Northern Nigeria during the colonial administration. In fact, many people and communities in Nigeria believe that the roots of the problems between Christians and Muslims go back to the British colonial era and the early 19th century.”45 Lord Lugard had promised the emirs that the Islamic structures on the ground would be preserved in order to create an atmosphere of trust between the colonial administrators and the Northern Muslims.46 “Colonialism increased the powers of Emirs by standardizing and routinizing administration. This concentrated power in the person of the Emir and often shifted the balance of power within the ruling lineages.”47

The success of the Jihad and the subsequent establishment of Islamic social, judicial and political institutions in the North provided the framework for violence so that the religious others could be forced to accept the Islamic faith or face death.48 This is the reason the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect that forbids western education and values and is fighting to establish Islamic laws in the country, keeps bombing and destroying lives so that they

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44 Abdul Raufu Mustapha and David Ehrhardt, eds., Creed & Grievance: Muslim-Christian Relations & Conflict Resolution in Northern Nigeria, Western Africa Series (Suffolk: James Currey, 2018), 112.
45 Nwanaju, Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria, 87.
46 Nwanaju, Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria, 89.
47 Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance, 112.
48 Umaru, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria, 35.
will force the government to grant their requests. They intend to continue the destruction of lives and property until they get what they want. This same pattern of violence as a strategy to get the other party to comply can be seen in the case of the Fulani nomadic herdsmen who have been moving from one State to another, killing farmers so as to make the farmers abandon their farmlands so the Fulani herdsmen can bring in their cattle to feed on the crops that the farmers had cultivated either for consumption or for sale.

The Islamic education and legal systems were promoted throughout the North; the Emirs and local chiefs became powerful defenders of the faith and were also political and state administrators.\(^{49}\)

Before his death, dan Fodio had transferred active leadership of jihad and the continued spread of their political dominance to his brother, Abdullahi, and his son, Muhammad Bello. Muhammad Bello held the eastern half of the caliphate with capital at Sokoto while Abdullahi held the western half, establishing his capital in Sokoto while Abdullahi held the western half, establishing his capital in Gwandu. However, over time, Sokoto became the prime center of the caliphate, where the sultan, Muhammad Bello, resided.\(^{50}\)

This afforded the Fulani the opportunity to dominate other ethnic groups and sustain their hegemony.\(^{51}\) The North completely lost its culture and traditional religions and took up the Islamic/Arabic culture and lifestyle in almost every facet of life.

Islam seeks to embrace the total way of life of people and the society at large with its unique social order. It is interesting to see how this plays out in Nigeria. The Muslims in the Northern part of the country do not distinguish between secular and religious spheres; everything is seen through the eyes of religion and their worldview is shaped by their

\(^{49}\) Cf. Ibid., 35.
\(^{50}\) Iwuchukwu, Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria, 9.
\(^{51}\) Cf. Umaru, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria., 47.
religious beliefs. For this reason, the dress code, food, buildings, marriages, and governance are all guided by Islamic laws and customs. Conversion to another religion, especially Christianity, is strictly forbidden and anyone who does so risks his or her life, for even the parents are permitted to kill their children if they convert to any religion other than Islam. These customs are all a result of the huge influence of the Islamic legal system and the insistence that Shari’a law be implemented in northern Nigeria.

A good percentage of the Muslims in the north would prefer that Shari’a law be the official law of the country and this has always been one of the reasons for the fight. “The adoption of ‘full’ Shari’a—both personal and criminal law—by twelve northern states after 1999 intensified the divide, tension and conflict among the adherents of Nigeria’s two major religions, Islam and Christianity.” Different reformist movements have emerged over time in the north under the guise that they want to renew Islam in the North and enforce Shari’a law. “They date from the post-independence period and became vehicles for popular protest against the bad governance characteristic of northern Nigeria and the growing impoverishment of a population that was already one of the poorest in the Muslim world.” This is not the case in the southwest where there is a clear understanding of the secular and the religious sphere, as well as bad governance, and social protests are often championed by civil servants, Yoruba cultural movements and unions, rather than by radical Islamic sects.

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52 Cf. Ibid., 39.
53 Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance, 140.
54 Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance, 139.
55 Campbell and Page, Nigeria. P.79.
There is a network of Koranic schools in the North that sustains Islam there.\textsuperscript{56} It is compulsory that all children attend Koranic schools where they are taught how to recite the Koran in Arabic. Enrollment is about ten million students\textsuperscript{57} and the curriculum is simply the memorization of the Koran and other Muslim sacred texts. Other subjects like mathematics, health education, the English language, elementary science, literature, civic education, and agricultural science are deliberately excluded from the curriculum because they are associated with the West. “The reluctance of Muslims to send their children to Mission schools in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century accounted for their seeming backwardness in the level of western literacy … They did not want their children to be lured from the right or straight path—the Muslim way of living.”\textsuperscript{58} Families in rural areas send their children to Koranic schools in the cities, where they learn Koranic citations and beg for food and money on the streets. The teachers in the Koranic schools also have not received any formal education, for they are also products of the Koranic schools. This kind of setting is a breeding ground where radical jihadist movements will emerge.

1.3.1 Islam in Southern Nigeria

Some scholars have argued that the introduction of Islam to Southern Nigeria was through traders and teachers and it was completely unplanned, such that “the first Yoruba Muslims had to worship privately and secretly.”\textsuperscript{59} During the slave trade between the northern Sudanic states and the Europeans, the Oyo empire played an important role as

\textsuperscript{56} Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria.}, 36.
\textsuperscript{57} Campbell and Page, \textit{Nigeria.}, 79.
\textsuperscript{58} Nwanaju, \textit{Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria.}
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 99.
Muslims were taken through Oyo and shipped as slaves to Brazil in South America and to Sierra Leone in West Africa. Around 1870, “the freed slaves from Hausaland, Brazil, and Sierra Leone began to return to Nigeria and reinforced the Muslim communities in the southern and western regions. The type of Islam of these freed slaves was in many ways mixed, embodying traditional Yoruba practices and Islamic practice.”

A lot of factors facilitated the spread of Islam in Yoruba land. According to Isidore Nwanaju, “the unity of the Yoruba people basically manifested in its urban settlement culture. Many people in Yoruba lived in clusters of urban life, which influenced the quality, polish, and sophistication of their politics, economics attitudes, dress, language and behavior.” Worth mentioning, too, is the element of homogeneity in culture in Yoruba land, which made it easy for the spread, diffusion, and sustenance of new ideas and styles of living. “The system of traditional and religious belief in Yoruba land, which was very tolerant and peaceful…” was also essential to the spread and growth of Islam. As time went on, “the complexities of Yoruba religious beliefs and practices, as well as the later entrance of Christianity, Western European values and colonial rule” became a challenge for the easy spread of Islam in Yoruba land, known today as south-western Nigeria. This explains why Islam has taken a different shape in southern Nigeria than in northern Nigeria; it is because both regions received the Islamic faith and coupled it with the existing culture of the people in their different regions.

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 100.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 101.
65 Ibid.
Radical Islamic movements have made little headway in southwest Yorubaland for at least three reasons: first, their traditional religious beliefs accommodate polytheism, which might suggest pluralism. Second, strong family ties and kinsmanship are cherished above religious affiliations. Third, the Yoruba people are open and willing to learn and acquire knowledge. The British noticed this and situated the first University in Nigeria in Yoruba land. Yoruba Muslims freely intermarry with Christians and are generally peaceful in their approach to issues. They send their children to regular schools where all subjects are taught and not just Koranic recitation.

Perhaps another important reason why there are hardly any religious crises in the southwest is that the Yoruba do not take the idea of strict monotheism seriously. Those who are either Christians or Muslims still go back to consult Yoruba gods like Ogun, Orisa, and Songo. Monotheism, as emphasized by both Christianity and Islam, is likely to create a conflict in the African’s understanding of the true religion, especially for those who are fundamentalists.

The Muslims in the southwestern part of the country acknowledge the difference between the secular and the religious and are more supportive of a secular state. In the same family, the husband might be Muslim and the wife Christian and they live together in peace without any conflicts over religious issues. The children are equally free to choose the religion of their choice and it is never a problem in the southwest. Unlike the north, western education and modern science are highly promoted and encouraged in the southwest and

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66 Ibid., 118.
67 Cf. Akinade, Fractured Spectrum, 8.
68 Ibid., 9.
69 Ibid., 85.
upholding religious ideology is not a do-or-die affair.\textsuperscript{70} For this reason, northern Muslims never consider Muslims in the west as serious Muslims and they are never allowed to lead prayers whenever they pray together.

1.3.2 Some Islamic Identities in Nigeria

This exposition on the various Islamic identities shows the complexity within the Islamic tradition and goes on to buttress the need for ecumenical approaches as part of the solution to the problem which is discussed in detail in the last chapter.

1.3.3 Sunni

According to John Paden, “Nigerian Muslim identities and organizations cover a full range of demographics and perspectives. Most are well within the mainstream of Nigerian Society and thought.”\textsuperscript{71} Sunni Muslims are the majority in number and are further divided into different sub-sects. Two main Sufi Islamic brotherhoods were introduced in West Africa: the Qadriyya and the Tijaniyya. The leader of the Jihad in northern Nigeria, Uthman Dan Fodio, who also founded the Sokoto Caliphate, belonged to the Qadriyya.\textsuperscript{72} For this reason, Qadriyya is firmly linked to the Fulani leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate, which makes the connection between ethnicity and religion evident, for only the descendants of Uthman dan Fodio can become the heads of the Sokoto Caliphate. Although the Tijaniyya brotherhood was introduced in Nigeria as far back as the 1820s, they settled mainly in Kano and preached a doctrine that symbolized their independence from Sokoto where Quadriyya is dominant. Both brotherhoods are further divided into multiple sub-

\textsuperscript{70} Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria.}, 50.
sects with similarities and differences in doctrines among them, which often results in conflicts and riots. Several sub-sects have broken away and formed their own doctrines, thereby generating a sort of conflict between them and the already existing sects. There have been different reformist movements like Izala, Maitatsine, Darul Islam and recently the Boko Haram. While there are differences among them depending on their leaders’ ideas, they all aim at establishing an Islamic polity conducted according to Shari’a law.73

1.3.4 Shia

Among the different sects and sub-sects, there is a struggle to express superiority in piety, orthodoxy, and control of a large number of Muslims. The Shia sect, which began in Nigeria in the 1980s with Ibrahim Yaqoub Zakzaky as its leader, is worth mentioning among the different sects.74 The Shia emphasize that western culture must be rejected, that only pious Muslims should rule and that Shari’a law must be the law of the land. Consequently, they reject the Nigerian constitution and laws because they are derived from non-Islamic sources. They refuse to sing the Nigerian national anthem and they reject democracy in general, insisting on and calling for an Islamic state in Nigeria with a constitution based on the Qur’an and the Hadith.75 It is important to note that “the Muslim Brothers Movement (Nigerian Shia) and their doctrines are rejected by most Muslims in Nigeria and because of their views, they are under the security radar even though they are allowed to preach.”76

73 Ibid., 41.
74 Ibid., 41.
75 Cf. Ibid., 40.
Other sub-sects are the Ahmadis and the Qur’aniyyun. The Ahmadis sect stems from India and has been present in Nigeria since the 1920s, mostly among the Yoruba ethnic group. They have suffered persecution from other Muslim sects who believe that the Ahmadis are a heretical sect and are not true Muslims. The sect is known for its efforts to promote a modern system of education and, like the vast majority of other Muslims, to uphold the Nigerian constitution and to work within the ambiance of the law.

1.4 Christianity in Nigeria

The Augustinian and Capuchin monks are said to be responsible for bringing Christianity to Nigeria around the fifteenth century. The first attempts to evangelize in West Africa by both Catholics and Protestants were not very fruitful, although they recorded a few successes. For instance, Cape-Verde and Sao Tome remained Christian, even in the early seventeenth century when missionary activities went into decline in the rest of West Africa.

The inability of the European missionaries to understand the nature of African society or its cultures and customs is alleged to be one of the reasons why the first missionaries could not achieve any remarkable success. They insisted on monogamy, which was quite foreign to Africans at that time. Some historians have said that one of the reasons why Islam was very successful was that it permitted polygamy, which was already part of the African society, so it was easy for them to accept Islam. Missionaries also

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78 Umaru, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria, 41.
80 Cf. Nwanaju, Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria.
misinterpreted the hospitality of the African rulers in providing accommodation and provision of land for the building of churches as the rulers’ desire to become Christians. Most African societies are traditionally hospitable and tolerant of other religions so the gestures of some of the traditional rulers were not necessarily an indication of their burning desires to become Christians.\textsuperscript{81}

1.4.1 \textbf{Christianity in Southern Nigeria}

It was in the nineteenth century that systematic missionary activities took place “when English religious societies sent missionaries to evangelize in Africa.”\textsuperscript{82} This second missionary journey to Africa was better organized and was unlike the first attempt where the missionaries concentrated on the palaces in order to have the king convert so his subjects would follow suit. This second approach of evangelization took place mostly through the establishment of schools and the provision of formal Western and religious education. Wherever they built a church, a school was built beside it and in some places, they built a hospital to provide health care services as well. “The success of evangelization in the southern part of Nigeria was due to the missionary policy of education of building schools in most villages.”\textsuperscript{83} People appreciated the idea of the establishment of schools alongside churches and sent their children and wards there; they longed to see their children speak the English language and become educated like the missionaries themselves.

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria}.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
1.4.2 Christianity in Northern Nigeria

Some Franciscan priests are said to have had contacts with Northern Nigeria in Borno State beginning in 1710 and by 1890, Christian missionaries had made significant contacts with the middle-belt and the northern part of Nigeria\(^\text{84}\) in places like Katsina, Baro, Bida, Shandam, Benue, Dekina, Lokoja, Minna, Zaria, Sokoto, Kano, Nguru, Bauchi, Damshin, Muri, Ibi and a host of other cities in the north. The same approach and style of building churches and schools was applied in the north. These structures were signs that Christianity was taking shape in the North.

Musa Gaiya’s account identifies two phases of the introduction of Christianity in northern Nigeria. In the first phase, from 1857 to 1894, the main vehicle of evangelization was the Anglican Niger Mission of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). As Gaiya shows, this period began with the establishment of the first Niger Mission station in northern Nigeria and ended with the initiation of the Sudan Mission. The second phase coincides largely with the period of colonial rule in Nigeria, beginning with the coming of the Faith Missions and ending with the rise of the first indigenous churches, thus creating an indigenous northern version of Christianity.\(^\text{85}\) Different denominations are responsible for the vast number of Christians in the country and “in the early post-colonial Nigeria, the dominant Christian groups were Catholics and mainstream Protestants.”\(^\text{86}\)

\(^{84}\) Umaru, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria.*, 38.
\(^{85}\) Mustapha and Ehrhardt, *Creed & Grievance*, 85.
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
1.4.3 Pentecostalism

“From the mid-1980s the Pentecostal movement and the charismatic movement more generally began to emerge as a great force.”87 The number of Pentecostal members has continuously increased in the world but their success in Africa and Nigeria in particular has been extraordinary. There are at least three reasons responsible for this huge growth of Pentecostalism:

(1) The young generation believes that it can empower them in their quest for a better future. (2) Middle-aged women who have responsibilities for taking care of their children and who are suffering from the yoke of male-dominated gerontocratic societies find that Pentecostalism could be a good route to building a career in trade or business, or for exercising agency outside patriarchal control. (3) For others, affliction and ill health are the problems that lead them to Pentecostalism.88

Yet, the most remarkable reason for the massive growth of Pentecostalism in Africa “is the ease with which it incorporates aspects of traditional African religions and cultural practices. This relates especially to the importance of the spirit realm, and of the forces of good and evil contending within African cosmology.”89 It has also introduced two new elements into Christian belief and practice in Nigeria, in that “it reverses the anti-materialism associated with the early church and justifies, and indeed legitimizes, the acquisition of material wealth. It has also introduced the element of power, and claims of its continuous capacity to perform miracles.”90

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 86.
89 Ibid., 86.
90 Ibid., 87.
1.5 Current Political and Religious Climate

For the past three decades now, Pentecostalism has grown so much in Nigeria due to a continuous dissatisfaction with the way the traditional churches—Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans—have refused to adopt the emotional style of worship. Among the Pentecostals, “there is an emphasis on feeling and emotion (spirit) rather than on theological concepts.”\(^91\) The more traditional churches have been threatened by this to the extent that they have started including in their services styles of worship identical to that of the Pentecostal churches. The Pentecostal churches preach a prosperity gospel and often associate God’s blessings with material wealth. Members are often made to believe that sickness is a result of their sins or some sort of spiritual forces working against them or inflicted on them by their enemies. Membership is also fast growing because they do not have long procedures like the “Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults;” rather, you just need to confess that Jesus is your personal Lord and savior. “Indeed, even a common doctrinal framework is difficult to discern.”\(^92\) The attractiveness of Pentecostalism seems to be due to the fact that it is concerned about the material prosperity of the people and their health and it puts the less emphasis on dogmatic issues which do not address the immediate needs of the members. The economic and social needs of the people are more important to them than preaching on dogmas. For this reason, the young generation is consistently attracted to Pentecostalism.

Tithing in Pentecostal churches is compulsory and some pastors insist that members who evade paying tithes to the church will not go to heaven. The Pentecostal churches do

\(^91\) Campbell and Page, *Nigeria*, 70.
\(^92\) Mustapha and Ehrhardt, *Creed & Grievance*, 87.
not place so much emphasis on a dress code the way some traditional churches do. In the traditional churches, trousers are forbidden for women and they must have their hair properly covered before going into the church or during prayers. In Pentecostal churches, there are no sacraments to prepare for since people do not generally want to be bothered with all of the processes of sacramental initiation. “Phrased generally, training in many charismatic churches is less formalized than in the orthodox Catholic and protestant churches. Charisma or grace can be bestowed on anyone. This means that in some cases church elders, with or without formal training, are blessed by pastors and told to establish their own churches.”

Furthermore, the growth of Pentecostal membership is not as a result of converts from Islam but from those who are already Catholics, Anglicans, or Methodists. “So, in sum, a major transformation of Christianity has been occurring in Nigeria over the past three decades; new religious movements have been encroaching on the membership of the more established denominational churches.” Pentecostal preachers question the doctrines and way of worship in the other traditional churches, use some scriptural quotations to back up that rejection, and argue that the traditional Churches have strayed from the Bible, and from there they win over new members to their own churches.

