

# Interreligious Dialogue as a Priority Area of Pastoral Concern in Kaduna Archdiocese

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## 1 Introduction

In this hall today, I somehow feel it would be easier to speak of interreligious conflict than of interreligious dialogue. If we were to speak of interreligious conflict, I would imagine that most of you here would have plenty to say and little of that would be positive. You would have your own stories to tell about how you were directly affected by the violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the past; some of you lost your loved ones, others lost your homes and livelihoods, others lost friends and neighbours, most of us felt the fear and the tension and saw with our own eyes the destruction left after the violence. You would probably also have many stories to tell of injustices you experience today as a Christian in Kaduna.

If we were to speak of interreligious conflict here in Kaduna, I have no doubt that our discussion would be very passionate. In fact, if we were even to speak of Muslims, our conversation would probably be no less passionate. Our conversation would be filled with hurt, pain, anger, hate, fear, and distrust and this passion would be stemming from our own lived experience, not so much of individual Muslims but of Muslims as a group and of destructive violence. The truth is that many of us have Muslim friends but we tend to forget about them when we speak of Muslims as a generalized group.

If we were to speak about interreligious conflict, we would probably speak very little about religion as such. In fact, the love, peace, forgiveness, mercy, hope, justice, right relations and so on which our religion teaches us would be difficult to find in our conversation. We might talk about sharī'a, but our discussion on sharī'a would probably have more to do with access to political seats, government appointments, work, university quotas, and state funding, than with theology. We would probably end up talking about history, such as Islamic jihad and Western colonialism and the imposition of one majority ethnic/religious group over many minority groups; we would discuss political questions such as tribal or religious identity politics in Nigeria, manipulation of religion for political power, access to power as equal to access to the national funds; we would talk about poverty and unemployment which make access to the national funds all the more important, and about ignorance which makes it easy for trouble makers to fill the minds of people with notions that might make them feel violence in the name of religion was justified and necessary.

It would be no harm at all for us to leave the floor open and to have such an honest sharing about our experience of conflict and our opinion of Muslims. In fact, it would be a good thing to do. It would be a first and necessary step towards healing our relationships and so I would actually suggest that it be done sometime, either at parish or diocesan level.

However, the Archdiocese has not chosen interreligious conflict as a priority area of pastoral concern to be discussed at this synod: rather it has chosen interreligious dialogue. Quite obviously, if there is interreligious conflict, then the reasons for this conflict must be discussed and analysed with sincerity. As we well know, there are two sides to every story, it takes two to tango; in any conflict between two people or two groups of people, there will be two different ways of looking at the conflict just as it is because of their different ways of looking at some particular question that there is conflict in the first place. The only way to resolve the conflict is to hear each other's views, try to understand them, and try together to find a solution that will be acceptable to both parties. Hence, if there is conflict between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna they will have to come together to discuss their problems and this would therefore become an interreligious forum.

But – is this all that interreligious dialogue is about? Is this coming together as Muslims and Christians to sit down and analyse our difficulty in co-existing peacefully, the only reason for interreligious dialogue? Conflict resolution, analysing the sources of our conflict and finding solutions together, is certainly a big part of the interreligious dialogue which the church is called to participate in and to promote. However, conflict cannot be the primary reason for such dialogue and nor can conflict resolution be the primary goal.

## 2 What is Interreligious Dialogue?

The term interreligious can be off-putting and misleading because it seems to imply that what we should be doing is mainly *talking* to people of other faiths. Many conceive of dialogue as formal interreligious gatherings where religious leaders make long speeches, or else as round-table discussions among scholars and theological experts of various faiths.

In fact, dialogue in the true sense of the word is not an activity at all and it definitely is not fully defined by meetings of religious leaders; rather dialogue is primarily a spirituality and an attitude. Interreligious dialogue is really more a way of 'living' together than of 'talking' together, sharing life in the context of daily living. Interreligious dialogue is a way of living with others that involves interaction with people of a different religion to my own at the levels of *being* (ordinary dialogue of life), *doing* (cooperation on social issues), *thinking* (study, discussion of theological issues), and

*reflecting* (sharing of religious experiences).

