
Interfaith Dialogue as A Remedy to Social Instability: Ghana and Nigeria in Retrospect

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ABSTRACT: *The world and Africa in particular has become pluralistic such that there are many political parties, ethnic groups, cultures and religions prevail and coexisting in such places. Many West African countries such as Ghana, Togo and Nigeria are pluralistic in nature. Citizens in the aforementioned countries find ways and means to live together peacefully despite their differences. Nonetheless, many African societies face political, ethnic, religious and social instabilities. These instabilities make relations with each other difficult. However, since religion permeates the lives of people for that matter Ghanaians and Nigerians in particular, this article argues that interfaith dialogue can serve as a remedy to social instability in Ghana and Nigeria. Using secondary data from the internet, published and unpublished works in the form of books and journal articles, this paper discusses the use of interfaith dialogue as an instrument for addressing or preventing social instability in the African society.*

KEYWORDS: dialogue, interfaith dialogue, social instability, remedy, tolerance, peace

INTRODUCTION

The human society from the past to the present has been characterized economic, religious and socio-political crisis that make the society unstable and hence a somewhat uncomfortable place for human settlement and survival. In lieu of this state of affairs, there have been several efforts to remedy the state of instability in our society. Since religion has become an inevitable human institution and a vibrant force in our society, it will be worthwhile to approach the issue of social instability from a religious perspective. In this work, enormous effort has been made to discuss interfaith dialogue as a remedy to the malady of social instability.

METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to highlight interfaith dialogue as a remedy to the various forms of social instability in West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. This essay is based on a

comprehensive study and analysis of several secondary data focusing on Interfaith relations and Sociology. The study is focused on Ghana and Nigeria which are countries characterized by pluralism. Data from the internet, published and unpublished works in the form of books and journal articles were patronized. This study is relevant because it highlights the essence and value of interfaith dialogue and harmonious interreligious relations as a means to manage or eradicate the various forms of social instability in the human society. This will didactically sensitize the incumbent and future generations to take further initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting interfaith tolerance, peace, stability and equanimity in Africa.

Dialogue

Etymologically, the term “dialogue” is said to emanate from the Greek term *dia-logos* which means “through word”.¹ Dialogue is “conversation” or “talking together”. Thus, ‘dialogue’ refers to a formal discussion between two groups or individuals, especially when they are trying to solve a problem or end a disagreement.² It is an exchange of ideas, opinions or views on societal issues with a view to reaching a harmonious agreement or settlement.

According to Mala, Dialogue means mutual dealings on the ways which adherents of different religions and ideologies relate or are connected with one another.³ This relationship can be social, economic, cultural, religious, political or educational. Dialogue, is also the exchange of ideas and meanings which helps us to develop our thoughts and value systems. Conversely, dialogue involves an exchange of thoughts and meanings that develops our knowledge of what we believe and how we value things.

As Catherine Cornille points out, dialogue is becoming more and more common in the description or prescription of the appropriate relationship between religions. Furthermore, cooperating with each other in social assignments and exchanging opinions on collective religious concerns has become a more conciliatory and constructive approach between religions rather than competing for territory, converts, or claims among them.⁴ Furthermore, dialogue is a broad term encompassing engagements between religious traditions, ranging from everyday interactions between neighbors to organized discussions and debates between experts in the field, as well as formal or informal exchanges between spiritual leaders and institutions to

¹ Olugbenga Olagunju, “Globalization and Inter-Religious Dialogue in African Cultural Context”, *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, Volume 2(2013), Number 1, 31-52, 1.

² Oxford Learner’s Dictionary of Academic English

³ Mala Simon Babs, “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Case Study of the University of Ibadan” in *Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa*, Ibadan: West African Association of Theological Institutions, 2012, 116

⁴ Catherine Cornille, “Introduction” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), xii

interreligious activism on social issues.⁵ In sum, dialogue is a framework of harmonious encounter between humanity to discuss matters that enhance and elongate their humanness.

Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue used interchangeably as inter-religious dialogue refers to conversations or interactions between two or more adherents of different religions or faiths. Fundamentally, there has been a general understanding of interreligious dialogue as an encounter between people of variant faith traditions in a condition and environment of mutual trust and acceptance.⁶ According to Sergey Melnik, interreligious dialogue is generally referred to as the institution of positive and constructive relations between adherents of diverse religious traditions.⁷ Catherine Cornille, however, defines inter-religious dialogue as any level of constructive and practical engagement between different religious traditions.⁸

Interfaith dialogue is mainly the bringing together of many voices, stories, perspectives and experiences of religious people in order to learn about and understand each other. It provides a conducive environment as well as an opportunity for telling stories, listening to others and building understanding on various religious matters.⁹

Interfaith dialogue with emphasis on Christian-Muslim relations can be described as the coming together of the followers of the “Cross and the Crescent” for different purposes in different places at different times.¹⁰ This coming together of Christians and Muslims can be geared towards discussing issues that affect adherents of both faiths. This can also be described as a cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between Christians and Muslims.¹¹ Dialogue between faiths or religions goes beyond talks or conversations to include interaction and relationships as well. Peace is the ultimate objective or goal of interfaith or inter-religious dialogue, so the dialogue process must be peaceful.

More to this, interreligious dialogue encapsulates all positive and productive interfaith relations between persons and communities of diverse faiths which are focused on communal understanding and enhancement in conformity to truth and higher recognition for freedom.¹²

⁵ Catherine Cornille, “Introduction” (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), xii

⁶ Olagunju, “Globalization and Inter-Religious Dialogue in African Cultural Context”, 1.

⁷ Sergey Melnik, “Types of Interreligious Dialogue”, *The Journal of Interreligious Studies*, 31 (November 2020), 48

⁸ Catherine Cornille, “Introduction,” (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), xii

⁹ Olu S. Owoseni, “The Relevance of Interfaith Dialogue to Theological Education Curriculum in the 21st Century Nigeria” in *Theological Education Curriculum in the 21st Century*, Ilorin: West African Association of Theological Institutions, 2008, 144

¹⁰ Babs, “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Case Study of the University of Ibadan”, 116

¹¹ Babs, “Christian-Muslim Relations”, 116

¹² John Paul II, Encyclical, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1984, No 22.

Thus, interreligious dialogue is not just a relationship, but essentially a non-institutional paradigm which seeks to engage people of other religions for mutual benefits.

Social Instability

Instability, literally, is the quality or a situation in which things are likely to change or fall suddenly, so that people are worried about what might happen. Instability is also the state of being unstable. Social instability is a state of disharmony and unrest that characterizes the total existence and survival of the people. It is a state of unrest and disharmony that makes the society a place not worth living in. Social stability encapsulates political, cultural, religious and economic instability.

We shall discuss some aspects of social instability in some West African states below.

SOCIAL INSTABILITY IN SOME WEST AFRICAN SOCIETIES (NIGERIA AND GHANA IN RETROSPECT)

Social instability is in many forms. It encapsulates religious instability, political instability, cultural or ethnic instability and economic instability. We discuss these terms as follows.

Religious instability

Religion has always been pivotal in the lives and being of Africans. Generally, Africans are incurably religious, with each people having its peculiar religious setup with a unique set of beliefs, customs and practices. Thus, religion pervades all facets of the lives of Africans such that it is very difficult to isolate it.¹³ It would be correct to say that for the African, religion determines practically every aspect of life that it can hardly be isolated. Thus, African heritage is intensely religious.¹⁴