Christianity is often associated with civility and the modern world while Islam is identified with the trans-Saharan slave trade. Moreover, those who are educated prefer to be associated with Christianity and are often embarrassed by anything that has to do with African traditional religions, even works of art. Relations between the different Christian

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93 Ibid., 87.
94 Ibid.
denominations are generally peaceful in the south, unlike the north where relations between the different Islamic sects are often hostile and often times result in violence against each other. Former U.S ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell states that “the conflict between Boko Haram and the more traditional Muslims in the north can be characterized as a civil war within Islam.”

Different churches with different names continue to spring up daily in Nigeria, although Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism are believed to be the largest. The socio-political situation, economic poverty and the influence of American Pentecostal spirituality have all contributed to the incredible upsurge and growth of African-style independent churches. They place much emphasis on speaking in tongues, reading the Bible and emphasizing spontaneous spirit-filled expressions. Generally, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) serves as the umbrella body for all the Christian Churches in Nigeria. In situations where there is a need to represent the voice of Christians on the National level, the CAN president takes on that responsibility.

The influence of religion on the state has become very evident in the fourth republic as Pentecostalism has taken the center stage as the dominant form of Christianity in the country since the beginning of the current democratic dispensation in 1999. Ebenezer Obadare posits that while Pentecostalism definitely predates the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, its emergence as a political force and as a theology that was directly focused on the appropriation of state power in Nigeria occurred with former army general Olusegun Obasanjo’s ascension to the presidency in 1999. He explains that the Christian-

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95 Campbell and Page, Nigeria., 71.
96 Cf. Campbell, Nigeria, 50.
Muslim struggle for supremacy has become more intense during this suspension of democracy. What is rather unfortunate is that the Pentecostal preachers have created a theocratic class for themselves but have failed to channel the influence they command on the people into organized and strategic development in the country; they are rather interested in sustaining themselves in that class. “The power of this class comes from the power to preach, teach, dogmatize, and lead congregations. They depend on perceptions of moral uprightness and justness, opposing themselves to the corruption of those in political power. They also rely on their charisma, their ability to arouse, inspire, and stimulate a crowd.”

The pastors control the minds of a lot of people through television, the social media and the massive churches/camp grounds they build. Led by a cohort of wealthy Pentecostal pastors, the members of the theocratic class have taken upon themselves to provide a cogent narrative about the fate of the Fourth Republic, if not of Nigerian democracy itself. On the whole, leading lights among the theocratic class have managed to redraw the boundary between the pulpit and state power, often in ways that seem to suggest concern for their own corporate existence and continued preservation as a class. They constantly interpret situations and events from a narrative that suggests the country is under demonic attacks and they provide a hermeneutical explanation of scripture that continues to widen the rivalry between Christians and Muslims.

This upsurge of Pentecostalism that is predominantly apologetic has received an equal reaction from the Muslim community with the introduction of different reformist

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98 Ibid., 24
99 Ibid., 24.
Islamic movements. “Christian resurgence, epitomized by Pentecostalism, has provided an impetus for Muslim revivalism and charismatisation.”\(^{100}\) Boko Haram, for instance, is an Islamic sect that insists that Shari’a law should be made the law of the country and at the same time insists that Muslims should not be led by Christians. The intentions of the group are both religious and political with a very forceful mode of operation, thereby worsening the security situation in the Northeastern part of Nigeria where it frequently operates.

The unfortunate thing on the part of Christianity, too, is that “despite the undoubted vigor and influence of Pentecostalism as an ideological force, its precise effects on politics can be difficult to judge.”\(^ {101}\) The politicians, be they Christians or Muslims, aware of the terrain in which they are operating, do not hesitate to take advantage of either Christianity or Islam as a social force in order to maneuver the political situation in their favor to gain access to power; but the basic positive teachings of the two religions that are likely to transform the society when put in practice are never even mentioned after the elections. The construction of a national identity by all stakeholders in order to work for a common goal with goodwill for all is indispensable in this kind of situation. The definition of who is a Nigerian will emphasize the elements that unite all rather than the elements that separate people because of the ethnic and religious differences that exist. The same resources available already that have been manipulated to suit the selfish plans of individuals can also be used to ensure that the citizens of the country have a sense of belonging. The political use of religion in a manipulative way impedes dialogue.\(^ {102}\)

\(^ {100}\) Ibid., 26

\(^ {101}\) Ibid., 26

1.6 Implications of Christian-Muslim Encounter in Nigeria

The encounter between Christianity and Islam was benign from the outset as Christians enjoyed the protection of Muslims on account of being the people of the book.\textsuperscript{103} “However, this benign start to the direct relationship between Muslims and Christians changed fundamentally between 1900 and 1903, on the eve of the imposition of British colonial rule over the Sokoto Caliphate.”\textsuperscript{104} The northerners interpreted the British conquest as Christians fighting against Muslims to take over their territory. When Lugard, as the head of the British forces, wrote a letter announcing the intentions of the British to establish good relations with Sokoto and settle therein, the Sultan Abdurrahman Atiku replied, saying: “I do not consent that any one of you should ever dwell with us. Between us and you, there are no dealings except as between Muslims and unbelievers: war as Almighty enjoined on us.”\textsuperscript{105} The northerners interpreted British rule as “Christians ruling Muslims, or Muslims collaborating in ruling alongside Christians.”\textsuperscript{106} There was stiff resistance from the already existing Muslim community in the north. The chiefs, emirs and the Islamic communities in those areas were so hostile to the Christian missionaries that they had to suspend missionary activities there and leave between 1886 and 1902. British colonial authorities also did not support Christian missionary activities in the north, and as a result, there was close monitoring to prevent evangelization from taking place. Church leaders were often taken to court and the already existing places of worship were destroyed. This began the period of the destruction of churches in the north.

\textsuperscript{103} Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 112.
Even until today, churches are easily burned down in the north at the slightest misunderstanding or miscommunication in the media. State governors rarely grant permission for the building of churches and in most cities, it is forbidden to build churches. Although Nigeria is a multireligious country and has been a secular state since independence, religion continues to influence all aspects of the country’s life. “Kenny maintains that the Colonial rule favoured the Muslims. They were able to build mosques, interact with people, and proselytize freely throughout the country.”\textsuperscript{107}

It is also worth noting the remarkable differences in the way the two dominant religions evangelized from the very outset, and how this has played out over the years in the larger society. “Like in most situations of religious struggle and conflicts, aimed at winning the attention and recognition of those aimed at, the relationship between Islam and Christianity was marked by a continuous effort to win the souls of the people either for Allah or for God, based on the principles of evangelization and indoctrination followed by the separate missionaries.”\textsuperscript{108} To achieve this, both religions demonized the other and created conflicting ideas in the minds of the people, and because of such actions, exclusivism became the common narrative for both religions. “The persecution of Christians became an early narrative in colonial Northern Nigeria, even under a European Christian colonial administration. Muslims and Christians adopted an exclusivist approach to issues of religion, seeing salvation as only possible through their particular faiths while at the same time denying any divine content in the opposing faith.”\textsuperscript{109} The ripple effects

\textsuperscript{107} Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria.}, 47.
\textsuperscript{108} Nwanaju, \textit{Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria}.
\textsuperscript{109} Mustapha and Ehrhardt, \textit{Creed & Grievance}, 114.
have all materialized and the results are available for evaluation after decades of living these faiths.

On the part of Islam, where it was predominantly the use of Jihad and subsequently the use of Koranic schools that teach only the Islamic religion, the outcome has been that people do not learn professional skills and critical thinking, are unable to find work and thus become impoverished. In the south, where the Christian religion and education were combined in formal schools, the students developed other skills and knowledge besides their faith. Therefore, many intellectual, moral and spiritual aspects of their lives were taken care of. There is much development in the south compared to the northern part of the country. As a result, Christianity is often associated with modernity. If the Christians and the Muslims do not adopt an inclusivist approach in their religious worldviews, the implications are that incessant violence could continue. Fundamentalists on both sides would continue to promote exclusivism, thereby leading to a great deal of violence. In contrast to the exclusivist approach, inclusivists hold that while one set of beliefs is true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true and can lead to salvation as well. The exclusivist, on the other hand, holds that only one religion or set of beliefs leads to salvation and the others are false.

While some Christian denominations are open to interreligious dialogue with Muslims, some denominations are not. Pentecostalism, as a dominant force, currently does not support interreligious dialogue and this creates a huge challenge since it is primarily apologetic and demonizes Islam. “The increasing conflicts may be as a result of competing fundamentalisms as Paul Gifford images both Pentecostalism and radical Islamist groups
as fundamentalists.”¹¹⁰ There is obviously a need for intra-religious dialogue for both Christians and Muslims in order to understand and agree among themselves first, and then project one voice, ready to embrace the culture of dialogue and friendship with the religious others.

1.7 Religion and Politics in Nigeria

“Secularism has failed to turn the public space into a neutral arena.”¹¹¹ It is quite interesting to see the interplay of religion and politics in Nigeria. “Nigeria’s religious conflict can be understood from the politicization of religion or the manipulation of religion by politicians and external geopolitical forces.”¹¹² Some politicians have exploited the political space for their personal gain; they continue to manipulate religious sentiments for their selfish interest. “Religion and ethnicity have taken center stage in polarizing Nigerians, fostered by some politicians.”¹¹³ Most Nigerians are very sensitive about their religion, and politicians, knowing this, skillfully exploit it to their advantage.

Although Nigeria has been said to be a secular State since its independence in 1960, religion still plays a huge role in the nation’s everyday life. For instance, politicians promise the electorates pilgrimage trips to Mecca and Israel in order to lobby for votes at the polls.¹¹⁴ “The elite who pose as defenders of Islam are not what they pretend to be. They are driven by more mundane interests such as the political power embedded in power arrangements and sharing of resources in a constitutional arrangement that allocates most

¹¹¹ Ibid., vii.
¹¹² Ibid., ix.
¹¹³ Umaru, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria, 52.
¹¹⁴ Iwuchukwu, Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria.
of the power to the center.”115 President Muhammadu Buhari, as a Muslim, currently serving in his second tenure, had to appoint a Pentecostal pastor as his vice president in order to convince the Christians that he would not fight against them during his tenure. There have been fears that Muslims intend to Islamize the country using the office of the president to achieve this. The last four years have been horrible for Christians in the Middle Belt and in the south due to the Fulani herdsmen who are president Buhari’s tribal men who, on repeated occasions, massacred hundreds of people while the president refused to take action against them. For this reason, most Nigerians have become extremely fearful that the president has an Islamic agenda in mind. The president has not disproven these allegations.116

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria has reproached the president on several occasions for being so insensitive to the plight of the Christians in the Middle Belt. Under his watch, Fulani herdsmen have killed farmers freely and no arrests have been made. Nothing has been done to prevent further attacks and the same situation keeps repeating itself. The body language of President Buhari has not demonstrated to the Catholic Bishops that he is a president for both Christians and Muslims, so for the first time, the Catholic Bishops Conference organized a walk in all thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja to demonstrate how unhappy they are with the manner in which the present administration has treated Christians. Instead of being able to promote dialogue, the Christians in the Middle Belt are begging that they should not be killed. Many

115 Van Gorder, Violence in God’s Name.
have accused this government of injustice and discrimination against Christians, including the Catholic Bishops.

There are genuine reasons for these fears because in 1986 the country was secretly registered as a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an organization believed to be only for Muslim countries.\textsuperscript{117} The Catholic Bishops at that time did not hesitate to express their disappointment upon this discovery, as they wrote: “The fact that secrecy and rumour eventually gave way to belated official admission that Nigeria has joined the OIC cannot but disappoint us. With the majority of Nigerians, we have come to expect openness and free debate to form this government.”\textsuperscript{118} These kinds of issues hinder conversations from becoming meaningful and bearing fruit over time. They generate tension, mistrust, mutual suspicion, and, at times, lead to physical violence. None of the languages spoken in Nigeria uses the Arabic alphabet, yet Arabic words are found boldly written on all denominations of the Nigerian currency called the “Naira,” something which has also generated a lot of concern in the country.\textsuperscript{119}

Although “there is a widespread feeling that religion should be used to improve the processes of political competition and governance,”\textsuperscript{120} when religion is understood as part and parcel of political life, it generates division and could lead to violence especially in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. “The adoption of full Shari’a law—both personal and criminal law—by twelve northern states after 1999 intensified the divide, tension and

\textsuperscript{120} Mustapha and Ehrhardt, \textit{Creed & Grievance}, 92.
conflict among the adherents of Nigeria’s two major religions.” The Northern politicians in those twelve states introduced Shari’a law because they knew that would play on the people’s sentiments and win them votes easily.

In addition, there are oligarchs who run the country even though they do not hold any public office; they exert a lot of influence on the people due to their past record, a previous leadership position they held or the financial power they exert. They are the “kingmakers” and their thinking is clearly reflected in the people they dominate; their religious beliefs and orientation are almost always reflected in their followers. In this way, religion and tribalism become instruments that the elites use to incite the masses and gain support. Politics is just a business and a way of becoming employed in the government in order to have access to the nation’s wealth. The desperation in these people is such that they are ready to kill other human beings in order to achieve their desires. Political campaigns are full of hate speeches against opponents and the use of religious and tribal differences to cause division and so win elections or achieve what they want. The undiscerning public is often quick to react and is almost always governed just by emotion; that is the reason violence erupts at the slightest incitement from the elites who are fighting to protect their selfish interests. The alienation of the non-elite continues to increase, the gap between the poor and the rich continues to widen every day, and the nation’s problems are never addressed because the attention of the people is usually distracted from facing national issues.

121 Ibid., 80.
122 Umaru, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria*.
124 Bourne, *Nigeria*.
125 Ibid., 250.
Since independence, religious and ethnic rhetoric has leveraged claims to political representation and opportunities. This is bad enough and often degenerates into fierce zero-sum conflicts. Corruption and incompetent leadership have added another wrinkle, preventing the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities and making the politics of religious and ethnic exclusivity more appealing.126

The culture of undifferentiated aspects of religion and politics developed in the minds of the people over the years and it has become difficult to see the difference between the two disciplines, religion and politics, given the antecedent events that have occurred over the years. “Since colonization established the basis for using identity politics as a means of accessing political and economic resources, religious differences have exacerbated political crises and have been implicated in major national conflicts.”127 For instance, the

 politicization of religion and ethnicity in Nigerian censuses have led to the exclusion of survey questions on these two variables from recent census exercises…Group size is used to support claims of alleged marginalization from the state and socio-economic gains so as to argue for a future increased share in political representation and other opportunities.128

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter discloses the fact that the conflict in Nigeria arose from a mixture of diverse reasons that are historical, religious, ethnic, economic, social, political and theological. The chapter reviewed the history of Nigeria as a country and discussed the role of the British in the creation of the country and the intended and unintended consequences of the decisions of the British. The origin of violence in Nigeria was explained, as well as

127 Ibid.
128 Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance., 118.
how the imposition of colonial rule created conditions for violence. “Religion as a powerful impulse, plays a paradoxical role in the region. It is both part of the problem and central in proffering solutions.” Religious extremists who continue to preach and promote exclusivism in both religions worsen the situation.

Religion and ethnicity are the two most important identity components in Nigeria, reinforced by the British during colonial rule. These two identity markers are often used to demand for a share in the nation’s resources and for political representation. Anytime there is a perceived misunderstanding among the elite, they evoke religious and ethnic sentiments among their followers and cry out that there is no justice. The reaction is often violence in the name of religion. Since the multiple ethnic groups in Nigeria were put together by force, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain peace in this era of democracy.

Since independence, religious and ethnic rhetoric has leveraged claims to political representation and opportunities. This is bad enough and often degenerates into fierce zero-sum conflicts. Corruption and incompetent leadership have added another wrinkle, preventing the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities and making the politics of religious and ethnic exclusivity more appealing.

Leaders have been unable to manage multi-ethnic and religious diversity and instead of harnessing the gifts of diversity, diversity has instead been taken as a challenge. The role that religion and politics play in a society like Nigeria has been discussed in this chapter. In general, the background for the issues and the problems that have besieged the country have been presented.

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130 “The Roots of Nigeria’s Religious and Ethnic Conflict.”
Some political administrations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like the Human Assistance Initiative (HUMAI) and the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) have been founded to facilitate interfaith dialogue but unfortunately, they have not been able to bring about interreligious harmony. Leo Igwe notes that:

A lot has been said about the imperative of inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria and how such an initiative could foster peace and tolerance among the adherents of the different religions in the country. In fact, it was in pursuant to this very noble objective that, some years ago, the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) was formed. However, from all indications, little or no dialogue has been going on amongst the different religions in the country. Clashes and killings have characterized inter-religious relationships. Apparently, Nigeria has very little to show for many years of investment in inter-religious communication and conversation.¹³¹

The next chapter demonstrates how the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council was able to renew itself and reform her theology in a way that provides room for the appreciation of religious others, having carefully re-examined herself and the trends occurring in the world. The Church was able to turn away from her past and official Church teachings and promoted unity among Christians and unity among peoples of other faith traditions in the form of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue respectively. Cultural and religious diversity hitherto condemned and frowned upon by the Church was now appreciated, cherished and promoted. This is presented in Chapter Two to demonstrate how an organization and a society can turn away from her past and transform it so that it serves as a model for the Nigerian Catholic Church to separate religion from politics, eliminate exclusivism in her theology, focus on the real essence of religion and dispose herself to serve the Nigerian people in general. It is evident that the way Vatican II embraced

religious diversity has transformed individuals and the world at large leading to peace and harmony. This is presented as a model for the Nigerian Catholic Church to solve the multicultural and multi-religious differences that abound in the country.
CHAPTER TWO: Discourse on Vatican II

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the ideas of the Second Vatican Council and those that developed over the decades since the end of the Council, which would be pertinent to the religious context of the conflicts in Nigeria. The Council itself serves as a paradigm for Nigeria on how to manage diversity. The Second Vatican Council, which was convoked by Pope John the XXIII in 1962 and concluded by his successor, Paul VI, in 1965, provides an example of how an institution or nation can deal with the issues of change and identity.