Dialogue, being open to other people of whatever religion or tribe or class, is something that **truly expresses the Christian faith**. Msgr. Kukah, in his presentation on Sunday evening (about Boko Haram and the Pastoral Challenges it presents), spoke about the need for us as Catholics to recognize that the greatest gift we have is our faith and that the recognition of this must move us to renew our confidence in ourselves, to increase our knowledge of our faith and to become more assertive in society as a Catholic presence.

The uniqueness and the depth of the Christian faith is that we believe God is love and that God's love knows no boundary, God's love is "unlimited by space and time" (*Dialogue and Mission – DM22*). God's love is unconditional. This love of God surrounds us in the world in every reality and every event. As people whose reason for hope is that God is love and that God is present and active in all places and in all times, we Christians believe that it is our duty to discover and bring to light the fullness of this richness revealed to and active among all humanity, including among Muslims or people who practice ATR.

We believe that God the **Son**, the Word made flesh, communicates God's love to all people. The human being, every human being without any exception whatever, has been redeemed by Christ; with the human being, with each person without any exception whatever, Christ is in a way united, even when the person is not aware of it (DM23)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, we are to dialogue with all people including people of other faiths, to experience Christ among us, to meet Christ in them and be Christ to them. We believe that in the **Spirit** God's love is moving among human beings and in the world, moving them towards God and one another. The Spirit "acts in the depth of people's consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts toward the truth" (DM24).<sup>2</sup> The Spirit is acting not just in the hearts of Christians, at work not just inside the visible confines of the 'Mystical Body', the Church, as many of us Catholics would still like to believe. The Spirit is active also outside the Church<sup>3</sup> (even among Muslims) and our role as Church is to discern the signs of the Spirit's presence, to follow the leads given by the Spirit, and to serve humbly and discreetly.

Hence, the principle reason we seek to enter into dialogue with people of other faiths such as Muslims and those who practice the African Traditional religions, is because we believe God is present and active among them. The principle reason we dialogue then is because we want to know

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<sup>1</sup> *Redemptor hominis*, n. 14

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22

<sup>3</sup> *Redemptor hominis* 6; cf. *Lumen gentium* 16; *Gaudium et spes* 22; *Ad Gentes* 15

the richness of God's love, we want **to know God better and we want to respond to God** more fully and more faithfully in our daily lives.

Sometimes, we think that the reason we should dialogue with people of other faiths is so that they become Christians. However, as John Paul II said very clearly: "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 deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where [he] wills<sup>4</sup>... Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.'" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56).

Interreligious dialogue is **not primarily geared towards conversions**, implying a change of religious adherence. In fact, when we speak of "conversion" we give it a much wider understanding than simply conversion to another religion; rather we speak of a conversion towards God. We speak of "a general movement toward God" (DP11), a "humble and penitent return of the heart to God, in the desire to submit one's life more generously to God" (DM37). Dialogue, therefore, does not aim at making Buddhists or Muslims into Christians. Similarly, neither can its aim be said to be making Buddhists into better Buddhists and Muslims into better Muslims. Rather, the movement of conversion is when all of us involved in dialogue move towards a more ardent and sincere response to God.

We are also told by Church teaching, quite strongly, that if as Church in any of our activities we are not open to dialogue with people of other faiths or if we teach our people to distrust and to hate people of a faith not our own, then we are going **against the demands of the Gospel**. That is quite serious! "Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel" (DM 29).

Dialogue is "**a manner of acting, an attitude**, a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression, values" (DM29). Dialogue therefore is an attitude more than a practice – an attitude that enables me reach out in love to other people who are not of my own faith community and to see with them how we can more sincerely search to know God, to grow in the faith, to respond to God and to practice the faith more sincerely. We seek with followers of other religious

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<sup>4</sup> cf *Redemptor hominis* 12

traditions 'to walk together toward truth, and to work together in projects of common concern' (DM 13).