Ghanaians like most African peoples, are highly religious. Thus, religion holds a substantial stake in the Ghanaian milieu. Religion pervades in almost every aspect of the life and behaviour of the Ghanaian. It will therefore be out of proportion to talk about the somewhat social instability evidenced in some Ghanaian communities without centering on the religious connotations behind such happenings. Religious pluralism has characterized Ghana. Hence, it is not rare to find people belonging to different religious traditions living in a common community and sharing the same public place or work. In certain countries, the misuse and misapprehension of religion has been sources of conflicts. But in Ghana, ethnic conflicts especially in the northern

¹³ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. 361 Hannover Street, Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1989, 1

¹⁴ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra-Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, 1

part of the country seem to be more prevalent than religious conflicts. These conflicts mar the peace of the nation.¹⁵

Further looking at the Ghanaian milieu, Konadu reports that, in 2016, there occurred a misunderstanding and consequent violent encounter between Muslims and traditional authorities in an area in Kumasi called Old Tafo in the Ashanti Region of Ghana over a cemetery.¹⁶ Immediately, gunshots sounded in all over the streets of Old Tafo and subsequently a curfew was imposed as a result of the death of one person in such clashes. The traditional authorities sought a proof establishing that the Muslim community owned a piece of land in the Old Tafo cemetery to bury their dead there. The situation almost led to a serious conflict after some Muslim youths slapped the traditional authority in the Old Tafo community. On hearing about the unfortunate incidence, the leaders of the three main religions in Ghana made collaborative efforts to resolve the menace. On another occasion in 2019 in Ghana, some Muslim youths confronted a Christian congregation in Accra.¹⁷ This followed a prediction by that church's pastor that the National Chief Imam will die in the following months. It took the timely intervention of the Chief Imam who ordered that the armed Muslim men should forgive the Christian preacher and hence managed to calm the tension.

In describing the Nigerian milieu, Clarence J. Bouchat establishes that Nigeria is made up of more than 250 diverse ethnic groups and languages encapsulating various Christian, Islamic and indigenous beliefs, and Western, Arab and native influences.¹⁸ Religious violence emanating from disagreements, misunderstandings and misconceptions has characterized several communities in the West African sub-region. Religious violence seems almost insurmountable because of suspense, mistrust and the fear of relating to people who are different from us. Christof Sauer also posits that there is relatively a high level of xenophobia and religious oppression in several contexts where Muslims and Christians coexist and this is frequently, and often more violently, the situation in Muslim dominated areas, with oppression suffered by Christians and other religious minorities than in Christian majority settings.¹⁹ Reference can be

¹⁵ Nora Kofognotera Nonterah, "The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of its implications for Peace-building in Ghana", *Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue in the Twenty-first century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 197

¹⁶ Konadu Adam, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders", *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, Volume 3 Issue 5, 2022, 185. Available online at <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2022352>.

¹⁷ Konadu, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders", 185.

¹⁸ Clarence J. Bouchat, "The Causes of Instability in Nigeria and its Implications for the United States", Strategic Studies Institute. <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/> Accessed on 24/02/18

¹⁹ Christof Sauer, "The Religious Other as a Threat: Religious Persecution Expressing Xenophobia – A Global Survey of Christian-Muslim Convivence", *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2009,70

made to the institution of Shari'a in some states of Nigeria and the imposition of Islam as the sanctioned state religion in contrast with the tenets of the federation's constitution, which at that time led to the death of about 60,000 people who were mainly Christians and followers of the African Traditional Religion.²⁰ In such circumstance or context, the non-Muslims saw dealings with Muslims as not just challenging, but grim matters of survival. Another sensitive cause of social instability in Nigeria from the past to the present is the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the concept of Jihad. In fighting for justice, a term commonly used by Muslims is Jihad, which means a struggle for something, and may be violent or non-violent.²¹ As Marie Van Lear puts it, though Jihad is not always physical fighting, "the Jihads of West Africa and other militant activities of conservative and orthodox Muslims elsewhere have military and war-like connotation".²² This violent form of Jihad is encouraged by the belief of some Muslims that they will go straight to Paradise if they die through fighting for Islam.