“When Pope John XXIII spoke about what he had in mind for the council, he sometimes used the term ‘aggiornamento,’ an Italian word meaning bringing up to date.” The council’s choice of a literary style and choice of vocabulary were all indications of a shift in values or priorities, the sign of inner conversion. “Words like charism, dialogue, partnership, cooperation, and friendship indicate a new style of thinking, speaking and behaving, a change from a more authoritarian and unidirectional style to a more reciprocal and responsive model.” Writing on Vatican II and the issue of change, John O’Malley posits:

In different and more secular forms, however, many institutions—schools, certain businesses, nations—must face them as well. They are about identity—how to maintain it while dealing with the inevitability of change, and then how to make it effective in new but recognizably authentic ways.

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133 Ibid., 11.
In this perspective the council serves as a case study, a paradigm. The issues transcend their religious articulation.\textsuperscript{134}

The changing world and times continued to challenge Catholic thought at that time and the consistent rejection of modernity could not continue if the Church was to remain relevant to the people in modern times. “The council was an attempt at healing certain aspects of the church’s history in that period and at slipping out from under its vestigial weight.”\textsuperscript{135} Catholic reactionary attitudes and the unhealthy competition with Protestants in foreign missions, the disregard for other religions, the low status of the laity in the Church, the use of authority in the Church, the liturgy and in fact the sixteen final documents of the Council, all indicate areas of special concern that the Council could not but deal with.

For centuries there was great animosity—not just between Catholics and other separated Christians, but between Catholics and adherents of other religions. Catholics were prohibited from relating with non-Catholics. A history of the crusades reveals that Popes and Saints, like Benedict of Clairvaux supported them. The Crusades were religious wars between Christians and Muslims that were waged between 1096 and 1291 in order to secure places that were considered sacred by both religions. In a bid to motivate the people to fight for land, Benedict of Clairvaux wrote: “Gird yourselves therefore, like men and take up arms with joy and with zeal for your Christian name, in order to take vengeance on the heathen, and curb the nations.”\textsuperscript{136} Pope Urban II on November 27, 1095 proclaimed a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[134] Ibid., 8.
\item[135] Ibid., 4.
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crusade in a fiery speech at the Council of Clermont and granted absolution to all those who would join in this “holy war.” Religion and politics dominated the affairs of the Catholic Church and ended up distracting her from her mission and wounded her relationship with other Christians and non-Christians. There was a need for renewal and reform so that the Church could reconcile with others and end the long years of division.

2.2 Vatican II

Of all the ecumenical councils held in the Church, Vatican II was the one most prepared for. There was an ante-preparatory commission that sought the opinions of the bishops around the world on the issues they would want to be addressed at the council. The wide consultations that were made before the beginning of the council were also a demonstration of the willingness to dialogue. This chapter therefore explores: (1) the four Conciliar Constitutions of Vatican II since they provide the orientations according to which the other documents are to be interpreted, and (2) the decrees and declarations of Vatican II, especially “Nostra Aetate,” which serve as sources for enough theological justification to promote dialogue with other religions—particularly Islam. The council re-examined the history of the Church and the trends in the world and knew that the exclusivist attitude, the politicization of religion, the unhealthy competition with protestants and all the things that damaged the image of the Church needed to be eliminated in official Church teachings. Also outstanding was the council’s commitment to a return to the sources or roots and at the same time a commitment to updating the belief system, the renewal of priestly and

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religious life as well as reforms that all people could embrace and shape within their context.

2.2.1 The Four Conciliar Constitutions

The first of the Vatican II documents to be promulgated was the Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, and “it prefigured much of what was to come in later documents of the Council.”\textsuperscript{139} The liturgical constitution according to Faggioli prepared the way for what he called “rapprochement manifestos” of Vatican II.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, the document does not only speak of Catholics but explains in paragraph 22 that: “the Holy Spirit offers to all, in a way known to God, the possibility of being made partners in the paschal mystery.”\textsuperscript{141} Explaining further the relevance of Sacrosanctum Concilium, Gerald O’Collins posits that the relevance of the paschal mystery extends beyond the baptized gathered by the Holy Spirit to celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ. The grace and power of the paschal mystery touches the whole of the human race. Here, we see how the scope and focus of the document expands its role beyond the Catholic faithful to all human beings. “Right from the opening article, a worldwide mindset distinguished the constitution. Unlike the Council of Trent, Vatican II presented its teaching on the liturgy within the context not only of Christianity but also of the entire human race.”\textsuperscript{142} Reintroducing the practice of the “prayer of the faithful” at liturgy, Sacrosanctum

\textsuperscript{139} Gerald O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning} (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 60.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 81.
Concilium states: “In this prayer in which the people are to take part, intercessions are to be made for all human beings and for the salvation of the whole world.”¹⁴³

*Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, equally reflects the rapprochement manifesto of Vatican II as it extends its treatment of the people of God to include people of all nations and even people of other religions, acknowledging that people of other religions can be saved. The constitution of the Church specifically mentioned Muslims: “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.”¹⁴⁴

In a similar vein, *Dei Verbum*, the Constitution on Divine Revelation instructs that editions of sacred Scripture be provided with suitable notes for the use of even non-Christians and adapted to their circumstances.¹⁴⁵ Finally, *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, took the rapprochement manifesto to its fullest conclusion. It elaborates the functions of the Holy Spirit in an all-encompassing way to include all human beings; thus it is through the Holy Spirit that all human beings receive the light and strength needed to respond to their supreme calling; through the Holy Spirit, all human beings receive the gift of faith; the resurrected Christ is at work in the hearts of human beings everywhere. “From start to finish *Gaudium et Spes* endorses dialogue and collaboration with the religious others.”¹⁴⁶ The four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council are the highest in rank and provide the key for interpreting the rest of the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 82.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 44.
documents; they also prepare the way for Catholics’ openness and readiness to embrace the religious others and serve as the keys to interpreting the other decrees and declarations of the council.

The manner in which the Council fathers were committed to and focused on changing the way the Church carried out her apostolate in the world in relation to religious others is established in the four Conciliar Constitutions. As such, the documents that follow suit are also in the same spirit of the council. The intention of the “nouvelle theologians” to get away from the metaphysical and ahistorical way of approaching theology and focus on human beings was embraced and implemented using the two principles of ressourcement and aggiornamento, simply explained as “inherited tradition” and “contemporary experience.” While *Lumen Gentium* 16 already made history by making positive remarks about Judaism and Islam for the first time in the history of twenty one ecumenical councils of Catholic Christianity, other documents of the Council followed that same spirit, hence the promulgation of documents like *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Nostra Aetate*.

Unlike the other councils before it, Vatican II did not spend time defining doctrines and condemning people of heresy. The focus was to find common ground, to find uniting factors and be of help to human beings. The council fathers expressed the solidarity of the church with the whole human family. They recognized that: “the joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any

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147 Ibid., 86.
way are the joy and hope and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.” As human beings, we share the same concerns, worries, sicknesses, pains, and sorrows and these are indications that we have things in common as human beings and the varieties of religions should not be the reason for division.

The essence of the council was “not solely to enrich the Church’s unity in Christ, but to enrich the unity of the whole world.” Everything that is human concerns the Church, therefore, the council through the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “addresses not only the sons and daughters of the Church and all who call upon the name of Christ, but the whole humanity as well…the world which the council has in mind is the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelopes it.”

From these expressions, we already see clear signs that a new dawn is here and that different religious beliefs should not be a hindrance to the Church’s ability to embrace every human being irrespective of their religion. “The idea of defending the sacred dignity of the human person was a major theme in Pope John XXIII’s encyclical letter Mater et Magistra of May 15, 1961…The growing sense of human dignity in the world shall contribute to the common good of all nations.”

The council fathers reiterate further that the church is willing and ready to be of service to the whole human family, hence the statement in Gaudium et Spes that advocates for an “expression of its solidarity and respectful affection for the whole human family and

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the desire to enter into dialogue unreservedly with humanity in fostering a sense of sisterhood and brotherhood to correspond to this destiny of theirs.”

We already see clear signs of the new direction the Church has taken from here following the citations that have been made thus far. For instance, Pope John XXIII in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council explained that the Church, “illumined by the light of Christ, seeks to spread charity and to enable all human beings to thoroughly understand what they themselves really are, what dignity distinguishes them, what goal they must pursue.”

This new dimension, the council fathers stated, is not motivated by selfish or hidden motives but by a sense of mission and faithfulness to the Lord, who came to save and to serve the world. She intends to be “a servant Church that embraces a ministry of justice and peace for the Modern World.”

The freedom, wisdom, truth, conscience, intellect and all that human beings have, stem from their dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. This is the genesis of an appreciation of religious others because it is human beings who practice religion; then it only follows that we appreciate and love the human beings who are adherents of other religions if we have respect for human life which we share in common with others irrespective of their beliefs. Background information as provided by John O’Malley reveals that Nostra Aetate, which is key for the Church in the area of interreligious dialogue, “was originally intended as a theological statement on the Jews and in some form a condemnation of anti-Semitism but was later expanded to include other non-Christian religions and a general statement about loving all human beings.”

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155 O’Malley, What Happened at Vatican II. 221.
holds a special place among the documents of Vatican II and its relevance after the council cannot be underestimated.

The understanding of who comprises the people of God was broadened to include even those who were not within the borders of the Catholic Church. It is very interesting to see in chapter two of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, that the council fathers neither limited the people of God to only Catholics, nor did they limit it to only Christians, but instead considered even non-Christians to be related to the people of God. This is very much in line with Acts of the Apostles 10:35, which states that at all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him: “The one people of God is accordingly present in all the nations of the earth, since its citizens who are taken from all nations are of a kingdom whose nature is not earthly but heavenly.”\(^{156}\)

Before concluding, *Lumen Gentium* clearly states that:

…those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways…Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, they too may achieve eternal salvation.”\(^{157}\)

Likewise, in article sixteen, “five groups of people are distinguished on the basis of the source and kind of knowledge of God that is characteristic of each group. They are listed in a descending order, from those whose knowledge of God is closest to Christian faith to those who have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God.”\(^{158}\) Islam is singled


\(^{157}\) Ibid., 16.

out here because it is a monotheistic religion like Christianity. “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.” With this having been said, the seedbed was gradually getting ready for the planting of “Nostra Aetate.” The inner logic of the text already reveals that if those who have not received the Gospel are equally considered in some way as the people of God, it follows out of necessity that religious liberty should be acknowledged. It is only out of freedom that people can truly follow God in a particular religion.

2.2.2 *Dignitatis Humanae*

There is a strong connection between the Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Nostra Aetate*, for it is a contradiction to declare that human beings are free to choose and to practice the religion of their choice while still refusing to respect them because of their religion. The council clearly states what it means by religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*:

Freedom of this kind means that all human beings should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his or her convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others.\(^{160}\)

What is the source of this freedom? The council states that this freedom is based on the very dignity of the human being. God, having created human beings, gave them...

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\(^{159}\) “DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH - LUMEN GENTIUM.” 16.

freedom and this freedom differentiates them from lesser animals. It is this very freedom that has brought about different religions in the world since people are free to approach their creator in the very tradition that they recognize and cherish. Human beings’ response to God is authentic only when it is entirely out of a free will. God is, therefore, the first to respect the freedom of human beings, whom he created, so there needs to be no justification or coercion of any kind; everyone is bound to respect it conscientiously. Without this declaration, it would have implied that the Church was promoting dictatorship in an era of democracy which places much value on freedom. “The Council’s ecumenical passion, its affirmation of religious liberty, its love for the Jewish people, its respect for other religions, its commitment to a hierarchically conscious faith that does not fear the modern world,” all of which proceeds from the council’s intention to task the Church with embracing and engaging the world in creative ways.

2.2.3 *Nostra Aetate*

*Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions was originally meant to be a statement against the Holocaust and to reconcile with the Jews. But with the presence of Bishops from about 116 countries and their diverse backgrounds, the minds of the Bishops were opened to the realization that there was a need to reconcile not just with the Jews, but with other religions around the world. Here we see how the council fathers, despite opposition, were able to manage diversity within the Church, which broadened minds and enriched the Church.

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This is and should be an example for the Nigerian Church and society at large. Although *Nostra Aetate* is said to be one of the shortest documents to have been promulgated by the Second Vatican Council with just about five paragraphs, “the impact of those five paragraphs over the past five decades has been extraordinary.”¹⁶³ The Church expresses the respect and regard she has for Muslims in the document by explicitly stating that:

The Church has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one and, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth who has spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour, and at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason, they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.¹⁶⁴

Thus, *Nostra Aetate* marks the beginning of a milestone in the Church’s desire for interreligious dialogue. It “is an acknowledgment by the Church of the universal presence of grace and its activity in the many religions of mankind.”¹⁶⁵ In it, the Church has: (1) demonstrated a better understanding and openness toward other religions, (2) recognized wisdom in other religious traditions, (3) acknowledged the fact that God’s revelation is manifest in other religious traditions too, and (4) confirmed a readiness to enter into peaceful and meaningful conversations with members of other religions so that together all religions can journey towards the truth. The document, “*Nostra Aetate* must be understood

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as a statement that gave a new orientation to dialogue, a dialogue built on a more positive attitude toward and constructive relationship with the followers of other religious traditions.\textsuperscript{166}

The ultimate goal for both Christians and Muslims is to draw nearer to God, and ultimately the vision of God in the hereafter. This goal motivates each believer to follow God’s will and promote the good in their personal lives, religious communities, and civil society. The ethical teachings of all believers to realize point to common elements in this Divine mandate. \textit{. In Nostra Aetate}, the Council acknowledges

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the existence of quarrels and dissension between Christians and Muslims during the past centuries and pleads with all to forget the past and also recommends that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding and so work together for the preservation and fostering of social justice, moral welfare and peace and freedom for all humankind.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

In an era in which even the secular world saw the need for peace and unity and nations were making serious efforts at promoting unity, the council thought it wise to promote such steps at extending the hand of friendship to other religions; in fact, she was already late but needed to catch up to her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and nations. “The second sentence of Nostra Aetate declares that it is a special duty of the Church to foster the unity of mankind, fellowship among individuals and nations. All of this is firmly rooted in the natural law created by God.”\textsuperscript{168} How does she intend to achieve this? She is concerned from the “outset on what people have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.”\textsuperscript{169} This is important because when people have

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\textsuperscript{166} Valkenberg, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, 94.
\textsuperscript{167} Ruokanen, \textit{The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions}.
\textsuperscript{168} Ruokanen, \textit{The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions}, 48.
\textsuperscript{169} “Nostra Aetate.”, 1.
\end{flushleft}
things that unite them in common, they tend to build relationships on such things. Beginning with doctrinal clarifications in the Church’s relationship with adherents of other religions, that is, in how they differ, would be signs that the dialogue and friendship would not grow. All people share a common origin and a common destiny; we are all from God and to God we shall all return. It is quite evident that God does not discriminate against anyone in his providence. “All peoples and all men have a common origin, because all are created by God. On the basis of this, all human beings live in the sphere of the Creator’s providence and enjoy the goodness of created things.” Everyone equally breathes in and out the air God has provided. “The Council, therefore, when speaking of the religions of the world, introduced a totally new atmosphere of respect and recognition.”

Different orientations, spiritual yearnings, and environments necessitate the different religions we have in the world today and for the first time in the history of the Catholic Church the council acknowledged the validity of other religions. All religions wonder about and question the meaning of life and death, the purpose of our existence, the source of suffering, how genuine happiness can be found, what is right or wrong behavior, and what rewards follow death. These are very basic and fundamental questions that all religions contemplate. Nostra Aetate addresses Catholics concerning other religions, saying:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her

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171 Ibid., 55.
172 “Nostra Aetate.”
own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.\textsuperscript{173}

With this statement, the council expresses her reverence for the moral and sociocultural values found among the adherents of other religions that are capable of leading their members to holiness and subsequently salvation, which is the ultimate goal. “While Lumen Gentium 16 had already broken new ground in the history of the twenty-one ecumenical councils of Catholic Christianity by its positive remarks about Judaism and Islam, \textit{Nostra Aetate} went further by reflecting on other religions…”\textsuperscript{174} Reading through the first documents promulgated by the council, one notices the direction and the mood the council adopted towards other religions.

\textit{Nostra Aetate}, therefore, is an explicit confirmation of the respect the council has for other religions and particularly mentions Islam. “For the first time in the history of Roman Catholicism, an ecumenical council honored as the work of the living God the truth and holiness to be found in certain other religions.”\textsuperscript{175} Nostra Aetate states:

In the course of centuries there have indeed arisen not a few quarrels and hostilities between Christians and Muslims. But now this Sacred Synod pleads with all to forget the past, to make sincere efforts for mutual understanding, and so to work together for the preservation and fostering of social justice, moral welfare, and peace and freedom for all humankind.\textsuperscript{176}

This statement illustrates the sincere efforts of council fathers to eliminate the unhealthy relationship of religion and politics that often characterized her relationship with Muslims in history.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{176} Valkenberg, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, 91.
The mixture of politics and religion in Nigeria has caused the country so many lives and has caused Nigerians to have a distorted view of what true religion is. The Council once again presents an example for the country of Nigeria to emulate, to eliminate the mixture of religion and politics. The mixture of politics and religion is fast destroying Christianity, not just in Nigeria but in Africa as a whole. Nigeria should look in particular to the last paragraph of *Nostra Aetate*, which “points to the firm foundation of human dignity and human rights in the theology of creation. The historical background of the birth of the document is also clearly discernable there. The Church reproves all discrimination, in this statement being motivated, above all, by the need to judge all forms of anti-Semitism.”

Having carefully reexamined herself and her role in the world, the Church picks up the task of promoting interreligious dialogue as her mission in order to promote the unity of men and women of different religious backgrounds and traditions. The document has maintained its relevance all through these decades; its relevance is only becoming more pronounced and greater day by day.

2.3 Conciliar Developments and Vatican II Implementation

The first Encyclical of Pope Paul VI’s pontificate entitled *Ecclesiam Suam* issued August 6, 1964, served as a motivation for the acceptance of *Nostra Aetate* and *Gaudium et Spes* and the entire work of the Second Vatican Council in general. The encyclical reminded the Church of the fundamental reason why Jesus founded it, “to be the loving mother of the whole human family and minister to its salvation.”