Dialogue is one way of **working for the coming of God's kingdom**: 'The reign of God is the final end of all persons. The Church, which is to be "its seed and beginning" (*Lumen gentium*, nn. 5,9), is called from the first, to start out on this path toward the kingdom and, along with the rest of humanity, to advance toward that goal' (DM25).

Dialogue has been defined as: "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**" (DP9). Thus, in some ways the **goal of interreligious dialogue is very general**.

However, its ultimate goal, like that of all mission, is to build deeper Communion with God and among all humanity, enabling us to be the image of God in which we were created, to be One as God is one, and to make visible and tangible here on this world that Kingdom of Communion (love, peace and justice) which we are sent to proclaim.

Interreligious dialogue may be considered by some **a marginal activity**, something which can be left to a few experts. This is not the thinking of John Paul II. He has presented his position very forthrightly in *Redemptoris Missio*: 'Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practise dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way (n. 57). Interreligious dialogue provides a very apt field for collaborative ministry.

John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, says that in this area "the contribution of the laity is indispensable" (n. 57). He speaks first about the example that they can give in their life situations, and also the relations that they can build up through their activities.

### 3 How is Interreligious Dialogue carried out?

The dialogue of *being*, of life, is certainly the most essential aspect of dialogue, believers living in day-to-day contact with followers of other religions and each giving witness to the other concerning the values and the inner wisdom and strength they have found in their faith. However the other forms of dialogue are also important.

The dialogue of *doing*, cooperation on social issues, is necessary particularly when two faith communities have difficulty in living together and religion is used or manipulated as a reason for the difficulty (as for example in Nigeria).

The dialogue of *thinking* is the study and discussion of theological issues and helps us in our

contemplation of God's presence and mission in the world. It brings us to a deeper understanding of our own faith and mission as well as a deeper appreciation of the faith of the other.

The dialogue of *reflecting*, the sharing of one's experience of the Divine is possibly the most enriching. We often hear that while life, doctrine and action can divide, spiritual experience usually unites. An honest sharing of spiritual experience helps us deepen in our appreciation of other religions as paths through which people experience and relate on an intimate level with God. As such we can also appreciate God's activity outside our own Church-club and recognize that God's mission is always active even if we are not.

#### 4 How is Interreligious Dialogue being practiced in Kaduna?

Dialogue of life between Muslims and Christians takes place daily here in Kaduna as people interact in the market, schools, hospitals, paces of work and so on. This dialogue of life is a little more limited because of the separate lives we now lead in our Muslim or Christian 'enclaves' (sometimes referred to as recent ghettoization policies). However, during Eid al-Fitr (sallah) celebrated on Sunday, I would hope and imagine that some of you shared in the festivities with your Muslim neighbours. Spiritual dialogue is difficult because of the fact that people, Muslims and Christians, are now so defensive of their religious texts and their churches or mosques. From time to time however, I hear of an Imam preaching in a Catholic church (St. Andrew's) or a bishop preaching in a mosque (Jos). Dialogue of action is taking place, mainly organized by NGOs and usually convened with conflict resolution and peace-building in mind. Theological dialogue happens to some extent but generally at interreligious encounters here they rarely speak of theology but instead try to deal with social issues of poverty, illiteracy, health or human rights.

These various forms of dialogue all help to improve Muslim-Christian relations, to bring more and more people together to analyse the situation, to form friendships across the religious divide, to overcome some of the distrust, to help each group see the other as human beings, and to plan activities for a better tomorrow together. Meetings of discussion, recreation or of common projects all help towards a gradual conversion of heart and understanding of values. They are small steps but, even if often funded by foreign agencies and hence looked at with some suspicion as are the initiatives of NGOs in particular, they are not at all irrelevant.