Political instability

Political instability has been a serious social evil in the Nigeria society. The major catalogues of political instability in Nigeria include the high turnover of governments or regimes caused by military coups, unhealthy electoral system, recurrent changes in national policies, political violence, and crisis of legitimacy.²³ Although Ghana has not witnessed any major form of political instability after 1979 coup, a few times there are tensions between some political party supporters. The supporters of the major political parties in Ghana which are the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) sometimes do have violent clashes before, during and after elections. For example, in the 2020 national elections in Ghana, there were reports of dozens of incidents of violence, some of which resulted in the death of some persons.²⁴

Cultural or Ethnic instability

Nigeria as a nation has encountered various levels of ethnic and communal violence in several parts of the country. Such happenings have led to the death of several people and many others have been internally displaced and there have been massive destruction of their properties. In Nigeria, ethno-religious misunderstandings have been the cause of many conflicts. Majority of the civil wars take place in the middle-belt and also along the culturally borderline states of the

²⁰ Christof Sauer, "The Religious Other as a Threat: Religious Persecution Expressing Xenophobia – A Global Survey of Christian-Muslim Convenience", 70

²¹ Samuel, Peni Ango, "The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus: A Hope for Christian-Muslim Relations", in *Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa*, Ibadan: West African Association of Theological Institutions, 2012, 19

²² Marie, Van Lear, "Islam" in *Discovering the Other Side: Challenges of Other Religions*, Ibadan: Flourish Books Limited, 2008, 18-19

²³ John Ugiagbe, "Nigerian Political Culture: Causes and Effects", *nigerianobservernews.com*. Accessed on 24/02/22

²⁴ <https://amp.dw.com/en/5-people/killed/in/ghana/election/violence/a-55883334>. Accessed on 09/09/21

largely Muslim North. It also occurs between non-Muslim ethnic groups and Hausa-Fulani groups in the South. With such ethno-religious conflicts, it is somewhat difficult to differentiate between religious conflicts and ethnic conflicts since the dividing line between them is very slim.²⁵ Instances of those conflicts based on ethnicity and religion are the Kafanchan-Kaduna disaster which happened in the 1980s and 1990s, the Kaduna Sharia unrest of 2000 and the Jos conflicts of 2001.²⁶ Ethnic and communal conflicts are realities in the recent past which if not appropriately handled at the proper time could possibly result in the fall of any nation.²⁷

There have been several ethnic and cultural conflicts emanating from chieftaincy disputes, land ownership misunderstandings and other cultural or ethnic differences in Ghana. According to Asamoah, the chieftaincy institution evidenced in Ghana has been integral to several kinds of community conflicts, particularly those related to ethnicity and leadership.²⁸ Paul Kwame Asamoah further explains that Ghana's governance and land tenure system are fraught with major challenges that aggravate insecurity thereby hampering the development of the nation. For instance, the Alavanyo and Nkonya conflict in the Volta Region of Ghana which had prevailed for decades has been centred on a section of land. The constant reoccurrence of the conflict is as a result of the land being considered as a traditional inheritance and heritage that needs to be protected and secured, irrespective of the effect.²⁹ Another example of ethnic and cultural conflict in Ghana is the unrest in Bawku where there has been a long history of tension between Mamprusi people and Kusasi people. There have also been conflicts between the Andani and Abudu clans in the Dagbon area in Northern Ghana over chieftaincy issues.³⁰ Konadu adds that Otumfuor Osei Tutu II who is the paramount king of the Asante kingdom sits with his chiefs and elders in his traditional court twice a month to resolve disputes and conflicts.³¹ They attend to numerous issues including those relating to religious violence, discrimination and human right abuse.

²⁵ Osaghae, Eghosa E. and Rotimi T. Suberu. 'A history of identities, violence, and stability in Nigeria'. CRISE working paper No. 6. Oxford, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2005, 19. Available at: <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/Inequality/wp6.pdf>. Accessed on 14 July 2022.