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earnest desire that the Church and the world should meet together and get to know and love one another.\footnote{Ibid., 3.} To achieve this, the pope was convinced that there was a need for a deeper self-knowledge of the Church’s own origin, nature, mission and destiny. This will inevitably lead to renewal and show the need for dialogue with the surrounding world where the Church lives and works. \textit{Ecclesiam Suam} thus promotes dialogue with the entire human race because of the common nature and common life that we share, it promotes dialogue with Monotheistic religions, dialogue with Christians and lastly, dialogue among Catholics. The encyclical promoted the entire work of the Council throughout the Church.\footnote{Edward Idris Cassidy, \textit{Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate, Rediscovering Vatican II} (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 134.} Paul VI then proceeded to set up structures that would make the change effective. “In 1964, while the Second Vatican Council was still in process, Pope Paul VI set up what was then known as the Secretariat for Non-Christians, to form a structure within the Church with special responsibility for interreligious relations”\footnote{Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli, \textit{Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). 239.} headed then by Cardinal Paul Marella who worked hard to ensure that the attitude towards people of other religions was properly communicated. The name was changed to Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1988. \textit{Nostra Aetate} Foundation was established by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1993. And “[the foundation’s] main purpose is to provide scholarships for students belonging to other religions who wish to improve their knowledge of Christianity by studying in one of the Pontifical academies or universities in Rome.”\footnote{Ibid.241.} It sometimes gives financial aid to support interreligious dialogue in different countries in the world. Other initiatives
include the introduction of courses/centers in the Universities to teach students Christian-Muslim dialogue like the center at Georgetown University, Graduate Theological Union.

While the first steps in Catholic-Muslim dialogue were undertaken under Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II succeeded in fostering and deepening this dialogue through compelling gestures towards Muslims.”\textsuperscript{184} Speaking of dialogue on World Day of Peace, John Paul II stated: “Dialogue is at the same time the search for what is and what remains common to people, even in the midst of tensions, oppositions, and conflicts. In this sense, it is to make the other party a neighbour.”\textsuperscript{185}

Speaking about the structures the Church has put in place to promote interreligious dialogue, Pope John Paul II said: “[It] is the symbol and expression of the Church’s will to enter into communication with every person, and in particular with the multitudes of those who seek in the non-Christian religious traditions meaning and guidance for their lives.”\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{2.3.1 Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims}

Established in 1974, the Commission for the Religious Relations with Muslims, which is entrusted with the task of accompanying and fostering religious dialogue with Islam, issued a document in 1981 entitled: “Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims.”\textsuperscript{187} For the purpose of study and research, a Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic studies was set up in Rome in 1964. “All academic and scientific activities

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.36.
in the institute are aimed at preparing students to meet Muslims respectfully and in mutual cooperation.”188 Since the promulgation of the document, different Church authorities have expressed friendly gestures towards Muslims because, “texts and documents as important as they are, cannot replace personal and face to face dialogues.”

2.3.2 Post Council Documents

Redemptoris Missio

In order to demonstrate her commitment to the charge given by Vatican II and implement it, the Church tasks herself with this mission of promoting dialogue and understanding with adherents of other religions. Relations with other religions, which were formerly filled with prejudiced interpretation and suspicion, became the official mission of the Church in the light of Nostra Aetate, which states:

The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”189

For this reason, since the promulgation of these documents, we find different popes promoting interreligious dialogue. Pope John Paul II, then the archbishop of Krakow, was at the council and, worked hard to promote dialogue between the Church and other religions, taking it as a part of the Church’s mission. In Redemptoris Missio, the Pope states: “Interreligious dialogue is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”190

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188 Umaru, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria.
189 “Nostra Aetate.” 2.
As stated, Vatican II embraced everything that is human, and through interreligious dialogue, the Church is able to be of service to others while at the same time listening to and learning from other religions.

Speaking further about dialogue, John Paul II writes: “Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements, and dignity. It is demanded by a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills.” The commandment given by Jesus to love one’s neighbor is not an optional commandment. It is at the heart of Jesus’ message and this love of neighbour is not to be based on conditions, whether she or he practices the same faith with you or not. Every Christian is called to love his or her neighbours as he or she loves himself/herself, irrespective of the religion, status or political affiliation of one’s neighbours. The pope clarifies it by saying: “Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruits in the spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Christian Church in the way they stimulate her…” In accordance with this sentiment, the council has made efforts to avoid the usage of negative language towards other religions. “The old terminology for pagan religions and their errors seems to be totally omitted from the document of the Council.” Nostra Aetate gives a special responsibility to Catholics, to be promoters of reconciliation in the present-day international scenario.

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191 Ibid., 56.
192 Ibid.
194 Valkenberg, *Nostra Aetate,* 95.
2.3.3 *Dialogue and Proclamation*

As stated earlier, Pope John Paul II said that “interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”\(^{195}\) Some have felt that dialogue and mission are in conflict with each other, that it is contradictory to acknowledge the validity of other religions, express interest in entering into dialogue with them and still think it is possible to obey the Lord’s command to proclaim the gospel. On this, Pope John Paul II wrote: “…dialogue is not in opposition to mission *Ad Gentes*, indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions.”\(^ {196}\) The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* explains what the church means by dialogue: “In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”\(^ {197}\) Evangelization here is explained as “the mission of the Church in its totality.”\(^ {198}\) So whatever concerns the church is, therefore, her mission and must be taken seriously. Obviously, “interreligious dialogue is a response to religious plurality, a phenomenon which is increasing as communications become easier and more rapidly”\(^ {199}\) If the Church fails to embrace dialogue in this age and time, the world will leave it behind; if we share the earth together with its natural resources, we must journey together at this time in our history so that we may enhance peace and

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\(^{195}\) “*Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990) | John Paul II.” 55.

\(^{196}\) Ibid.


\(^{198}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{199}\) Fitzgerald and Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue.* 27.
development in the world. Religious plurality can no longer be denied with certain theological propositions that are opposed to it outright.

2.3.4 *Forms of Dialogue*

There are four forms of dialogue explained by *Dialogue and Proclamation*:

1. **Dialogue of life**: This is where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. Here, it is important to show genuine interest in others, especially those of other religions, by learning about them through reading or direct contact. “The dialogue of life is the active concern of citizens with the problems of life together in one free and democratic country.”

   This helps us overcome prejudices and promote understanding among each other. Home visits are one example of good neighborliness, sharing in our neighbors’ joys on occasions like weddings, childbirth, graduations, promotions at work, religious festivities and the like. Likewise, “acknowledging the feasts of people of other religions is a way of showing recognition and esteem for them,” equally sharing in their neighbors’ moments of sorrow in times of bereavement, wildfires, sickness or accidents.

   Interreligious marriages are another wonderful way to practice the dialogue of life, for where there is love between the spouses, the desire to respect the religion of the spouse comes naturally. In conflicted situations, one seeks to honor and respect one’s spouse. Although in Canon 1124, the Catholic Church strictly forbids mixed marriage and requires the express permission of the local ordinary before such marriages can be

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considered licit, given the difficulties involved in the disparity of cults, she is also willing to grant permission for mixed marriage if certain conditions are met.202

2. **Dialogue of action**: This is where Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. Social justice issues like the protest against the violation of human rights by governments, the collaboration between Christians/Muslims to visit prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, orphanages and supply them with food and necessities of life are all classified as parts of the dialogue of action. “There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims.”203 The tendency to be mute when our members are not directly affected is always there but we must rise above this kind of attitude for the sake of justice and the common good in our society. As Fitzgerald and Borelli say, “Work for justice and peace is an integral part of the Church’s mission, it forms part of its *diakonia*, and has to be carried out at all levels. The services of education, medical work and social action are not confined to the Church’s members but offered to all.”204

3. **Dialogue of discourse**: This is where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. Issues discussed may include the formation of the clergy/religious leaders for the different religions involved, religious education, rights of children and women in the

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203 “DIALOGUE AND PROCLAMATION:” 44.
society, our common home, the earth. “Care must be taken to avoid polemics, but also not to restrict the exchanges to a purely academic approach.”

4. Dialogue of religious experience: Finally, this is where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches. This interreligious discourse focuses on the spirituality of the religions involved and may include but not be limited to holiness, prophecy, meditation and prayer. Islam in particular enjoys a special status in terms of the willingness of the church’s hierarchy to promote interreligious understandings between the two religions. The Commission for the Religious Relations with Muslims (CRRM) began in 1974 and has been saddled with the responsibility of maintaining positive theological ties with Muslims. The need for study, reflection, prayer, and consultation to ensure a fruitful dialogue with Muslims is promoted so that believers take this seriously. These dialogues must be implemented at the grassroots level, especially in Nigeria which has an equal population of Christians and Muslims. Although dialogue does not take place at the Vatican, the Vatican makes sure that she endorses it and creates an atmosphere that promotes interreligious dialogue in the universal Church.

2.3.5 Aims of Dialogue

There are three aims of dialogue mentioned in Dialogue and Proclamation: First, the Church desires that people of different religions live in peace and harmony, so she enters into dialogue with people of other religions in order to promote peace which is a mark of the kingdom of heaven. The second aim is to ensure cooperation among people of different religions in the service of humanity. Dialogue and Proclamation states that,

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205 Ibid., 32.
206 Valkenberg, Nostra Aetate, 94.
“The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice, and human liberation needs to be stressed.”\textsuperscript{207} The third aim of dialogue is that of inner conversion. Conversion here does not mean change of religion but a total submission of the heart to the will of God. The aim here is submission to the will of God in humility and not to a particular religion. Since the issue of conversion is a sensitive issue, we must not enter into dialogue with the aim of persuading the dialogue partner to change his or her religious allegiance from the outset; otherwise, the dialogue would be vitiated. Change of religion is a possibility that has to be left open if the partner in the course of the dialogue so wishes to change his or her religion; this must be by free decision and not by coercion. In interreligious dialogue, “we are all companions on a journey.”\textsuperscript{208} As companions, we may not necessarily agree on everything, we can maintain our individuality and our differences, but we need to talk along the way because “in interreligious dialogue, we are travelling together towards the truth.”\textsuperscript{209} On our way towards the truth, we bring in the different perspectives of our faith because as human beings, we cannot stand in one position and see from different perspectives, we need the help of others to be able to see the truth from the perspective of the other friends/neighbours who are standing in the other different positions other than ours, for “interreligious dialogue is also an act of friendship.”\textsuperscript{210}

\textsuperscript{207} “DIALOGUE AND PROCLAMATION:” 44.
\textsuperscript{208} Valkenberg, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, xv.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., xv.
2.3.6 Dialogue with Muslims

*Nostra Aetate* therefore clearly opens the door for a new course to begin and acknowledges the Abrahamic roots Christians have with Muslims. It states that “the Church deplores all hatreds, persecutions, display of hatred leveled at any time or from any source against people on the on the basis of religion.” Although some Muslims were still skeptical that it was a political move, it was generally received with joy and lots of hope for the future of both religions. “The recognition of Islam as a separate religion leads finally to an encouragement to dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. This is the whole purpose of Nostra Aetate.” Efforts to find common ground between Christianity and Islam have been intensified, as Pope John Paul II noted during his General audience on May 5, 1999: “…the Christian doctrine on the Trinity, confirmed by the Councils, explicitly rejects any form of ‘tritheism’ or polytheism.’ In this sense, i.e., with reference to the one divine substance, there is significant correspondence between Christianity and Islam.”

Speaking at *Nostra Aetate’s* fiftieth anniversary celebration, Cardinal Tauran comments:

We at the PCID, along with others recognize that Muslims are living a difficult period of their history and are facing many challenges. One of these challenges is the necessary and not-so-easy dialogue with modernity. Another challenge is of a legal nature. It is the recognition of human rights, including those of women, the challenge of full citizenship to non-Muslims living in the Muslim majority countries, the real integration of the Muslims in countries where they have emigrated, and the challenge of a sound relation between religion and politics. They have to cope with some of their co-religionists who sometimes use the name of religion to justify violence and violation of fundamental human rights. Still a major challenge is that of

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211 Cf. “Nostra Aetate.”
212 Fitzgerald and Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue.*
the fundamental liberties—liberty of conscience, of expression, of religion, of intellectual research; the blasphemy law; poverty and underdevelopment in numerous Muslim societies; and confessional tensions and conflicts, in particular between the Sunnis and the Shiites.

The Catholic Church seriously struggled with modernity prior to Vatican II and one of the gains of the council was a dialogue between the two religions. Both religions can learn from each other, such as how to solve the problems that the other has struggled with in the course of its history. Cardinal Tauran explained further that Catholics cannot afford to remain passive in the challenges and problems facing many of our Muslim brothers and sisters and should be ever willing to pray for them and share experiences with them with the hope of finding solutions, not with the attitude of paternalism but as a way of enhancing brotherhood and friendships. This is the kind of mindset and orientation that the Nigerian Christians need to embrace as they interact with their Muslim country-men and -women.

Apart from the fact that both religions are monotheistic, both religions also have a high regard for the prophets of the Old Testament like Abraham, Isaac and Isaiah, as well as Mary and Jesus, although they regard Jesus as a prophet. The Muslims on their part named a Mosque in Abu Dhabi after Mary the Mother of Jesus as a sign of their commitment to religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Sheikha Lubna noted that “the choice of name is of huge significance as the Virgin Mary and Jesus, known in Arabic as Maryam and Issa, are not only at the very heart of Christianity, but also Islam.” Christianity and Islam are both universal faiths open for people of all races, ethnicity,

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214 Valkenberg, Nostra Aetate, 98.
215 Ibid., 98.
country, or color. Adherents of both religions comprise over half of the world’s population. These are enough reasons for adherents of both religions to dialogue so that they can both serve humanity and the world, whereas lingering conflicts are enough to cause the upcoming generations to become atheists.

The Abrahamic roots of Christianity and Islam can account for more similarities and more reasons to unite than to divide. “The Islamic ideal is to live in complete submission to God (Islam) both individually and collectively.” This an ideal that Christians equally strive for, total submission to God. This informs the reason to respect the dignity of the human person, divine laws, moral laws, divine revelation and prayers, all informed as a result of our common heritage.

2.4 Islamic Initiative

_A Common Word Project_

It is essential that leadership of the Church maintain a certain humility and keep in mind that one of the aims of dialogue, which is inner conversion, is to learn from, rather than adopting a paternalistic stance towards, religious others. The consequences for such oversights are seen in the reaction of the Muslim community around the world to Pope Benedict XVI’s talk in Regensburg. Pope Benedict XVI visited Regensburg, Germany in September 2006 where he gave a lecture entitled: “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections.” In the course of the lecture, he cited a fourteenth-century Byzantine Emperor, Manuel II Pelaiiologos, who said that “not acting reasonably is


contrary to God’s nature.” The emperor had illustrated his claim about unreasonable religious behavior by discussing the use of violence to coerce conversion, ascribing such practices in polemic terms to Islam.\textsuperscript{219} The general impression about Benedict XVI was that he was not so inclined toward interreligious dialogue and had once called it “a concession to that relativism which negates the very meaning of truth.”\textsuperscript{220} So the quotation at the public lecture in Regensburg reinforced this impression, thereby sparking a lot of rage.

This stirred protests in many Islamic countries since the pope failed to include the unreasonable behavior of Christians, nor did he mention thereafter that the Catholic Church has high regard for Muslims as stated in Nostra Aetate 3. The pope sent out an apology to the Muslim community a few days after his talk, explaining that those words were not his personal thoughts on Islam. In an open letter to the pope signed by thirty-eight Islamic scholars around the world, they proposed an invitation to dialogue. This was the origin of “A Common Word Between Us and You.” “This proposal is based on verses from the Qur’an and the Bible, which both share the golden commandment of paramount importance, the love of God and love of neighbour. Based on this common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims.”\textsuperscript{221} This has served as an inspiration to dialogue in different parts of the world and gained wide acceptance in both religious and academic circles. “A Common Word Between Us and You is timely. It provides a platform for dialogue between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. It is a call to


\textsuperscript{221} Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Northern Nigeria}, 105.
focus on what Christianity and Islam have in common while addressing issues of mistrust and suspicion and the political, social, economic, and ethnic reasons for conflicts.”

This is a prime example of how important it is for both sides to be open to the other. This situation clearly illustrates the initiatives taken by both Muslims and Catholics to find peace and cultivate dialogue.

Pope Benedict was determined to correct the impression he made at his Regensburg speech, so he explained himself at the General Audience on September 25, 2006 with Muslim diplomats and tendered apologies to the Muslim community. Two months later, precisely on November 30, 2006, he was seen standing in Istanbul’s Blue Mosque alongside Grand Mufti Mustafa Cagrici, engaged in a moment of shared silent prayer. Cagrici was one of those who signed the open letter accusing the pope of misunderstanding Islam. According to John Allen, two events made the Pope and the Catholic Church at large prioritize interreligious dialogue with Muslims; these were the 9/11 terrorist action against the United States and then 9/12, as the Regensburg episode has been nicknamed, along with the global firestorm that followed. “The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, produced a sea change in interfaith priorities inside Catholicism. Senior Catholic officials who had given Islam little thought before were suddenly consumed with the subject, especially with Islamic radicalism.”

Pope Benedict’s damage control in Turkey was a clear reinforcement of the conviction that Islam matters.

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224 Allen, The Future Church., 96.
Pope Francis has also made efforts to ensure that he gives life to the mandate issued at Vatican II and to practically show to the Muslims that this move is not born out of any selfish or political motives aimed at deceiving them in order to win them over or win some favors and take over their territories.\textsuperscript{225} Rather it is born out of the true love of neighbor, irrespective of his or her religion and status, and out of an appreciation for the religious values found in other religions. The Vatican has demonstrated this clearly in order to prove that it is an institutional change of attitude and not just a show of friendship by some popes who want to achieve peace during their papacy.

The pastoral care shown by different popes by way of their visits to Islamic countries and great exhortations to encourage Christians and Muslims to continue to respect the religious others have been very rich, as noted by John Paul II: “The non-Christian world is indeed constantly before the eyes of the Church and of the Pope. We are truly committed to serve it generously.”\textsuperscript{226} The pastoral care has yielded fruits by way of reconciliation and mutual respect, received and taken by both parties. In less than a two-month interval this year, Pope Francis has visited two Islamic countries, Abu Dhabi and Morocco.