The Inter-faith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, founded by two ex-militants, Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa, has brought religious leaders together on a number of occasions to deal with issues of conflict and to work towards meaningful reconciliation. It was under their

auspices that religious leaders in Kaduna signed a peace agreement in 2002; they still hold regular meetings with these religious leaders and have recently drawn up a strategic plan of action together. This NGO has been given numerous international awards and is known worldwide. The two founders and co-directors co-authored a book called the Imam and the Pastor which was made into a film which in turn was presented in the British Parliament just over a year ago and which has since been translated into Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish and French! Amazing how few people in Kaduna have seen that film!

Inter-Gender is an NGO that was founded in Jos and until 2004 was very active, bringing women and youth of both faiths together to discuss common concerns, to spend days of recreation together and to overcome some of their prejudices and hurts. They realized quite a number of programmes in Kaduna.

The Anglican founded PROCMURA (Project for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa) is headed in Northern Nigeria by the Anglican Bishop of Kaduna, Bishop Fearon, who himself is very involved internationally in interreligious dialogue forums.

The Association of Christian Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN) is founded by the Lutheran Church and since 1994 holds an interreligious conference every two years which is attended by Muslim scholars and Christian theologians from many of Nigeria's universities, including from ABU.

The Catholic Dialogue and Mission Dept was only officially set up in 2002 but doesn't seem to be all that active at diocesan levels despite the commitments made by each diocese in the north at a workshop held in Kaduna in 2005. Very few other Catholic initiatives specifically designed to improve Muslim-Christian relations exist.<sup>5</sup> However, the Interreligious Dialogue commission of the Kaduna Archdiocese, of which Fr. Dogonyaro is director, ensures there are cordial relations between religious leaders, such as by inviting each other to one another's events.

The most high-level interreligious attempt at improving relations between Muslims and Christians is probably the Nigerian Interreligious Council, more commonly known as NIREC. This was established in 1999 as a joint forum of Muslim and Christian religious leaders to advise the government on how to deal with conflict areas and religious questions. The president of SCIA, the Sultan of Sokoto, and the president of CAN, presently Archbishop John Onaiyekan, are co-

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<sup>5</sup> Jarlath Walsh's Secretariat of Christian-Muslim Relations in Jos was one exception. So too, the Centre for Religious Existence in Kano, which grew from the Centre for Comparative Religions.

chairmen of NIREC. The plan nowadays is that in each state a State NIREC will be formed which will eventually lead to LGA NIREC so as to really reach the grassroots.

## 5 Why should Interreligious Dialogue be Considered a Pastoral Challenge?

**a. To help us know God more nearly:** *'Once we shut our hearts to the other, we shut ourselves to God.'* It has been said that the sin of religion is to pronounce every other religion empty and unknowing, deficient and unblessed.<sup>6</sup> One of our greatest sins as Catholics, and one that can cause our religion to be something rhetorical, legalistic, institutional and static, is that we think that with our little or our greater catechism, we know all there is to know about God. But, God is not *something* to be known; God is *someone* to be known, a personal loving God who wants to live and love in each one of us personally. Hence, the first reason why interreligious dialogue must be considered a pastoral challenge is that we can never finish seeking to know God, to be in greater communion with God. Since God is present in every human being we must open ourselves to those others, especially those others who challenge us because they are different to us.

**b. To help us know ourselves more clearly:** We have repeated many times during this synod that Catholics don't know who we are; our knowledge of basic Christian doctrine, of the Scriptures, of Church teaching, of Church Social doctrine, of the symbolism in our liturgies, and so on, is weak. It is said that if *I know only one religion, I know no religion*. We come to know our own identity (be that religious, cultural or whatever) only in relationship with other groups that are different. What is it that makes us as Christians unique; what makes us different to Muslims or to people of African Traditional religions? We can only know this when we compare our teachings, our beliefs and even more so our behaviour with people of other faith traditions. In dialogue with others, we explain to them our hope, we explain to them our beliefs, and in the process we come to understand them better ourselves.