²⁶ Eghosa and Suberu, A history of identities, violence, and stability in Nigeria. 19

²⁷ Kanayo Louis Nwadior and Amara Mary Uzoigwe "Ethnicity and Social Stability in Nigeria: The Place of Religion", Ujah Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v14i3.5>. Accessed on 24/02/2022.

²⁸ Paul Kwame Asamoah, "Ethnic Conflict: A Threat to Ghana's Internal Stability". A Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, 2014, 3-4

²⁹ Paul Kwame Asamoah, "Ethnic Conflict: A Threat to Ghana's Internal Stability", 1

³⁰ Anekunabe, Emmanuel K, Northern Ghana: Ethnic Conflicts and Politics. Feature Article of Tuesday, 1 December 2009. Available at: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Northern-Ghana-Ethnic-Conflicts-and-Politics>. Accessed on 18th March, 2022.

³¹ Konadu, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders", 185.

Economic instability

Several West African countries have been endowed with rich resources that should mastermind enormous growth and development economically to the benefit of the people. Nonetheless, with the natural resources Africa countries boast of, the current state of economic affairs in West Africa is abysmal and cynical. Countries like Ghana and Nigeria are not in good economic standing expected of them after independence. After Ghana and Nigeria gained independence, one would have expected that they make use of the natural resources they have and gain much more economic stability for the development of their countries, West Africa and the international markets.

In the eyes of several people, Nigeria should do much better given the natural resources and potential at her disposal. Some years after it attained independence, Nigeria was considered a land flowing with milk and honey. However, the country has become a victim to massive corruption since independence. It probably began with government officials and has perpetually eaten deep into other private agencies and almost every other area of the country. The nation's economy has been weakening for the past years with the expectation that things will get better, but it is worsening. The country's infrastructural setup which should promote economic growth is in mess and very little is done to reverse the case.³²

Similarly, Ghana shares similar stories of economic instability. Like Nigeria, Ghana is endowed with numerous natural rich resources like gold, cocoa, kola and crude oil but still faces economic crises and is unable to rise to the standards of the international market. The nation could easily fall into a growth trap, like other countries that grow fast and then unexpectedly stop growing. There is low government income and the little money gathered is not spent efficiently and wisely. Thus, there is poor results for the money it has.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS A REMEDY TO SOCIAL INSTABILITY

There are many ways or measures to control or eradicate the numerous happenings that destabilize the society. Nonetheless, the stigma of instability and chaos still linger within the human society. Interfaith dialogue can be considered as a remedy to the malady of social instability. The following are the reasons for or the importance of interfaith dialogue as a remedy to social instability.

Fostering mutual respect and understanding in the society:

According to Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, mutual and harmonious interfaith relations evident in interfaith dialogue foster mutual respect and create an atmosphere for understanding each other's

³² "6 Problems Nigeria has been struggling with since Independence". <https://www.nigerianbulletin.com>. Accessed on 2/08/2020

religious beliefs and doctrinal conviction³³. Dialogue therefore draws the parties closer to each other to replace hostility and misunderstanding. Through dialogue, the parties try to find a common solution to problems of the world such as health, peace, security and development. Dialogue tries to clarify the existing differences and opens up for a debate. Dialogue continues to bring the parties together in order to find common ways to live peacefully.

Promotion of religiosity and commitment to humanity:

Every human society experiences stability and tranquility in situations where the members or occupants have a sound religiosity and moral commitment to humanity. According to Stuart, interfaith dialogue is a vibrant key in ensuring formidable religiosity and commitment to humanity.³⁴ In sharing together the understanding and experience of the world, people are able to work to try to build the world in harmony with the will and promises of God as expressed by their individual religious beliefs and traditions. Before interfaith dialogue, the religious other³⁵ is seen as an abstraction or just a different faith about which they know less or more but as they go through conversations, they get to feel that they need one another, to help one another, to bring to each other the diverse modes in which God has spoken to man. This can lead to the deepening and strengthening of our knowledge of each other and of religious truth.³⁶ Thus, dialogue should be possible and fruitful for understanding each other. Interfaith dialogue makes religious people think and discuss how they can be offer comprehensive support to themselves and others without having to compromise their commitments to their God or deity.³⁷