2.5 Religious Pluralism

By the “recognition of non-Christian religions as entities which the Church should respect and with which Christians should enter into dialogue with in Vatican II’s \textit{Nostra Aetate},”\textsuperscript{227} theologians began to theologize in different directions; some debated on how


\textsuperscript{226} Sherwin and Kasimow, \textit{John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue}.36.

\textsuperscript{227} Ruokanen, \textit{The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions}.\textsuperscript{36}
adherents of other religions achieve salvation, while they tried to situate Christian Theology in the context of world religious plurality. The theologian, Karl Becker states that, “the Church feels called to dialogue because of its faith, in the Trinitarian mystery, Christian revelation allows us to glimpse in God a life of communion and interchange. Thus the Trinity itself is taken as a model for dialogue, at least in an analogical way.”

This means that, in dialogue, the Church wishes to mirror the relationship of the three divine persons and the unity that exists among them. “The unity of the three Divine Persons completely respects the identity of each. In interreligious dialogue, respect for identity, one’s own and that of the partner in dialogue, is of great importance.”

Jacques Dupuis is also one of the theologians who has contributed to the theology of religions since religious pluralism is here to stay. He writes:

“We live in a new world, one that has now become multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious. Negative attitudes towards the others and biased evaluations of their traditions that have characterized many centuries of Christian history are now inappropriate.”

On this subject, Dupuis then writes that the “first act of doing theology must be a serious practice of interreligious dialogue and taking seriously the religious experience met personally in the lives of the “others” with whom one comes in contact through interreligious dialogue.” He tried to address a central question: how can Christians profess and proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as the one Redeemer of all humankind, and at the same time recognize the Spirit at work in the world’s religions and cultures? “He

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229 Ibid., 385.
231 Ibid., 8.
advocates persuasively for inclusive pluralism using the Trinitarian dimension.”232 “The term pluralism refers to the replacement of the single universal and constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ with many ‘ways’ or saving figures heading to God-the-Center.”233 This sounds like the most appropriate position to take at this period in history given that we are in an era of a heightened cultural and religious sensitivity. We must, therefore, show maximum respect for other people’s cultures and religions.

Religious pluralism is rooted in the depth of the Divine Mystery itself and in the manifold way in which human cultures have responded to it. Far from being a hindrance that must be overcome, or a fact of life that we must be resigned to tolerating, religious pluralism is to be gratefully welcomed as a sign of the superabundant riches of the Divine Mystery which overflows to humankind and as an outstanding opportunity for mutual enrichment, ‘cross-fertilization,’ and transformation of the traditions themselves.234

If we are to confidently attest that “theology is faith seeking understanding, this faith has to try to come to grips with the reality of religious pluralism and attempt to make sense of it.”235

Closely related to the issue of religious pluralism is a recent document jointly signed by Pope Francis and Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb during the Pope’s recent visit to Abu Dhabi, “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.”236

It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide.

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232 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions. 183.
233 Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions. 77.
234 Ibid., 84.
235 Fitzgerald and Borelli, Interfaith Dialogue. 38.
for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{237}

The interesting thing about this document is that it is not just a Catholic document reflecting on other religions and expressing the desire to dialogue like \textit{Nostra Aetate} and other documents of the Church reflecting on the religious others; it is the fruit of dialogue itself that both Catholics and Muslims signed together to “declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.”\textsuperscript{238}

While the signing of the document is a welcome development, a particular line in the document caught the attention of Catholic theologians: “The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race, and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which he created human beings.”\textsuperscript{239} The interpretation and contention have been that if pluralism of religions is willed by God, then why did the incarnation, the suffering, crucifixion, and death of Jesus take place? Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Astana argues that, “the apostles and other martyrs would have spared themselves their terrible deaths if they had believed that the pagan religion and its worship is a way, which as well corresponds to the will of God.”\textsuperscript{240} It is important to ask if Schneider considers Islam as a pagan religion in this context or whether he intends to deny the reality of religious pluralism in a world like ours that has considerably changed since the time of the apostles.

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
What the Lord has revealed in our age and time, at this moment may be different from what he revealed and permitted at the early stage of Christianity in the world.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the official position and disposition of the Catholic Church towards the religious others has taken on a new and interesting dimension in a way that the Church in Nigeria, too, needs to tap by using the resources of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council gave rise to a new dawn in the history of the Catholic Church through its deep reflections about the mission of the Church, the nature and identity of the human beings the church is called to serve and the times in which she is to serve. These factors motivated the council from its opening to its closing. It is very obvious that had the Church delayed in presenting a new attitude about her mission in the world, she would have been out of fashion. The secular societies were already making first attempts at solving certain issues that the Church should have been the first to address. For example, ecumenism first began on the side of the protestants and the declaration of human rights, including religious freedom, first came from the United Nations. Vatican II, therefore, presents enough resources for the Nigerian Catholic Church to tap into to initiate a culture of dialogue with Muslims and actually be at the forefront on this issue.

There is a need for further collaboration between the Catholic Church, other Christian denominations and the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in order to promote interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. The preaching of exclusivism by some Pentecostal churches has not been helpful and the need for collaboration among the Christian community in Nigeria is very important. At the universal level, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue collaborates with the Orthodox churches and the
World Council of Churches, this has born fruit, such as the formation of the Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Co-operation (IRDC), and the publication of documents like “African Religiosity” (2000-2004), “Interreligious Prayers,” (1997-1998) “Interreligious Marriage”²⁴¹ (1994-1997), and “Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct”²⁴² (2006-2011). This interreligious dialogue is worth emulating at the grassroots level in Nigeria so that the Christian Community can speak and act in one accord as they seek to promote better dialogue with Nigerian Muslims. Speaking about the importance of dialogue at the grassroots level, Cardinal Jean-Louis Turan wrote: “Interreligious dialogue, as a matter of fact, does not take place in the Vatican but, rather, in the local Churches, at the grassroots, where the followers of the different religions live either side by side or face to face, sharing the joys and the trials in day-to-day life.”²⁴³

Another point worth taking a second look at, during this time in which we are making serious efforts to promote interreligious engagement with others, is Canon 1086 which states that: “A marriage between two persons, one of whom is baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not defected from it by a formal act and the other of whom is not baptized is invalid.”²⁴⁴ This appears to be a law that is intended to ensure that the Catholic partner does not lose her faith in the course of the marriage and also to ensure that the children who are going to be the fruit of that marriage are introduced properly to the Gospel values as taught by the Church. However, the increase

²⁴¹ Valkenberg, Nostra Aetate.
²⁴³ Valkenberg, Nostra Aetate.
²⁴⁴ “Code of Canon Law - IntraText.” 1086
in means of communication and migration, the growth and spread of civilization have all resulted in an increase in the number of mixed marriages around the world.245

Although the Catholic Church’s official position on interfaith marriage is that she does not encourage it because of the difficulties involved, experience has shown that some interfaith and inter-ethnic marriages turned out well in Nigeria. Interfaith marriages may be a concrete and practical way to promote dialogue and live it out in love. It is an example of the dialogue of life discussed above. That show of love, respect, and mutual understanding towards adherents of other religions does not flow very well with this canon. It shows that the laws of the church still have some reservations in matters of marriage concerning the religious others. Young people constantly fall in love across religious lines and to uphold the canon would imply that the non-Catholic partner must change his or her religion for the marriage to be valid.

This chapter identified key aspects of the Second Vatican Council’s deliberations and writings. It maintains the stand that the Council serves as a model for interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. The goal of the Council was to prepare the Church for fuller engagement with modern society through dialogue and action. Throughout its sessions pluralism was understood as a critical aspect of modern society and it was the decision of the Council to fully embrace this reality. Such an openness to the world and the desire to embrace the world in which the Church lives and ministers was evident in the fact that the Council invited non-Catholics observers to its sessions. To fulfill this goal of openness to the world, the Council adopted key operational principles: (1) broad consultations,

preparations, organization and its achievements with the documents it promulgated; it
demonstrated that it is truly the work of the people by accommodating and gathering
information from the grassroots level; this also expressed the democratic nature of the
council; (2) commitment to remain in dialogue and discernment, that is “reading the signs
of the times.” (3) its commitment to return to the sources in an effort to promote internal
renewal and updating. The return to the sources is not just an exercise to dwell in the past,
but instead to understand the Church’s nature, history, and mission so it serves as a
springboard for updating and reforming priestly and religious life, the Rite of Christian
Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and the liturgy. Equally discussed were some of the
documents of Vatican II demonstrating how the first four Constitutions promulgated by
the Council give us the orientation and the key to interpreting the Council’s intentions
toward religious others. The focus of the council fathers was precisely on human beings,
how to serve them and offer them the ordinary ark of salvation, the Church. This change
in attitude gradually led to the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian
Religions, Nostra Aetate. This chapter also discussed the pastoral care shown by different
popes in their efforts to ensure that the new culture of respect for Muslims and the
adherents of other religions is now a mission of the church since the council is concerned
with human beings and their wellbeing.

In addition, the step taken by the Muslim community by introducing “A Common
Word” was examined as a way of promoting dialogue with Christians. Also reviewed
were the forms and aims of dialogue and how theologians are reviewing religious
pluralism. The official position of the Catholic Church is very open towards the religious
others, as this chapter demonstrated. Right from the beginning of the Second Vatican
Council, the declaration of the Church’s position on non-Christian religions and the initiatives taken by the Vatican have helped to ensure that this new spirit and culture permeates the whole Church and the world. At the moment, the implementation of Vatican II in Nigeria needs to be taken more seriously in order to convince Muslims that it is the Church’s intention to collaborate with them and not to compete with them, for the good of humankind at large. Having realized that exclusivist theologies were only going to sustain and widen the division, the council saw the need to reform the belief system and promote dialogue among religions.

The next chapter emphasizes the need for the concrete implementation of Vatican II and makes some suggestions for that implementation. The chapter recommends following the ethos of Vatican II by emphasizing the need for broad consultation and involvement of Nigerians, attentiveness to history while fostering openness to the world, and commitment to not only update but return to the roots of African values. The Catholic Church in Nigeria needs to take care of the issues troubling her from within, including the change in theological method in Nigeria, so that it predisposes the parties and prepares them for greater openness to society as a whole and in particular Muslim communities.
CHAPTER THREE: Implementation of Vatican II in Nigeria

3.1 Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis discussed the precarious relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, expatiating on the complex reasons responsible for the conflicts and violence in the country due to theological, economic, ethnic, social, and political issues that are involved in Christian-Muslim encounters in the country coupled with the role of colonialism in the origin of the country. The second chapter concentrated on explaining how the official Church position changed from exclusivism to one of openness to dialogue with religious others. It also showed how the Second Vatican Council is a model for Nigeria due to the way it managed diversity as a gift and reformed the belief system for Catholics and it discussed the effects of such action after the council.

Although the official Church position about religious others has changed, as explained in chapter two of the thesis, people’s negative attitudes about other religions continues. Coupled with the frictions between religious and political leadership and the emergence of ethnic and religious divides in the struggle over limited natural resources, interreligious dialogue in Nigeria is a herculean task. This chapter makes recommendations on how the Catholic Church in Nigeria can reform and predispose herself in order to promote unity and harmony in the country using Vatican II as a guide. The recommendations follow the Council’s goal of the openness to the modern world as well as its operational principles categorized under the main themes considered as the ethos of Vatican II namely: wide consultations, commitment to dialogue and discernment; and a return to the sources as part of the Church’s commitment to internal reform and ongoing renewal. an. Even though the problem of civil and interreligious tensions is bigger than the
Catholic Church alone can resolve; nevertheless, she can take a cue from the Second Vatican Council and begin to earnestly implement the Council’s teachings. The problem must be dealt with as a Church and as a country. Pew-Templeton religious projections show that the fertility rate for Christians and Muslims is currently 4.5 for Christians and 6.5 for Muslims, respectively, and that by 2050 there will be over 200 million Muslims and over 150 million Christians in Nigeria.\footnote{Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project.} This projection implies that there is every need to renew and reform the belief system that is responsible for breeding exclusivism so that the present and upcoming generations may embrace new paradigms and models in interreligious and cross-cultural adaptations for the good of the future. If the theology taught and preached in Nigeria ends up promoting exclusivism, the religious conflicts may never end. Vatican II then serves as an example for working on this problem.

Adherents of both Christianity and Islam seem to be guilty of promoting exclusivism, as already espoused in Chapter One. In order to aid the implementation of Vatican II, this chapter proposes a return to the traditional ethics found in the African value system that was destroyed during the era of colonialism, thereby adversely affecting the moral and social fabric of the African societies. In precolonial days, African Traditional Religions had no inclination toward evangelism, monotheism or a quest for dominance. According to Udokang, “African ethics and morality serve as a vehicle for social order and stability in African communities.”\footnote{Emmanuel Jerome Udokang, “Traditional Ethics and Social Order: A Study in African Philosophy,” 2014.} There were shared beliefs and values which formed the traditional ethics agreed upon by the different African societies, irrespective of the religions they practiced. Vatican II called for a return to the sources and at the same time
an update of what needed to be updated. In the same vein, this paper calls for a return to the shared values and norms that held African societies together. In this way, both Christians and Muslims could harmonize their Christian/Islamic beliefs with their traditional ethics, filling in that gap created by the lack of shared beliefs that led to exclusivism.

This paper discusses the need to take care of internal issues within the Catholic Church in Nigeria and dispose herself for dialogue. Then this paper examines the external issues that deal with the promotion of ecumenism among the different Christian denominations in order to help the Christian community approach religious others with a positive mindset, as opposed to the exclusivism/demonization of Islam presently promoted by many churches in Nigeria. This is the mandate that Vatican II gives to the universal Church and the need to carry out the mandate at the grassroots level is ever increasing. Vatican II understands interreligious dialogue as an imperative, as part of Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbour. Vatican II’s openness for dialogue with other religions, without compromising the differences, is quite compatible with the way Africans in general view other religions. Each country represents a unique context, depending on the circumstances there. The challenges that Islam presents in northern Nigeria seem to be absent in southern Nigeria among the Yorubas, as explained in Chapter one. The Yorubas have retained the general outlook of tolerance towards other religions found in Africa before the arrival of Christianity and Islam. They do not see other religions as competitors because the concept of strict monotheism is foreign to the African mind. This is the reason why those in the southern part of the country rarely have issues of religious violence, as described earlier in
Chapter One. Muslims in the north. However, worked to absorb the Islamic identity from their understanding of the Koran, thereby discarding their African values.

In addition, as a solution to the forced unity that was imposed by the British over a century ago, this paper proposes: (1) That there is a need for the construction of a national identity using religion, which has been found to be the most influential element in Nigeria above ethnicity given the Nigerian context. Unity is one of the strong elements that Vatican II is concerned about promoting. It will go a long way in solving some of the social and economic problems associated with the multiethnic nature of the country. In other words, preachers and politicians must use the influence of religion in Nigeria positively to promote the values that bind people together and make them see themselves as people belonging to one country called Nigeria. (2) The cultivation of interreligious dialogue in schools and at home should be undertaken, as well as an expression of genuine interest in dialogue by absorbing certain virtues should be emphasized. (3) The importance of concentrating on areas of co-operation between Christians and Muslims, like marriage, family, human rights and so on should be expounded in order to build a just, humane and peaceful society. The resources exposed in Chapter Two will then be helpful to justify the claim that Vatican II is indeed a paradigm for solving the problems of diversity in Nigeria.

The Church as Mother and teacher must take up her task seriously at this period in time in order to save not only her members, but the people of all other religions as well. The council in Nostra Aetate urged all to embrace reconciliation and dialogue. The qualities of a good mother are always to unite all her children despite their individuality and differences. The suggestions to improve dialogue will, therefore, be classified under some of the key themes that make Vatican II serve as a model for dialogue in Nigeria. They
are commitment to updating, return to the roots or sources, wide consultations that make it a true work of the people, and then attentiveness to history, while fostering an openness to the world to also appreciate what is good in other religions and non-Christian values.

3.2 Need for Broad Consultations/Involvement

Under this key element of Vatican II, this paper emphasizes the need to, first of all, involve all Catholics and even go beyond the four walls of the Catholic church to involve other Christian denominations. In order to achieve renewal in Nigeria, the clergy, the laity and other ecclesial bodies must be involved to make it a true work of the people and not just the Bishop’s mission. Dialogue with the Catholic community and in fact the Christian community in Nigeria is very key. So just like the broad consultation that took place before Vatican II, there is a need for broad consultation in Nigeria for a successful dialogue.

3.2.1 The Need to Update the Theological Education of Catholic Clergy and Laity

One of the distinguishing features of the Second Vatican Council that made it successfully change the way the Catholic Church operates was its commitment to promote ecumenical and interreligious relations and the broad consultations/involvement of priests and bishops. This needs to be implemented in Nigeria as it is extremely important in shaping a new way of thinking about the adherents of other Christian denominations and, of course, Islam. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has to update the education of her clergy and Laity. It is important to consider the kind of theological education given to those responsible for faith formation in the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The basic theological education of faith formation teachers would need to follow a suitable method that supports unity and interreligious dialogue. At Vatican II, the council fathers knew the importance
of taking care of the internal belief system, of updating it in a way that seeks to unite and embrace others instead of promoting division as it was the case in the past. Theological education of clergy and laity in Nigeria has not been updated to reflect the change that took place at the Second Vatican Council; hence, homilies, the Catechism and the relationship of Catholics with other Christians and adherents of other religions are equally affected. Exclusivism is still reflected in seminary theological education, catechism classes, and homilies at the parishes. The discussion on *Lumen Gentium* in Chapter Two already demonstrated how the Council considered Muslims as also belonging to the people of God because they proclaim God as Creator.