**c. To witness to our faith:** We say we believe in God who is Love, God who is a God in relationship, God as Trinity. If we are closed to others simply because they belong to another faith tradition, can we say we witness to the God we believe in? As Paul VI told us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (41) and John Paul mentioned in *Redemptoris Missio* (42), 'the people of today listen more to the witnesses that to the masters and if they listen to the masters it is because they are witnesses'. Unless we witness to that unconditional love of God which knows no boundaries of race or creed, space or time, what use is our preaching, our evangelization?

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Chittister, *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*, Orbis, New York 2000, p. 88

**d. To respond to God more faithfully:** The demands of following Christ are not easy. We often hear it said, maybe we say it ourselves, that we will only show humility and openness to Muslims if the same is shown towards Christians in Muslim-majority countries or areas of our country Nigeria. We will only allow mosques and Islamic centres here if the same is allowed in Saudi Arabia. We are right to burn mosques in retaliation for destruction wreaked on Christians in Muslim-majority areas. We will do if you do; if we do you must do. However, reciprocity is not a Christian virtue: gratuity is. Jesus tells us very clearly in Mt. 5, 39 – 47: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you....” As Christians we are asked to give without hope of return and to welcome to our tables especially those who cannot repay our hospitality (Lk. 14, 12 – 14). If we are not to betray our faith, we cannot set conditions to our attitude or our behaviour towards others. We can of course hope that our openness, honesty and humility will be returned but even when it is not, we still persevere, always listening to others patiently to know what they have in their hearts (ES 87). To love until the end, to give without counting the cost, to love my enemy, to turn the other cheek, - this is what God, in Christ, asks of us as the followers of his Son. If we want to respond more faithfully to God’s call, we must ask ourselves about our willingness to reach out to Muslims and to people of other religions.

**e. To be Church:** Fr. Thomas Adamu spoke to us of Communion, an essential, fundamental aspect of the nature of the Church. The Church is to be a sacrament of Communion, which means it is to be a sign and an instrument of communion with God, with others and with oneself. As Church we are to be instruments and signs of communion and right relation among all humanity. We cannot be a sign of communion with all humanity if we don’t adequately appreciate the diversity within that one human family which includes religious diversity. We cannot pretend to be signs and instruments of communion in the world if we speak and act as though we have something to offer others while they have much less, if anything, to offer us. To be signs and instruments of communion requires serious, humble, reflective and active dialogue with the adherents of other faiths, including with Muslims.

**f. To build God’s Kingdom on earth:** We pray the Our Father many times every day: ‘Father, may your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven’. In God’s Kingdom, will Muslims sit in one corner, and Christians in another, at best ignoring one another, silently tolerating one another? The values of God’s Kingdom are love, justice, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, peace, right relationship. We are called to make those values reign on earth, reign here in Nigeria and we must do this in collaboration and in solidarity with Muslims and with people of ATR. By coming

together with people of other faiths to work on common concerns and promote these values of God's Kingdom we advance towards that goal of building God's Kingdom on earth.

**g. For reconciliation and peace:** Last but not least! I purposely put the seeking of reconciliation and the building of sustainable peace as the last reason for opening to the pastoral challenge of interreligious dialogue. Even if in Nigeria Muslims and Christians lived together in peace, we would be called to dialogue with one another. We do not dialogue *only* because we need to learn to co-exist, to 'tolerate' one another (what an awful word!). However, here in our country where we have experienced such hurt at the ends of one another, and where we continue to live with a sense of mutual distrust and fear, conflict resolution through sincere and humble dialogue is a necessity. Since religion is not the principle factor but is certainly an important factor in the conflict, religion must be part of the resolution. Hence, religious bodies, rather than NGOs, should be at the forefront of those who create spaces for such dialogue. The Catholic Church, Sacrament of Communion, to be true to our nature and mission, should be in the very front line. Unfortunately, we are not.