Transforming individual religions in the society

Interfaith dialogue is a crucial component of the common religiosity and spiritual formation in the 21st century because dialogue makes adherents of the various religious groups get to know about the profound wisdom of their individual faith in relation to the wisdom of the faith of the other's religious tradition. According to James Fredericks, Christianity could be possibly transformed only through the massive transformation of the Christian devotees.³⁸ Fredericks indicates that a meeting between the truths of Christianity and that of non-Christian religions is capable of ensuring a real and genuine deepening in Christians' religious vision and spiritual transformation. This is applicable to the other religions since during this transformation, adherents living in the society will discover a way to manage religious diversity such that they will be more responsible to the expectations of their individual religious tradition while they

³³ Glory, E. Dharmaraj, and Jacob, S. Dharmaraj. *Christianity and Islam: A Missiological Encounter*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999, 295.

³⁴ Stuart, E. Brown, *Meeting in Faith*, 3

³⁵ The 'religious other' here is refers to a person of a different faith and culture different form one's own.

³⁶ Stuart, E. Brown, *Meeting in Faith*, 3

³⁷ Stuart, E. Brown, *Meeting in Faith*, 10

³⁸ Federicks, James L., *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999, 179

continue the respect of other religious traditions. According to Konadu, religious diversity is defined as the peaceful co-existence of many religions based on mutual tolerance and collaboration.³⁹ Thus, it is a social phenomenon in which people of many religious beliefs coexist. In that regard, if different religions are found in a given society with tolerance and respect for each other, there is religious diversity at play.

Ending disagreements and violence:

Dialogue is a better alternative to solving disagreements. Interfaith dialogue is advocated as a panacea for religious violence. During religious violence, the quarrelling factions try to exhibit tolerance and communal understanding in times of overt and covert hostility from one another by employing dialogue rather than war.⁴⁰

Ghana is an epitome of the ability of interfaith dialogue to bring peace and an end to violence. As Abdul-Hamid puts it, politics in Ghana for instance has become mainly a theatre of love in which Christians and Muslims partake and in which their identities as Christians and Muslims are dissolved into the major political identities as political party faithfuls.⁴¹ As a result of interfaith encounters and dialogue between the members of the numerous political parties, there is cohesion and expression of love and concern among Christians and Muslims within the various political traditions. Other aspects where Muslims and Christians in Ghana express their theatres of love are Education, Health, sports and dialogue of life which is the process of social interaction in everyday life. In Ghana, Christians and Muslims attend the same schools and learn together. When citizens are sick they seek healthcare and treated equally by the health workers irrespective of their religious background. During sports, people cheer the national teams irrespective of their religious backgrounds; even the team members and their coaches also belong to different religious backgrounds. What is important here is the national identity and not religion. For instance, when the national football team (Black Stars) of Ghana is playing a football match and a team member scores, every citizen rejoices in the victory no one questions the religious background of the goal scorer. Dialogue of life as already mentioned is the interaction of everyday life among people living in the same community or society. Thus, people live their everyday lives irrespective of their religious backgrounds.

Ensuring peaceful co-existence in the society:

Once there is interfaith dialogue, religious people relate well with each other. Therefore interfaith relations ensure and promote peaceful co-existence in the modern society. Once there

³⁹ Adam Konadu, *Religious pluralism and its effect on Ghanaian society*, 2018. Accessed from <https://www.grin.com/document/454170> on 14th February, 2021. 1.