One’s theological education can, in the long run, affect how one respects or disregards other people’s religions. Evangelization began in Nigeria at a time that exclusivist theologies were the order of the day and has continued until now, and for this reason, the attempt to evangelize Muslims has always been done with this kind of mindset, a mindset which intends to bring them to light since their lifestyles are often very different from the lifestyles of the Christians in the south. In a situation where there seems to be little or no respect for the religion, culture, and lifestyle of the other party in dialogue, such dialogue might definitely end up as an exercise in futility. There is equally a need on the part of Muslims, too, to stop the destruction of places of worship in times of misunderstandings because these are evident signs of disrespect for the values of the religious others. Such actions also betray the monotheistic belief claims made by both religions. It is pertinent that the style of evangelizing should change, given the fact that the Church speaks about the dignity of human beings and the freedom that they have. To practically demonstrate that the clergy and laity believe in the freedom and dignity of
human beings would mean that they would have to serve others in their various apostolates, the non-Catholics as well as Catholics. For example, the non-Christians who seek treatment in Catholic hospitals should be treated with much respect, regardless of their creed or religion. The way the clergy and laity do their work should reflect the beliefs that they holds dear. The image of God is in a person, irrespective of the person’s beliefs or religion. Therefore, if others recognize the image of God in a person, they should then treat them with respect, even if they are from a lower social status.

One simple way to educate the clergy would be to introduce clergy study week once a year to bring them together and have them study the issues for a week. The results will definitely manifest in their parishes as they give homilies and minister to the laity. Laity week may also be introduced for laypersons to help teach them Vatican II’s theology in a simplified way. A good idea would be to develop a course that highlights the dangers of exclusivism and the need to promote the integration of good African values with the Catholic faith in a way that discourages division.

In order to promote the culture of dialogue, the Catholic Church in Nigeria needs to ensure that the theological formation of those responsible for seminarians in the different seminaries across the country reflect the teachings of Vatican II so that in making decisions and formulating policies, they will bear in mind the present needs of the Church and the society she is preparing the students to serve at large. Summer training could be organized for rectors and faculty of seminaries. Conferences, seminars and workshops could also be organized to run the course of the whole year. During these conferences and events, lectures should be delivered on the importance of dialogue, of learning about other denominations and the Islamic religion, not for the purpose of using their weak areas to preach against
them, which is what ends up happening some of the time, but to truly be a learner, a listener with an open mind who can understand and learn something different from the religious others.

In planning courses for the seminaries, interfaith courses should be made mandatory, with field trips to Mosques made compulsory for such courses. Experience has shown that it is always better to have a Muslim teach a course on Islam and a Christian teach a course on Christianity. In that way, the bias is controlled to a certain extent. Both Catholic and Muslim prayers are full of rituals and gestures; these should be explored so that the students understand them and become comfortable with the Islamic style of worship, even though it is different from his. This helps in reducing the prejudices people might have against believers of other religions. Care should be taken to explain the contributions of Muslims in philosophy, science, agriculture, music, education, law and technology in the middle ages. Immersion trips could equally be helpful in inculcating the culture of dialogue in the life of seminary students.

For many reasons, a lot of the diocesan clergy might not receive higher theological education after ordination. In Nigeria, the problems are related to funding, the workload in the parishes and sometimes the bishops may deliberately ignore those interested in higher education after ordination for personal reasons. Whatever the reasons might be, there are several other ways of communicating how Vatican II can be implemented at the diocesan, deanery and parish levels respectively. One easy way would be to make videos. Some Nigerian priests do not intend to go through the rigor of studies after their ordination or

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they may not enjoy reading; however, they love watching videos. Retreats and workshops could be organized for this group of priests and the videos could be explained using the accompanying materials. This will save the dioceses a lot of money that they otherwise would have used to send the priests to school. These videos can also be made available for the laity in local languages. For most Catholics, the local parish is their only contact with the Catholic Church; therefore, pastors should be trained to have leadership skills on how to manage a parish. The parish should be structured to help parishioners believe that the parish is truly a family of faith where they are nourished and energized to go out into the world and promote unity and reconciliation. For example, there are sports facilities in the Catholic schools and pastors can make these facilities available for all the people in the parish neighborhood, irrespective of their religion and from there, build friendships with the neighbours where the parish is located.

Diocesan structures can be intentionally put in place to promote a culture of dialogue. Perhaps an office created for this purpose can then be the one responsible for making sure every parish in the diocese registers and attends the retreats, conferences, and workshops they organize on behalf of the entire diocese. The Nigerian Catholic Church would then need Diocesan Centers for Research and Training on Dialogue. All of the materials for training may be made available in local Nigerian languages, including audio materials, videos and printed materials for everyone who requests them: parents, priests, catechists, religious women and men, deacons, young adults and so on.

Once the Church leaders are sure that they have accomplished the in-house job of providing the right disposition for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue to Catholics and that the people trained are now equipped and ready to engage, they can then begin to reach
out to religious others by beginning with the Pentecostal Church that is nearest to their Catholic parish. Little invitations to share breakfast with them after morning Masses on weekdays may be simple ways to begin.

3.2.2 **The Need to Promote Catholic Ecumenical Dialogue with other Christians**

Ecumenism is the response to the prayer of Jesus that his followers may be one. At the Second Vatican Council, the fathers urged the promotion of ecumenism and the document, *Unitatis Redintegratio* was promulgated to this effect. *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions already discussed in Chapter Two, had its beginning from the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, then headed by Cardinal Bea whom Pope John XXIII had asked to prepare a draft declaration on the inner relations between the Church and the people of Israel.\(^{249}\) *Nostra Aetate* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, “the two texts, while obviously different, share a common logic and rhetoric and represent similar shifts in official Catholic attitudes toward, respectively, other religions and other Christian communities.”\(^{250}\) Unity and reconciliation were very central to Pope John XXIII’s papacy and this is clearly reflected in the spirit of the council. *Unitatis Redintegratio* states that: “The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council.”\(^{251}\)

Ecumenism will help the Christian Churches to be united among themselves as one body, to communicate and promote Christ’s will in the Gospel, and to approach the Muslim community with one voice and one attitude that reflects the Gospel values that Vatican II

\(^{249}\) Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 1.
\(^{250}\) Valkenberg, *Nostra Aetate*.
is promoting. Presently, the contradictory preaching coming from different church denominations and preachers do not aid in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. There seems to be little effort at promoting unity among the Christian Churches in Nigeria. The council notes that: “such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.”252 Although the official Church position toward religious others changed many years ago, some preachers are still promoting exclusivism and generalizing that Islam as a whole is a religion of violence. Pentecostalism has come with its own peculiar attributes and challenges in Nigeria as it “struggle to ‘Pentecostalise’ power and governance—if not democracy itself—against the backdrop of perceived creeping Islamization of politics by the Muslim ‘other.’”253

In order to promote ecumenism, different Christian denominations should begin to engage in charitable works together, like feeding the hungry, visiting prisons and orphanages and so on. Presently, it is often difficult to find other denominations going to visit orphanages owned by the Catholic Church and vice versa. The need to have seminary students preparing for ministry in different denominations study together may also help in promoting ecumenism and might lead to even offering ecumenical theology as a course. Often times different denominations preach against each other just to win over more members. This is further creating the wounds of division and may be curtailed if the different Christian denominations begin to do things in common like study, worship, work,

252 Ibid.
253 Obadare, Pentecostal Republic, 31.
play and build healthy friendships. This may help in overcoming the prejudices and biases they have against one another.

In paying attention to the internal crises within the Christian body in Nigeria, it is clear that there is a need to keep promoting the need for ecumenism. “In 1976, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was established to bring together the different Christian denominations in Nigeria.” Unfortunately, CAN has not been able to function very well in the country as a result of poor leadership and the internal politics among the denominations, such that some Churches are not part of the Christian Association of Nigeria. In 2013, the Catholic Church in Nigeria suspended its participation at the national level of the Christian Association of Nigeria. “The Catholic Bishops stated that CAN is being dragged into partisan politics thereby compromising its ability to carry out its true role as conscience of the nation and voice of the voiceless.” This is not encouraging, due to the fact that the Bishops seem to care less about the call of Vatican II to promote unity within the Christian body. In moments like this, the leadership of the Catholic Church should be at the forefront of promoting unity and reconciliation using the principles of Christian democracy and the call of Vatican II that Catholics should lead the promotion of unity and reconciliation in the world. Vatican II actually encourages us to engage the secular world and not to run away from it. A situation such as this one should serve as a teaching moment where the Bishops of Nigeria would show how committed they are by developing extra skills to promote the growth and unity within CAN. The unhealthy

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politics in CAN has to stop, but it would not be able to stop if the Catholic Bishops, who are called and mandated to be the light, quit in times of misunderstandings within CAN.

3.2.3 Some Practical Initiatives on How to Promote Ecumenism in Nigeria

Areas of Employment: It is disappointing that when there are employment opportunities in Catholic institutions like schools, parish offices and hospitals, Catholics are given priority, not on the basis of competence but on the basis of their membership in the Church. It is even worse on the side of the Pentecostal churches; Catholics are hardly employed in their institutions. The council fathers drew attention to the human condition that faced by all, irrespective of faith practiced. To promote ecumenism, it is important that job opportunities be given on the basis of competence and not be given on the basis of membership in a particular denomination, even though the person is not qualified.

Areas of Common Interest: The pastors of the different denominations could meet on their off days and play sports together, eat together, share resources and learn together how to best minister to their congregations. Once their members see how they meet frequently on a friendly basis, they will follow suit and the culture of building friendships among the members will continue.

Work on a common project: Different church denominations within a county, for instance, may decide to organize a skill acquisition programme for the youths within their county to learn computers skills, sewing skills, baking, driving skills, cooking skills, playing sports games, etc. These will become avenues where the youths will meet and build lasting friendships instead of exchanging rage on social media more often over differences on religious issues.
3.3. **Attentiveness to History While Fostering Openness to the World**

The need to engage other religions, especially Islam, becomes imminent for people after having put their house together as Christians. Attentiveness to the history of the country has shown that the Christians and Muslims cannot continue to promote exclusivism on both sides; there is a need to engage and open up to one another from within various religions so that all can work to promote freedom and justice in the country.

3.3.1 **Catholic Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims in the North**

The Catholic Church in Nigeria needs to demonstrate to the Muslim community her sincere efforts in entering into dialogue with Muslims and not just a strategy to evangelize them to become Christians. If the intention of going into dialogue is to convert the religious others, the possibility that such efforts would fail is very high. In January of 2019, the Catholic bishop of Sokoto Diocese, located in the North where the Muslims are the majority, offered to train about ten million *Almajiris* and take them off the streets.

“*Almajiri* is a corruption of the Arabic word *al-muhajir*, meaning ‘the migrant.’ *Almajiri* are migrant children who leave their homes and families with the latter’s consent and travel to faraway towns and cities unknown to them or their families to attain Koranic education with a ‘*Mallam*’ (teacher)”256 This practice has been in Northern Nigeria since the advent of Islam there, but the *Almajiri* children have posed a serious challenge to peace and security. “They have no steady source of income; they live by begging for food, money, and other needs. *Almajiri* are deprived; hence they roam about begging during the course of the Qur’anic studies.”257 They do not receive any formal education and give their alms

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257 Ibid., 76.
and extra food to their Mallam as a reward for his teaching and care for them. This is a fertile ground for Boko Haram recruitment. Because of this, the Catholic Bishop offered to train these children in school as a way of responding to the challenge that these children pose to the general society. Unfortunately, the offer was rejected by a group called “The Muslim Rights Concerns (MURIC);” they described Bishop Kukah’s “proposal as a ploy for modern colonialism and a potential time bomb.” The group said: “We cannot pretend to be so naïve as to entrust our Muslim children to the hands of Christian gospellers.”

Why was such a wonderful gesture rejected by the Muslim community in the North? One of the reasons is that they do not believe the Catholic Church leader will train the Almajiri without converting them to Christianity. The Catholic Church has to demonstrate her commitment to dialogue with the Muslim community by showing that there would not be power differences on the round table. “Dialogue goes beyond communicative action, because what we are looking for is not merely a rational consensus but the emergence of a community.” Stereotyping can be an obstacle to dialogue because it can block communication, especially where economic and political differences in power exist.

There must be a true demonstration of acceptance and respect, not just tolerance, in order for dialogue to be successful. According to Amaladoss and Jonathan, “Dialogue can also be blocked because we do not seek to meet the need of the others for recognition,

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259 Ibid.
respect, and acceptance as a group and for a social space in which they can live and develop their identity.”

Sometimes we may try to be inclusive in a relationship of domination-subordination and the other group may seek to affirm their identity in an adversarial or a revolutionary mode, giving rise to conflict. Again, Amaladoss and Jonathan say: “One who is open to pluralism does not seek to dominate or impose, but rather to converse, to dialogue, and to search for consensus.”

A demonstration of the equality of all participants coming to the dialogue table would show the commitment and seriousness of the groups concerned about interreligious dialogue.

*A Common Word Between Us and You*, which is an invitation on the part of the Muslims to dialogue with Christians, as discussed in Chapter Two, would serve as a good resource for the Catholic Church in Nigeria to engage in dialogue with the Muslim community. The Common Word proposal is “based on verses from the Qur’an and the Bible, which both share the golden commandment of paramount importance—the love of God and love of neighbour. Based on this common ground, it called for peace and harmony.”

This initiative has been welcomed in different parts of the world like Bangladesh, Britain, Canada, India, Pakistan, the United States, and South Africa. “It has also become the subject of major national and international seminars, workshops, symposia, lectures, and meetings.” Catholic Church leaders in Nigeria need to take advantage of the Common Word on the international scene. It is a call to dialogue on certain values shared by all human beings and if initiated in Nigeria, will foster dialogue between

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261 Ibid., 61.
262 Ibid., 61.
263 Ibid., 57.
264 Ibid., 106.
266 Ibid., 106.
Christians and Muslims. In *Nostra Aetate* the Council fathers called on everyone to forget the quarrels of the past and asked that a sincere effort be made on both sides to achieve mutual understanding.

3.3.2 Catholic Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims in the South

Interreligious Dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the south seems to be better when compared to the north, as noted by Akintunde Akinade: “In Yorubaland, Christians and Muslims live side by side celebrate their differences and do not see doctrinal cleavages as constituting a veritable barrier to interfaith encounters and relations.” They seem to be engaged in the dialogue of life. Akinade argues further that:

One of the significant points of departure in interfaith encounters on the level of civil society among the Yoruba people is the acceptance of the presence and legitimacy of other religions as symbolic mediations of the sacred encounter. This understanding of other religions is not derived from an evaluation of them as abstract systems or structures. Rather, it is based on an unequivocal appreciation of the experience of people who practice them and of the activity of God in their lives as portrayed in their ethical and spiritual commitments.266

As explained in Chapter One, the reason why radical Islamic movements have not been able to make headway in southern Nigeria among the Yorubas is because of their traditional religious belief system that accommodates polytheism, making it needless to fight over issues of religious difference. Catholic Muslim dialogue in southern Nigeria therefore has not been challenging, as compared to the situation in the north. The dialogue, however, needs to be sustained in that way that allows the culture of dialogue and peace among religions to remain in place in that region of the country.

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There is always a sense of superiority in an area where a particular religion has numerical strength. Often times, in the south where Muslims are in the minority, they are open to dialogue so they can claim certain rights; likewise in the north where Christians are in the minority, they insist that all religions should be treated equally. But in the states where a particular religion is dominant, they tend to dictate the terms of the relationship, which is also reflected in the choice of leaders during elections and claims to certain rights and resources on the basis of numerical strength. Where there is dialogue and mutual understanding, the needs of the minority should be taken care of. It is obvious that adherents of both religions face issues of discrimination where they are not the majority and only dialogue can address some of these issues that are so imperative as we live together in the same country.

3.3.3 Promotion of Interreligious Dialogue in Schools and in Homes

To promote the culture of dialogue, the use of schools and the home would be very helpful in communicating this new approach to understanding other religions. Most people first learn about a particular religion from their parents and then the schools build on that. It is the way that the parents understand their religion that will be passed on to their children, especially by the mothers. The need to get parents and teachers involved is, therefore, necessary for success. The Nigerian Catholic Church as a faith community, convinced about adding value to this world and putting faith in action, would need to provide a lot of resources to train those responsible for faith formation, those who teach in the seminaries, those who preach in parishes and so on. Jacques Dupuis noted that the problem in his experience with dialogue in India, “stems from the fulfillment agenda of
most Christian approaches to other faiths.”

In Egypt, there is “a joint project in coordination with the Episcopal Church, Al Azhar El Sharif and the Ministry of Education to implement the dialogue concept through developing the educational system, starting from primary classes and passing on through the higher classes.”

The establishment of theological schools that are compulsory for all preachers and faith formation leaders to attend and to receive certification from before teaching/preaching to the public is very important. At the moment, theology as a course is not offered in public universities in Nigeria. The Catholic Church has her own seminaries where she trains candidates for the priesthood only. Pentecostal pastors do not attend any theological school, nor do they receive any pastoral training in school. Any pious member who feels he or she is called to establish a new Church, simply goes ahead and does that, preaches whatever doctrine he or she believes and acts in whatever manner without any sanctions, no matter the outcome of such teachings in the general public. This is why the promotion of ecumenism is so important. It is a very big mistake to abandon thousands if not millions of people who attend Churches and Mosques at the mercy of untrained preachers who manipulate their minds in whatever direction they desire. These preachers ascribe their intuitions and thoughts as being revelations from God and the people are ordered to obey. This is one area where the Church and State can cooperate to ensure that the National assembly passes a law forbidding those who have not been formally trained from teaching or preaching in public.

267 Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions, 89.
Currently, there are no structures created by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria to take care of the education and provision of resources to the people in order to promote interreligious dialogue and engagement with Muslims in different parts of the country. Chapter Two mentioned the different offices in the Vatican that were created for the promotion of dialogue, such as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; such offices are needed at the local church level, too. Whenever there is a crisis situation, the bishop responsible for that area condemns violence and that is all that occurs. There is no systematic approach to properly initiate dialogue with Muslims and sustain the conversation over time. At the moment of violence, attention is focused on solving just that particular issue, forgetting that we must put in lasting structures on how to prevent the violence from taking place.

Among the ten trends revolutionizing the Church that John Allen calls attention to in his book entitled “The Future Church” is Islam. He recalls: “the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, produced a sea change in interfaith priorities inside Catholicism. Senior Catholic officials who had given Islam little thought before were suddenly consumed with the subject, especially with Islamic radicalism.”269 Before becoming Pope, Benedict XVI is said to have been one of those who were not interested in promoting interreligious prayer. He had once called it “a concession to that relativism which negates the very meaning of truth.”270 Yet, the need to make conscientious efforts about interfaith dialogue with Islam cannot be overemphasized. If the Vatican has realized the importance

269 Allen, The Future Church, 106.
270 Ibid., 95.
of taking interfaith dialogue with Muslims seriously, then the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria should follow suit as a sign of their faithfulness to the Church’s teachings.