## 6 Our Response to this Pastoral Challenge: Some Proposals

**1. Increase Respect for Islam:** It is not at all rare to hear people speak of Islam in a very derogatory way. In fact, I feel quite confident in saying that in the opinion of many Christians in Nigeria Islam has little good to offer and represents a work of the devil, a school of terrorists, a threat to Christians, a backward civilization. The first step, therefore, if we are to enter into respectful dialogue with Muslims, is to respect also their faith tradition. For 1400 years, billions of people throughout the world have reached out to God through Islam, have encountered God responding to their cries through their faith and their religious community, and have found in the Qur'an and Islamic teachings the inspiration and the strength to live lives of compassion, justice, generosity and forgiveness. In this respect, as Church we can take steps to enable our people have a greater knowledge of Islamic teachings: we can invite Muslims to speak in our churches; we can introduce lessons in our schools where we find the values common to our two faiths...and so on.

**2. Be firm in our own faith and identity:** Real dialogue takes place only between those rooted in their own identity, with a deep commitment to their own faith. In the encounter with other religious traditions, Christians are exhorted to remain firm and faithful to their identity as disciples of Jesus to whom they are called to give witness unwaveringly and uncompromisingly. Interreligious dialogue is not a pretext to dilute or compromise the essence of the Christian faith. Rather the engagement in and practice of interreligious dialogue provides an incentive for a

Christian to become a better Christian. Engagement in interreligious dialogue or respect for another's faith does not mean ignoring or playing down the essential particularity or distinctness of each religion. Again, the importance of our faithful being firmly grounded in the principles of the Catholic faith cannot be overemphasised.

**3. Look sincerely at our own Truth, not the Truth of the Other:** In Nigeria (and beyond) we each, Muslims and Christians, tend to assume a moral high-ground and with a sense of superiority speak down to the other. Christians often speak of Muslims as a violent people, at war between themselves, a threat to the Western world, a people who oppress their women, suppress religious freedom and oppose democracy. Muslims often speak of Christians as immoral, dishonest, promiscuous, and opposed to anything Islamic. We each speak the truth about the 'other' but not the truth about ourselves. Comparing our own ideals with the reality of the other, speaking the truth about the other but not about ourselves, as we so often do, is neither honest nor just and doing this causes attempts at dialogue to founder. As Christ himself showed by his example and as Paul VI wrote in *Ecclesiam Suam*, humility can be a sign of weakness and can leave us vulnerable but it is the way to the truth (ES 81). We need to be humble about our own truth, our own inauthentic way of life as Christians – we need to see the log in our own eye before we see the speck in the eye of our Muslim brothers and sisters.

**4. Ecumenical Imperative:** Is there anything that weakens the proclamation of the Gospel more than the division of Christians? I honestly believe that our greatest weakness, our true Achilles heel, as Catholics in Nigeria is our arrogance!! We deride other Christians, we speak ill of their pastors, we refuse to cooperate in CAN as it is below our dignity to associate with such 'illiterates in collars', we don't even recognize the baptism of most other Christian denominations in Nigeria – hence we don't consider them Christians (this latter is a particularly serious point requiring urgent theological dialogue of Church leaders in Nigeria). In short, as Archbishop Ndagoso concluded in his PhD thesis, the great fragmentation of Christians in Nigeria makes our efforts at evangelization irrelevant and incredible in the eyes of our non-Christian neighbours. Hence, the quest for Christian unity is an imperative if we are to enter into any sincere dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other religions. If we are to assume the pastoral challenge of interreligious dialogue, we must seriously devote our energies to seeking unity in our diversity with other Christians. Our commitment to ecumenism should not stem from a desire to 'unite against a common enemy', but rather from the recognition that God created us to be one, Christ desired that we should all be one, we are already one in some aspects of our faith, and we must do everything possible to make visible

and real our Oneness in Christ and the Oneness of the Gospel.