⁴⁰ Paul Kwame Asamoah, "Ethnic Conflict: A Threat to Ghana's Internal Stability", 60

⁴¹ Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana", in *Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa*, Ibadan: West African Association of Theological Institutions, 2012, 33

is peace and order, all human aspirations can be best realized under a condition of peace and order. Through interfaith dialogue, people interact and relate naturally with others. This is referred to as “dialogue of life”⁴² which commonly takes place at any place and any time between people irrespective of their cultural, ethnic or religious background. Through dialogue of life, people live with, encounter, interact with and participate in each other’s daily life or activities together. This nature of interaction and action will eliminate fear and create a sense of peaceful co-existence that would extend to everyone in the society despite their religious background. There is the need for a pattern where all people can transcend dialogue and simply recognize each other as humanly as possible, pursuing common ground with utmost compassion and humility. Such a climate can only be attained within a political and legal framework which ensures freedom and harmonious interaction for all religious communities.⁴³ This is because, as Samwini indicates, an environment created for dialogue of life and practical engagements among religious practitioners can curb any form of religious tension, violence or war. Interfaith dialogue results from understanding and ensuing tolerance, which both pave way for peaceful co-existence.⁴⁴ Thus, individuals can possibly see peace and talk peace as an indispensable part of life only if they are willing to learn to live at peace and co-exist with one another through mutual dialogue.

Development:

When people belonging to the diverse religions tolerate each other and co-exist in peace as a result of dialogical interactions, the society can develop physically. The people in the community can possibly come together and articulate their views and grievances with a common voice and authorities will listen without hesitation. Also, it can result into the development of the numerous religious communities.⁴⁵ Realistically, development comes through the prevalence of peace, stability and strong collaboration between people irrespective of their religious background.

CONCLUSION

This article has proven that despite much instability that face human beings such as cultural, ethnic, political, social and religious differences; dialogue is the most efficient tool to make people interact and try to solve common issues. Interfaith dialogue as we have seen is the remedy

⁴² <http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2011/9/14/a-dialogue-of-life-approach-to-interfaith-peace-in-west-afri.html> (Accessed on 19th October, 2022) See also: Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations. Available at: <https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/87/89>. Accessed on 19th October, 2022.

⁴³ Stuart, E. Brown, *Meeting in Faith*, 62

⁴⁴ Samwini, Nathan Iddrisu, “The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations”

⁴⁵ Samwini, Nathan Iddrisu, “The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of life in Community Building”

for all instabilities of life in a pluralistic society. The following are suggestions based on the study.

There should be Dialogue of life: Dialogue of life involves a social dimension whereby people live their lives daily by co-existing peacefully with people belonging to other religions for the sake of peace and social stability. People should accept the fact that religious pluralism has come to stay in our contemporary communities. As we go about our daily activities or routines in both private and public places, we meet and interact with the religious other. Dialogue of life therefore must characterize every aspect of our lives.

Interfaith dialogue should not be aimed at proselytization: Adherents of the various religions need to be informed that the practice of their faith should be personal, and that none should seek to force his faith on the other. Rather, it should be aimed at letting people acknowledge the existence and authenticity of your religion in a harmonious way, not for the purpose of converting them to your faith.

Interfaith dialogue must be a social and civic responsibility or of a general interest: As a matter of responsibility and cooperate interest, it is about time that people graduate from verbal or roundtable dialogue. Thus, dialogue should not be confined to roundtable discussions centering only on mere exchange of words and ideas. Rather, there should be dialogue of action. This implies that the adherents of the individual religions should be occupied in activities that will promote social justice and charity to the extent that they will have less time to think of violence. In such a situation, the love the individual has for the religious other will overcome the sentiments they have against each other.

People must personally have the commitment and passion for interfaith dialogue: Such commitment to pursue peace is needed despite the religious differences. Those who accept this will help in building a tension-free society where everyone will be free to live and practice his or her religion for the sake of peace and social stability. By so doing, there will be the respect for others and maximum tolerance. Tolerance produces trust and respect for the individual and his or her religion. The respect for others also enhances the presentation of our faith to each other.

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