3.3.4 The Need for an Engaged Religious Diversity

John Borelli makes a distinction between the three meanings of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism can be defined as a sociological term that just describes the particular kind of social relationship shared among participants of various religions in a given society. Secondly, he speaks about religious pluralism as a political term that defines the relationship between government and religious groups, for example in the USA. Lastly, religious pluralism may be viewed as a term used in theology and the academic setting as means of living in relationship with God or as what others may hold to be of ultimate value. Engaged religious diversity implies that the variety of religious traditions and the adherents of such traditions actively interact with one another in such a way that the interaction influences and even changes the traditions themselves. It is not just a political or sociological term. In this usage, religious pluralism refers to more than a plurality of religions.

There is a need for the different religions to engage in different activities in moments of celebration like Muslim and Christian holidays. Workshops and conferences aimed at educating parents can be of great help, especially for the mothers who spend most of their time with their children, and are responsible for teaching them. At such workshops, parents will be taught the importance of teaching their children, at the very early stages of their lives, about the need to respect the religions of their neighbors, which may be different.

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271 Fitzgerald and Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*.  
272 Ibid., 46.
from the one they practice. It is also important that they visit each other’s homes and places of worship and engage in community building and activities. When Christians visit Mosques and pray with them, it creates a sense of trust; stereotyping can be reduced the more they engage in doing things together. Pope John Paul II, his successor Benedict the XVI and now Pope Francis have all made efforts to engage the Muslim community as a sign of their commitment to interreligious dialogue with Muslims, making this truly a dialogue of action. During seasons of fasting, Christians should be encouraged to accompany their Muslim neighbours and vice versa. When there is an unfortunate event such as the New Zealand Mosque shooting, the Christian community should come out clearly to condemn such acts and the same should be applicable if a Church is bombed anywhere in the world. There is a need to ensure that whenever any government in any part of Nigeria infringes on the rights of Muslims or Christians, representatives of the two religions should both release press statements, condemning such acts. In other words, there must be intentional encounters aimed at expressing goodwill towards religious others so that the neighbor in question has no reason but to accept that such gestures are truly altruistic. By so doing the different forms of dialogue already discussed in Chapter Two—namely the dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of religious experience, and dialogue of discourse—would take shape among believers of the two faiths. Indonesian Catholics set a good example by helping poor Muslims there celebrate Islamic feasts.273

3.3.5 **Work for Justice**

The popular saying of Pope Paul VI that ‘if you want peace, work for justice’ is very true. “By virtue of their faith in the living God who is both ‘generous bestower’ and ‘just providence,’ believers should show by their deeds that God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.” The Catholic Church in Nigeria, in line with this saying, must demonstrate sincere efforts in this area to convince religious others that her interest is for the common good of everyone in the society and not just a ploy to convert Muslims and others to become Catholics. “By virtue of their faith in the living God who is both generous bestower and just providence, believers should show by their deeds” that “God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.” The Church is not just a pressure group that should be seen working for the interest of her members only. Every human being created in the image and likeness of God should be respected and treated with dignity, and not just Catholic Priests. There has been a tendency for indifference in Nigeria when religious others are being treated unjustly. For instance, the Muslim Fulani herdsmen continuously attacked and killed women and children in the villages in Benue State and environs in 2017 and 2018, but neither the government of the day nor the Church leaders condemned such acts in strong terms until two Catholic priests and seventeen parishioners were killed while celebrating morning Mass on April 24, 2018. That was when the Catholic Bishops Conference of

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275 Ibid.
Nigeria called for a protest march in all the dioceses in Nigeria. While it was commendable that finally, the Church leaders spoke up, many expect that the Church would speak up wherever justice is denied and whenever such disrespect for human life is shown. The lives of Muslims, protestants, or atheists are not less important compared to those of Catholics. The social teachings of the Church should come alive in the way the clergy and laity carry out their apostolate and pastoral work in the Country; they should not continue to remain the Church’s best-kept secret. Where there is a sincere demonstration that the Church is working for the common good, social justice, and equal wealth distribution, not just for Catholics in Nigeria but for every Nigerian, it would clear up all kinds of suspicion on the part of the Muslims so that they may be ready to engage in dialogue knowing that it is the Church’s efforts to be of service to humankind.

3.3.6 The Disposition to Serve in Humility

For an effective dialogue to take place between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, a great deal of humility is required from believers of both religions, especially their leaders who are to serve as good examples to the general public. For the Catholic Church in Nigeria, this virtue is urgently needed in order to encourage Muslims to honor the invitation to dialogue effectively. Catholic clergy have a prestigious status in Nigeria and their air of superiority in the midst of the religious others can be discouraging and inimical to dialogue. Catherine Cornille posits that dialogue “demands humility toward other traditions. This involves recognition of the limitation of one’s knowledge and understanding of the

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Vatican II made serious efforts to avoid the authoritative language that the Church was fond of. The style of persuasion, invitation, and dialogue was adopted to show the Church’s desire to be of service to others in a humble way. This is why the council described itself as a pastoral council.

Every religious tradition represents a complex whole of beliefs and practices, philosophical schools and sectarian developments that no single individual can pretend to master. At this level, humility towards the other is a matter of necessary cognitive vigilance: one must always guard against imposing one’s own categories of understanding upon the other and indeed remain open to constant correction and growth in one’s knowledge of the other’s traditions.

Catherine Cornille acknowledges that Christianity is usually associated with arrogance and triumphalism than with an attitude of humility. However, humility remains at the core of Christian spirituality and it is upheld against its opposite called pride. God is said to love the humble and the lowly as Jesus himself serves as the perfect example of humility; from the very beginning of his life to the way and manner in which he died, we have him as a model of humility as Christians. Christians are to show great humility when they enter into dialogue with other religions, humility with respect to doctrines and humility as a disposition to learning something new from the partners in dialogue.

There has been a shift in the way we understand truth—from a classical perspective, which emphasizes that truth is immutable, static, eternal and never affected by history, to a more dynamic understanding of truth. “Modern consciousness is marked by an awareness

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279 Ibid., 12.
of the historicity of all linguistic and symbolic expressions of truth."\textsuperscript{280} This should be taken into account as we engage in interreligious dialogue and help us go there with an attitude of humility, not just in terms of attitude but also in terms of doctrines.

3.3.7 The Need to Focus on Areas of Cooperation Between Christians and Muslims

One of the aims of \textit{A Common Word} is to promote the areas of common ground between Christianity and Islam. There is a need to focus on the areas that unite believers of both religions more than on the areas that divide them. Muslims and Christians have a lot in common and this has to be promoted and made known. Once Muslims feel the spirit of unhealthy competition, the possibility that they would become disinterested in dialogue is very high. Both religions uphold the dignity of marriage and the family and this is explicit in the scriptures of both religions. The integrity of the family is threatened by many issues now and it is an opportunity for believers to unite and promote the continued existence of the family. The dangers that the larger society faces as a result of family breakdown are enormous. “Often Muslims are gratified to find out that their Christian friends have the same ideals as theirs for marriage and the family.”\textsuperscript{281} Believers of both religions can unite and promote the dignity of human sexuality and oppose the culture of death that seeks only pleasure and promotes abortion and infanticide. “There are in fact many opportunities where education for adolescents, preparation of engaged couples for marriage, maternity and childcare centers, social services for those couples who become separated, and many other occasions for promoting love.”\textsuperscript{282} The more we focus on areas of common ground, the more likely we are to achieve great results and make society and the world a better

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{281} Borrmans, \textit{Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims}.

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 94-95.
place as believers. In this way, even an atheist can see a reason to have faith, seeing that the believers live out their faith in such a way that makes the world a beautiful place for everyone to live in.

Support for the Girl Child: The vibrant Catholic Women’s Organization can collaborate with Muslim Women Unions to build Non-Governmental Organizations to take care of the needs of girl children in Nigeria. Female education in northern Nigeria is very poor. The mothers spend more time with the children, nourishing them and training them. If a girl child is neglected, it is obvious that her future has been neglected. Both Catholic mothers and Muslim mothers condemn issues like abortion but do not provide resources to help support the ladies in case some of them become pregnant; if they have such resources to rely on, they can jettison the idea of aborting. By uniting to support girl children, they would be putting their faith in action, their doctrine in action.

3.3.8 Genuine Love of Neighbor

No matter how a mother verbally professes love to her children, if she does not put it into action, the children may not understand what she means by love. The love of neighbor that Jesus demands of Christians is not based on certain conditions that the neighbour has to fulfill. The neighbour could be a Muslim, Hindu, or even an enemy. The neighbour could be an immigrant, a Republican or Democrat, it really does not matter who the neighbour is or what she or he believes in. It is an obligation for Christians to do this. It can manifest itself in the way Christians show their empathy to the Muslims around them. “Empathy thus represents the means to gain understanding of the affective dimension of the other religion, of the religious desires and needs that lie at the origins of particular beliefs and
practices and of the experiences generated by them." The Common Word initiative and the Mutuality models are both promoting love of neighbor between believers of Christianity and Islam.

3.3.9 The Need for Political Harmony

One of the problems mentioned in Chapter One is the abuse of religion for selfish political reasons. Often times politicians take advantage of the people’s religious sentiments to get what they want. Adherents of both religions may want to reject the exploitation of the people for selfish reasons. Political harmony is an area where the adherents of the two religions may want to promote more given the fact that both Christianity and Islamic religion promote the same social virtues like civic responsibility, sense of duty that promotes the common good, promotion of minority rights and even for those who cannot speak out for themselves like children and the disabled. The political division that takes place colored in religion ends up destroying a lot of lives and property. Believers can prudently and honorably fight against injustice and oppression. We must unite to condemn the wrong usage of religion for selfish reasons.

3.4 Commitment to Updating/Return to the roots

One of the ethos of Vatican II is its commitment to return to the roots or sources of Christianity in order to trace where the Church got it wrong along the way. This brought about a renewal of the religious life, RCIA, priestly life and a call to strive for holiness by all. In Nigeria too, we need return to the roots, the sources that so that we discover who we are and update the way we live out the Christian life. To do this Catholics need to separate

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283 Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue.*, 140.
Christianity from the activities of colonialism and appreciate traditional African values that are compatible with the Christian faith. In this way, they can become authentically African Christians and not Africans who practice a western version of Christianity by rejecting African values that they were initially compelled to do during colonialism.

3.4.1 The Importance of Promoting African Values and Cultures

Africans have been said to be generally tolerant of other religions because polytheism was predominant in Africa and there was no religious violence prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam. In “Fractured Spectrum,” Akintunde Akinade cites the words of Wande Abimbola: “The African point of view is one in which there is respect for all the religious traditions of humankind, while we hold steadfastly to our beliefs, we respect the right of others to practice their own religions in their own ways, provided they do not infringe on the rights of others.” At the time that both Christianity and Islam were being propagated in Nigeria, exclusivist theologies were the order of the day, both religions preached strict monotheism and this generated conflict in the African mind. Christianity and Islam started in Nigeria long before Vatican II and the Replacement and Fulfillment models were very much in use at that time. Both religions saw themselves as the only truth, following the metaphysical understanding that truth can only be one.

It is evident that most Africans abandoned their own religious worldviews, values, and cultures and embraced the values and cultures that were foreign to them as a result of colonialism. Now that era of colonialism is over, the need to promote African values and cultures would help in the resolution of religious conflicts. Vatican II opened the doors for

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the appreciation of the different cultures of the world. *Gaudium et Specs* 53 says: “Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature.”\(^{285}\) The council met at the time that many countries had gained independence from their colonizers and began to reject the cultures and ideas imposed on them. The popes after Vatican II have continued to emphasize the importance of cultures, thereby supporting further the argument that Vatican II can serve as a paradigm for solving the issue of diversity in Nigeria. The Catholic Church in Nigeria would need to continue the education of people through homilies, Catholic Schools, catechisms, hospitals and so on, so that gradually the teachings of Vatican II will bear fruit at the grassroots level. Africans generally have respect for life and they are also hospitable towards visitors and strangers and these values should be promoted in relation to adherents of other religions as they practice their Christian faith.

The integration of the positive African values into both Christianity and Islam will be helpful. The frequent disagreement about dress code, dietary restrictions, and other values between the two religions would not be an issue. Islam comes with certain elements of Arabic culture and Christianity comes with elements of western culture since it was introduced in the country by Europeans. A clash of the two cultures has brought about conflicts. So, if both religions keep their African values and cultures, some of the issues causing disagreements would be solved. By recognizing the positive African values, one would not necessarily become Arabic to be called a Muslim; similarly, one would not necessarily become western to be called a Christian. One can be African and Christian at the same time in a beautiful way without necessarily becoming western and losing one’s

African identity. The same thing could be applicable to the Islamic faith. This will help build the missing bridge in the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Presently, Christians bear western names and Muslims bear Arabic names; if they both begin using African names, that’s already a connecting point that shows African names are worth bearing and it would serve as something in common for adherents of both religions.

3.4.2 **Advocacy for the Restoration of Traditional African Values through the Family System**

In traditional African societies, there were no policemen and women securing the communities and yet the crime rate was very low compared to what it is today. This was simply because of the traditional moral values that the parents inculcated in their children at home. African traditional norms, precepts, principles and moral codes regulated the conduct of individuals in traditional African societies and eventually brought about social order. Immediate families were responsible for the discipline of their children, then the family heads, usually the men, were in turn responsible to the community chiefs and reported cases they couldn’t handle at the family level for the community to look into. When instructions were given by the head of the community, the men responsible for their families were expected to implement them at the family level. Unfortunately, “converts were made to believe that traditional customs which are the very foundation of ethics and morality were paganistic and heathenish. Consequently, converts were encouraged to disregard, abuse and jettison their traditional customs which held the society together.” Colonialism condemned African moral values and ethics and the early missionaries

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286 Udokang, “Traditional Ethics and Social Order,” 266.
succeeded in convincing Africans that there was nothing good in their African traditional
customs, ethics, and values and so they should convert to the foreign religions which had
exclusivist theologies at that time, leading to the conflict presently being experienced.
Mustapha and Ehrhardt posit that: “Muslims and Christians adopted an exclusivist
approach to issues of religion, seeing salvation as only possible through their particular
faiths while at the same time denying any divine content in the opposing faith.”

An African scholar, John S. Mbiti, in his book entitled African Religions and Philosophy
opines that:

…virtually every sect and denomination in Europe, Britain and America, has started its work in Africa. The result is that Africa does not have a single image of Christianity but several. Different Church structures and traditions have been imported from overseas, and African Christians have inherited them without even understanding their meaning or background. These denominations endeavour far more to produce perfect Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Quakers and so on than to make their converts good followers of Jesus Christ. Denominationalism is one of the worst divisive elements in modern Africa; and some of the denominations have engaged in physical fighting, while today they compete for converts and in homiletical propaganda.

A return to the shared values that Africans hold across the different religions and the use of strong family ties to inculcate values at the family level, will help a lot in this situation. Many parents prefer to give their children Arabic names if they are Muslims and English names if they are Christians; they do not want to be associated with the native names. Many priests refuse to baptize children with native names too, creating the impression that African names are not good enough for baptism. This should be

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287 Mustapha and Ehrhardt, Creed & Grievance.
discouraged as a way of appreciating the wonderful African names that depict their experience of God. Vatican II has opened the doors for this already.

Similarly, in the light of *Dignitatis Humanae*, there is a need for new and improved ways of evangelizing that show respect for the freedom and dignity of the person being preached to. Coercion should not be used by believers in any shape or form, including the use of exclusivist texts that compel the individual to act out of fear. People should not be treated as objects of conversion when met by people of other religions. Evangelization can be done today by giving a good example in the way one behaves toward the other person, by carrying out one’s duties at various workplaces faithfully, by being faithful citizens, faithful mothers and fathers, faithful teachers and students and so on. By so doing one may be touching the lives of others by such good examples. By entering into dialogue with the believers of other religions, one is already evangelizing by way of promoting peace, reconciliation, and unity as espoused in *Dialogue and Proclamation*.

### 3.5 Other Recommendations

#### 3.5.1 Use Media to Promote the Culture of Peace and Dialogue

The role of the Catholic media in Nigeria: The use of Catholic newspapers, Catholic radio stations, television, websites, Facebook, Instagram and so on to promote the culture of peace and dialogue cannot be underestimated. The secular media reports seem to focus on the bad news more than the good because in that way they make more sales. They report the bad news of crises and the number of people injured and killed, but the good news of Muslims and Christians living next to one another and making serious efforts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding is not reported, creating an imbalance. The Catholic
Media should, therefore, take up the task of promoting all the sincere efforts that the Christians and Muslims are making at promoting dialogue and understanding. Decree on the Media of Social Communications: Inter Mirifica states that: “The Church recognizes these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind since they greatly contribute to entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the kingdom of God.”

The case study of the work that The Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Women’s Associations in Kaduna is a good example of sharing more positive news in the media. The State Capital of Kaduna has experienced a good number of violent riots which inspired the women of different faiths there to act. These women, be they Christians or Muslims, share the same concerns about poverty, the lack of peace and justice, voicelessness, and the lack of leadership opportunities as “these present great obstacles to women’s assuming their responsibility to be mothers of a culture of peace.”

This forum, therefore, strengthens women’s voices by bringing women together to speak as one in: joint press statements about current instances of tension or violence; joint radio programs on issues relating to women and religious coexistence; seminars with political and religious leaders on issues of conflict and women’s concerns; conferences on insecurity and women’s responses; and solidarity visits as interfaith women religious leaders to victims of ethnoreligious violence. The natural predisposition of women is generally to nurture and to care for others. This has played a huge role in their involvement in the peacebuilding

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291 Ibid., 180.
project in Kaduna. They feel pain and heartbreak when either their children or their husbands are killed. “The number of female-headed households increases when men, who are usually the breadwinners, are killed.” In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, it is not easy for women’s efforts to be recognized but their efforts as a group are gradually becoming evident as the popularity of organizations like this one increases.