**5. Our commitment to the Kingdom:** I would suggest that any projects which we run as a Church to confront the many social ills in our society, such as programmes to alleviate poverty, challenge injustice and corruption, empower women or youth, should also be extended to people of other faiths. Our schools and hospitals are usually open to all without distinction or preference. However, our schools must be places where children learn to respect people of the other faith and to respect their religion. I think it is unfortunate that while Muslim children or indeed children of other denominations are welcomed into our schools, they are not allowed share on their religion or their church; rather they must simply learn our prayers and participate in our catechetical programmes. It is surely a challenge for us to consider introducing opportunities for faith-sharing in our schools and for comparative moral lessons or lessons on common values so that our children learn that we can, and indeed must, promote these values in our Nigerian society together.

**6. Pastoral practice, e.g. Interfaith Marriages:** We have grown used to the notion that we must fortify our presence in Northern Nigeria as a Catholic community. We say we must ensure that our girls marry Catholics so that they do not follow their husbands to other Christian churches; we must do all in our power to prevent our sons and daughters from marrying Muslims. There is some justification for both of these attitudes; we are well aware of them and I will not go into them here. However, what I believe we must consider is the witness such an attitude gives to others. In a sense we are nurturing a ghetto mentality; this is not what Christ asked his followers to do. I would suggest that instead of expending our energies on this practice we would, firstly, question and challenge the cultural notion that a girl has not any religion until she marries (must automatically follow her husband's faith) and, secondly, we must try to implement the guidelines which the Catholic Church gives us on interdenominational and interfaith marriages. These marriages, if based on love and accompanied adequately, both before as well as after the wedding, can be opportunities to witness to the Communion which we are sent to proclaim and to establish.

**7. Church Associations and Societies:** Growing up as a Catholic child in Ireland the only Church group I ever knew was the Legion of Mary. In College I met the YCS. Otherwise I never heard of Church societies and associations. Here in Nigeria the vitality of Church Associations is immeasurable; it is wonderful. I suggest that each of these organizations/associations/societies be encouraged to reach out to people of other faiths. I have found that in every Christian community in Nigeria there is a vibrant women's movement: Zumuntar Mata Katolika, Zumuntar Mata ECWA, CWO, Mothers' Union, Baptist Women's Fellowship, and so on. Even in the Muslim community

there is a vibrant Federation of Muslim Women's Associations. If each of these women's associations took interreligious dialogue as a priority, if they reached out to women of the other faith by inviting them to participate in their celebrations and their conferences or to avail of their empowerment services, can you imagine the difference this would make to our Nigerian society? Women are the backbone of every society; women of every religion are the mothers of our future generations; if only, motivated by their faith, they would take this responsibility seriously, what hope we can imagine for tomorrow! Other Church associations, such as the CYON and indeed all others, could have the same huge effect – reaching out to other youths, who are coping with the same challenges in society, sharing their dreams, in solidarity with their energies, together building the future; this must be our commitment.

## 7 Conclusion

During this presentation I chose to concentrate primarily on Muslim-Christian dialogue. Interreligious dialogue with African Traditional Religions is also a huge challenge for the Church today. In many respects, it requires the same spirituality and attitude. Unfortunately, Christians tend to view ATRs with great disrespect, as juju or a sign of backwardness, and they seek to replace ATR with Christianity. Conversion to Christianity is their goal rather than dialogue per se. This of course is wrong, but is a topic for another day. Given the predominance of our difficulties with Muslims in Kaduna, I have chosen to concentrate on this pastoral area.

The list of how we can be involved in dialogue, and thus help to improve Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria, is endless; it requires only our interest and commitment. It requires our appreciation of dialogue as an essential part of our being Christians and our being missionary, an openness to contemplating God outside our camp, and an assuming of our responsibility as Christians to be for others and work with others for that Kingdom of God which we proclaim and seek.

This will require from us forgiveness, humility, openness. It is not necessarily easy; it demands a spirituality of dialogue which only God's grace can give. We pray to be given that grace.