Although the NGOs and the government are involved in peacebuilding initiatives, change can hardly be brought about through secular discourse or laws. “Women’s lives are deeply affected by religious and customary laws and norms, and faith-based groups working within the framework and terminologies of their faith communities can best ensure that oppressive customs are eradicated.” Women also form better networks at the grassroots level so effective change can be felt at the local levels. This can be seen in Kaduna where the women established an Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Youth Association that make efforts for youths of different faiths to meet in places like national youth service camp and pre-Ramadan football events to promote interfaith understanding and work for a better Nigeria. Each time women are denied the opportunity to lead, society loses the contributions that they would have brought for the benefit and growth of everyone in that society. If the media promotes such positive activities of women, that would go a long way toward the promotion of a culture of peace, dialogue and engagement with the religious other.

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292 Ibid., 186.
293 Ibid., 181.
3.5.2 The Need to Show Sincere Commitment to Interfaith Dialogue by the Muslims

Muhammed Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer are Muslims committed to promoting interfaith dialogue. In the book they both wrote entitled *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* they observed that some Muslims are opposed to interfaith dialogue either because they believe it is against Islam, following their interpretation of some Koranic texts, or because they think it is a missionary strategy to convert them to Christianity. “Once a Muslim man in a mosque was heard shouting that interfaith dialogue is *kufr* (disbelief) and that those Muslims who participated in it were acting like *kuffar* (disbelievers). His voice was full of hatred and disapproval.”

The Islamic community could be won over to the idea of dialogue by overcoming their fears in order to show a sincere commitment to it. “Muslims have other fears, one of them being that non-Muslim participants are actually missionaries looking for additional information and insight to improve their evangelization efforts and convert Muslims.” It is important to reduce these fears by encouraging Muslims to remain committed to their religious traditions while Christians remain faithful to their own. Doing otherwise defeats the very meaning of interreligious dialogue. According to Catherine Cornille, “Interreligious dialogue in the full sense of the term involves engagement between religions, or between individuals insofar as they confess adherence to their particular religious tradition.”

The Nigerian Catholic Church needs to appreciate the wisdom that comes from the Islamic tradition, show interest in learning more about Islam, appreciate Islamic customs and traditions and jettison the stereotypes and prejudices that are widespread about

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295 Ibid., 15.
296 Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 59.
Muslims in Nigeria. If the Muslims hear Christians say good things about Muslims and Islam, they will most likely reciprocate that kind gesture and vice versa.

Interfaith dialogue cannot remain on the level of ideas only. Muslims need to be motivated and convinced that interfaith dialogue is for the good of the adherents of both religions. This can only happen if there is a level playing field for members of both religions. Situations where Christians feel superior to Muslims at interfaith gatherings and act like they are more learned and educated and bent on instructing Muslims on how to act in the most proper and reasonable way are inappropriate. “Dialogue is an equal-opportunity activity and must be perceived that way by all participants.”

No one wants to get involved in a dialogue in which she or he would be looked down upon as an inferior partner. As long as Christians continue to promote the fulfillment and replacement models, the dialogue initiative may likely fail. This is also applicable to the Muslims who continue to consider the Christian Scripture as falsified, as noted: “have you any hope that they will be true to you when a part of them used to listen to the word of Allah, then used to change it, after they had understood it, knowingly?” (Qur’an 2:75). This is an age-old belief that Muslims have, that the Christian scripture contained in the Bible today, was falsified. They certainly need to overcome this kind of prejudice as they engage more with Christians.

3.5.3 The Need for the Construction of a National Identity

Given the state of Nigeria now, it is important that there should be a sense of national unity in the country. The concept of national identity is related to the collection of common identifiable attributes and values in the people of a nation that give the members

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298 Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*.  

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of a particular community genuine meaning and a sense of belonging.\textsuperscript{299} This is a serious challenge in Nigeria. Given the diverse ethnicities that make up the country, it is difficult to find something genuine that will give Nigerians a common sense of belonging to one nation. “Nigeria is one of the most heterogenous societies in the world with over 250 ethnic groupings and many more languages, this richly endowed country, in natural and human resources, is an ethnic, religious and cultural mosaic and consequently a mere geographic expression.”\textsuperscript{300} Although the British had forced the multicultural and multiethnic communities together for easy administration, they were unfortunately unable “to impose a collective identity on these societies.”\textsuperscript{301} This problem can perhaps be solved through a multidisciplinary approach. Sociological, theological, as well as political skills, need to be employed in order to make head-way and harness the different groups and construct a national identity. “The challenge of the Nigerian state has always been how to grapple with and merge the discordant ethno-religious groups, into a coherent whole while at the same time preserve the sufficient autonomy for each group to satisfy cultural and religious aspirations.”\textsuperscript{302}

Dodoye Williams identifies four dimensions that could be influential in the construction of a national identity, namely: national heritage, belief structure, cultural homogeneity, and ethnocentricism. In order to measure which of these four is the most influential, a survey was carried out in three states of the Federation: Akwa Ibom State, Cross River State, and the Federal Capital Territory. Respondents answered questions

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid.
about the issues that are most important in shaping national identity. About 288 questionnaires were returned out of the 300 that were distributed randomly in the three different states in the country. The lowest on the influence scale was national heritage which had a response of about 41.5 percent. This result is not surprising because “beyond the existence of national monuments, museums, edifices, and other national symbols, there is really no common national heritage in the country. Each of the ethnic cleavages in Nigeria holds a unique history and traces their origin to different sources.”\textsuperscript{303} Next in line was the cultural homogeneity dimension with a total of 57.1 percent. Again, in a country with over 250 ethnic groups with different cultural, religious and political structures, it is not surprising that cultural homogeneity scored that low.

Ethnocentrism came next with a percentage of 67.5. “Ethnocentrism is that level of consciousness one has of one’s own culture as being far greater than that of other cultures… In no small way, ethnocentrism has also been a major hindrance to the construction of national identity in Nigeria.”\textsuperscript{304} The belief structure dimension got the highest percentage of 132.9 percent, which means that Nigerians are of the opinion that religion is the most defining influence in the construction of national identity.\textsuperscript{305} This shows clearly how influential religion is in Nigeria and that it is a wonderful opportunity for religious leaders to contribute actively to the construction of national identity as a positive way of using the influence they have on the people. A lot of Nigerians may easily disobey the president of the country, but they would hardly ever disobey their religious leaders. The influence that the religious leaders have on their subject can be used in a positive way to

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
construct a sense of national identity with the traits that are respected across cultures like hospitality, respect for life, and strong family ties which are also African values. These are values promoted by all ethnic groups. The different identities that are promoted presently are not unifying and this is further aggravating the problem. Islamic identity is different from Christian identity, there is need for synergy and perhaps the African religious values may be that uniting force to form a national identity.

The role of the political leaders is simply indispensable in the construction of a national identity. Often times the temperament of the president of the country is reflected in the entire country and makes the daily news. If the president promotes justice, treats all religions, people and ethnicities equally and avoids the manipulation of religious sentiments of people for political reasons, such a leader will succeed in uniting the country. The rule of law must be upheld to avoid situations where political leaders tend to favor people who are from their own religion or ethnic group. Nigerian leaders must show by example that everyone is first a cherished citizen of Nigeria before anything else. Political leadership can either make or mar the construction of national identity. Presently, there are different identities operating within the Nigerian space; they are the African identity stemming from the different ethnic groups, the Christian identity, the Islamic identity and some recently constructed identities that are violent, for example, the Boko Haram. These different identities conflict with one another in the quest for dominance and recognition. The need to use religious influence positively and construct a national identity is important in resolving the issue. A typical Muslim from the north does not appreciate the way the Christian has become so western; the Christian, too, does not appreciate the way the northern Muslim has become so Arabic. The adoption of the African worldview of
religions would be helpful here since believers are first Africans before becoming Christians or Muslims. Contextual theology is useful here and become really important because it appreciates the cultures, languages, ethnicities and the values therein. It appreciates diversity and celebrates it, again further proving the argument that Vatican II serves well as a model for dealing with the problems of diversity in Nigeria.

It is true that this idea of a construction of national identity can also result in the side effect of nationalism. In the long run, it must be understood that solutions to religious and socio-economic problems are not always permanent and that the dynamics change over time. Other negative effects may creep into a national identity, but it only calls for a sign of commitment on the part of the leadership to keep modifying policies in order to maintain the original ideal. For example, new churches spring up frequently in Nigeria and they use religion to construct a new identity for their new members and then put policies in place to keep their members in their churches. If all these different bodies promote the idea of healthy unity, devoid of dirty politics, and this is reflected in their public teachings and actions, it will be very helpful. Groups that may be helpful in fostering this idea of national identity include the Nigerian Interreligious Council, (NIREC), Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN), women’s faith groups like the Federation of Muslim Women’s Organization, (FOMWAN), and Women’s Wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN). Biological families and politicians can all contribute to ensure that a national identity is constructed. Once the people notice that the common good is promoted irrespective of tribe, gender, and status, they will be drawn to join hands in promoting what is good and unity would have been achieved. Presently, many different identities are clashing within the Nigerian space, such as the Christian identity, the Islamic identity, the
African identity as well as other constructed identities that are not aimed at supporting the common good, for example, Boko Haram.

3.6 Conclusion

As important as doctrines are, their functions are only complete when they are put into actions. Chapter Three sought out ways that Vatican II can be implemented in Nigeria and advocated for the restoration of traditional African ethics and values through the family system. Solutions were sorted into internal issues where the discussion covered the issues that the Catholic Church needs to take care of first in order to prepare herself to venture into dialogue. She needs to educate her own clergy, Seminarians, women in religious life and the laity and involve them to follow the mission of promoting dialogue so that it becomes truly the people’s work. Then the external issues which are about ecumenical and interreligious dialogue with Muslims were discussed. The chapter concentrated on Vatican II resources and the practical initiatives that need to be taken by the Catholic Church in Nigeria in order to demonstrate her seriousness about ecumenical and interreligious dialogue with Muslims.

The discussion emphasized the need to update the theological education of the clergy and laity as the Catholic Church seeks to promote ecumenical dialogue. Then the paper elaborated on the promotion of interreligious dialogue with Muslims in the north and Muslims in the south. An explanation was provided of the need for the construction of a national identity as a response to the socio-political dimension of the problem since there are diverse ethnic groups and cultures and integration has been a problem. Because Nigeria is blessed with multiethnic and multireligious communities, they are often carried away by their differences without taking advantages of the strengths that unity in diversity offer
them. Vatican II comes as a model to deal with the difficulties of diversity in Nigeria. Concrete ways of fostering interreligious dialogue must be adopted to break the ideologies down into practical realities. This can only happen when the Church seeks to engage the Muslim community in order to work together for justice, to dialogue in humility, and to show her sincere commitment to this project of seeking peace by way of focusing on areas of cooperation and expressing genuine love for the Muslim neighbours. The discussion covered the importance of political harmony as well.

Of paramount importance to the discussion in Chapter Three is the promotion of African values and cultures. Africans value family, marriage, peace, and unity. “The African man’s concern for the well-being of his brother and neighbour is at the heart of traditional ethics and morality.”306 They have respect for life and are very hospitable. Their worldview towards other religions is peaceful and the idea of strict monotheism was completely foreign to them, but has created the conflict that exists today. The promotion of African Values and culture connects well with the ideas of Vatican II on culture and respect for diversity. This is evident in the way Christians and Muslims in the south respond to religious issues in a peaceful way because unlike the north, they have not discarded their cultural values to embrace Christianity and Islam. Vatican II equally opened the doors for the acceptance of the different cultural elements that are in conformity with the Gospel. This thesis recommends the promotion of African ethics and values to be integrated into both Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. In that way, the shared beliefs and values lost over the years will be restored.

General Conclusion

Exclusivism in both Christianity and Islam seems to be difficult to eliminate, even in the 21st century. The rate of violence occurring around the world in the name of religion, especially between Christians and Muslims, continues to baffle the world. Hardly does a month pass these days without news about the killings of believers and bombing of places of worship. The need for interreligious cooperation, dialogue and understanding continues to remain ever urgent. Adherents of both religions constitute sixty percent of the world’s population, making it necessary for both religions to engage in constructive and meaningful dialogue. As Pope Francis frankly told the leaders/believers of both religions during his visit to Abu Dhabi in February of 2019, “there is no alternative: We either build the future together or there will not be a future.”

The interreligious conflicts between Christians and Muslims, though a global problem, has presented itself in Nigeria in a particular manner that requires a reconstruction of the way we view and interpret our everyday realities. The unhealthy mixture of social, political, and economic issues with religion has further complicated the problem in Nigeria. The lure of contextual understanding, therefore, necessitates that the historical background be provided to the thesis by expatiating on the origin of Nigeria, the role of the British, multiple ethnicities, Nigeria’s two religious majorities, and the resultant effects of mixing religion and politics in order to have access to the nation's resources for selfish reasons. These are all the issues that are at stake in the country and were discussed in Chapter One.

The persistent fears about the Islamization of the country by the present president were clearly reflected when the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria expressed them to the president of the country during their plenary session held in Sokoto on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of September 2018. The president in his response “expressed dismay that such propaganda and innuendos, promoted by outsiders, was finding tractions in the Church… He told the nation’s Catholic bishops that there are no plans to turn the African powerhouse into an Islamic State.”\textsuperscript{308} Unfortunately, his body language has not proven to ordinary citizens that he is committed to his words. All his political appointees and security officers are of his Fulani tribe and are Muslims too. As a consequence, the Fulani herdsmen continue to kill ordinary citizens who are defenseless and the country seems to be more divided now than when he took over.

With these kinds of fears reflected even among the highest Catholic leadership in the Nation, one can only imagine how intense the fears of the common people on the streets of Nigeria would be. This is a clear sign that dialogue has not been going as expected between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Chapter Two of this thesis emphasizes that it is imperative to provide resources to pursue interreligious dialogue in the manner stemming from the Second Vatican Council. Chapter Two also explored the four Constitutions of the council and the Declaration on Relations with Non-Christian Religions, paying particular attention to relations with Islam. The creation of Vatican councils responsible for dialogue with other religions and the actions of Popes after the Second Vatican Council to actively see dialogue with Islam can serve as resources for the leadership of the Catholic Church in

Nigeria to take advantage of and initiate lasting and fruitful dialogue at the grassroots level where they all serve as pastors of the people. *The Common Word initiative* which promotes dialogue and mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims was discussed as another resource for such dialogue.

To facilitate the implementation of Vatican II in Nigeria, Chapter Three advocated for the restoration of traditional African ethics and values beginning at the family level. Although the official Church position may have changed, it may take a long time to filter down to the grassroots, and such filtering is still particularly weak among the Christian faithful of Nigeria; hence the call to update the theological education of both the clergy and the laity as well as the need to promote ecumenical dialogue was emphasized. Ways to promote interreligious dialogue with Muslims in the south and Muslims in the north was equally discussed. Vatican II’s call for dialogue was also likened to the African understanding of other religions, which is peaceful. This understanding was in place before the advent of both Christianity and Islam. Chapter Three also emphasized the need for political harmony as well as the creation of a sense of national identity using religion as a cure for the disunity among the different ethnic groups.

Vatican II serves as a critical model for Nigeria. It has opened the doors for the appreciation of other cultures and asked the universal Church to engage in dialogue and forget about the past quarrels between adherents of Christianity and Islam. The theology of the council re-interprets and positions itself for a better understanding and engagement with the religious others. Religion has proven to be a very powerful tool in Nigeria for either the destruction of lives and property or the construction and development of society, depending on how one uses it. In order to bring about positive social change in the country
this thesis calls on the Catholic Church in Nigeria to take advantage of her influence in the
country and bring about the construction of national identity to address the problem of
ethnicity that has otherwise been skillfully mixed and woven into the problem of religious
conflicts by religious and political leaders. The Church’s role as mother and teacher
continues to remain ever necessary as leadership demands responsibility. She is called upon
to foster interreligious dialogue without fear and to lead out of love, humility, faith and
hope. She has only to play her role as instrument of peace here on earth.

Our fellow country-women and -men who practice the Islamic faith equally have a
role to play in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. Marinus Iwuchukwu posits that
“the strong influence of Wahhabism on Islam in northern Nigeria will more actively and
quite obviously manifest itself in late colonial and early postcolonial Islam in northern
Nigeria, through the influence of the then Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello…”
External influences that are toxic and unhealthy in the promotion of interreligious dialogue
should not be welcomed by Muslim leaders in northern Nigeria. Internal crises among the
different Islamic sects in Nigeria are the result of some of the idealistic and imaginary
religious piety promoted by religious leaders. There is obviously a need for Muslims to
dialogue among themselves too, as the constant conflicts between the Sunni and the Shi’a
sects are a call for concern.

Although Nigeria is a social construct of the British put together solely for the
purpose of profit making, the British cannot continue to be blamed fifty years after
independence. It is Nigerians and their leaders who must be committed to this project of

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promoting peace in all spheres of their lives so that the country will grow beyond its challenges. Theologically, the problem of interreligious conflict has been solved and many nations have reconciled, ending the sharp religious divide between different religions. The real challenge seems to be the will to learn from other parts of the world that have been able to manage diversity and make it fruitful, rather than see diversity as insurmountable.

Some of the areas that this thesis could not cover in depth are issues of cultural anthropology, and a detailed explanation of the Christian and Muslim understanding of a human person in relation to his or her environment. There is a huge anthropological crisis affecting the country at the moment because of the conflicting ideologies and identities operating on the African continent. The porous land borders and the internet have made it very difficult to control external influences. Areas in need of further research will certainly include identity issues, the sociology of religion and Islamic studies.

This thesis calls for a return to the African ethics and values, using the family which is an important institution in Africa, in order to facilitate the implementation of Vatican II in Nigeria. This thesis demonstrated that by using the African worldview of religions, which accommodates the existence of other religions without compromising the differences, the Catholic Church in Nigeria can emphasize the implementation of Vatican II in order to successfully deal with the problem of diversity in a country that is so unique. Africans should not throw away the good aspects of their cultures completely in order to embrace foreign religions. Vatican II successfully dealt with the problem of diversity, opening the doors for the acceptance of good cultural elements that are in conformity with the Gospel. This thesis, therefore, concludes that Vatican II serves as a model for solving the problems of religious and cultural diversity in Nigeria.
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