

THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH ON THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN THE CURRENT WORLD A MODEL FOR IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

*Going through the history of the human beings, it is clear that, the human person is a religious and social being. Religious because he believes and professes belief in the existence of a deity (a Supreme Being, God, a creator of the universe) and realities that are supreme to the realities surrounding man. He is social because he lives not alone but with other humans in the society. With the diversity of nature of the human person, it has become very necessary to always cultivate dialogue and interaction for peaceful coexistence. Interreligious dialogue is one aspect of the different forms of dialogues existent amongst humans. In this brief reflection, we are going to present the teachings of the Catholic Church about dialogue between Christians and Muslims. In a document of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra aetate*, these guidelines and teachings about dialogue are discussed. In view of this, from the theological point of view, this paper aims at demonstrating how the message about interreligious dialogue can contribute more lessons and values to the principle of complementarity of the Igwebuike philosophy, illustrating, therefore, how theological values can help to improve, as well, the values already existent in the Igwebuike philosophy.*

Keywords: God, *Nostra aetate*, dialogue, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, interreligious dialogue, Igwebuike philosophy, Christians, muslims, unity.

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allow them to live and cooperate with one another, in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction among people of different religious traditions, at both the individual and institutional levels. Each party remains true to their own beliefs, while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely. Although interreligious dialogue is a recent term in the vocabulary of the

Church, its reality is not new, but has always been existent in the Church¹. The document *Nostra aetate* of the Second Vatican Council is a document that presents the Church's relations with non-Christian religions. It gives us some key guidelines for establishing a fraternal dialogue, of relations, of mutual trust and respect between Christians and Muslims. Certainly, when they promulgated the document, the council fathers took into account the pluralism of both religions and cultures and ideologies. Although basically, the texts deal with questions concerning what practical relationships between Christians and Muslims should look like; however, they also offer suggestions on aspects of a new Catholic Theology on dealings with Muslims.

The following reflection will be based on this document and other texts of the Popes (encyclicals and messages), in order to present some of the teachings of the Magisterium on the dialogues of the Catholic Church in reference to Islam, with special emphasis on the practical demonstrations of these teachings of the Popes from Vatican II. This paper will point out very important aspects about inter-faith dialogue beneficial to the *Igwebuiké* philosophy. This philosophy is based on the Igbo-African worldview of complementarity, that is, the manner of being in African ontology. It is a worldview in which individuating differences must work towards a corporate existence, where the 'I' does not stand as the 'I' but as a 'We', where life and living makes meaning. In a scenario of this kind, difference does not divide nor does it constitute a threat, but rather unites and gives hope that future existence would have meaning. In a cosmogony of this kind, while the ontology of the person is founded on the particularity of the individual, implying that it is the metaphysics of the particular that founds identity, it is the community that gives meaning to such an existence and grounds such an identity². The Church always calls for dialogue between all people. It calls all to

¹ Cf. Dupuis, R, "Cristología fundamental", en *Diccionario de Teología Fundamental*, Latourelle, R., Fisichella, R. y Pié-Ninot, S. (directores), Madrid, Ediciones Paulinas 1992,

²Cf. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuiké as a philosophical attribute of Africa in portraying the image of life*. A paper presented at the 2017 Oracle of Wisdom International Conference by the Department of Philosophy, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, 27-29 April. Kanu, I. A. (2017b). *Igwebuiké as a complementary approach to the issue of girl-child education*. *Nightingale International Journal of Contemporary Education and Research*. Vol. 3. No. 6. pp. 11-17. Kanu, I. A. (2017b). *Igwebuiké as a wholistic response to the problem of evil and human suffering*. *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No 2, March. Kanu, I. A. (2017e). *Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African modality of peace and conflict resolution*. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 31-40. Kanu, I. A. (2017g). *Igwebuiké and the logic (Nka) of African philosophy*. *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1. pp. 1-13. Kanu, I. A. (2017h). *Igwebuiké philosophy and human rights violation in Africa*. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3. No. 7. pp. 117-136. Kanu, I. A. (2017i).

a dialogue and solidarity as human persons, to work for the common good of all³.

The Teachings of the Church on Dialogue

The beginning of this document indicates that all peoples form one community and have the same origin, because God made all humanity dwell on the whole face of the earth⁴. The text continues with an affirmation of Islam's link to biblical tradition, as can be read in number 3; “*The Church also looks with appreciation at the Muslims, who worship one living and subsisting God, merciful and omnipotent, creator of heaven and earth, who spoke to men, to whose cult designs seek to submit entirely, as was submitted to God Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith refers willingly*”.

Although the reference to Muslims’ professing to Abraham's faith seems to be on a subjective level, its position as one of the non-Christian monotheistic religions can be clearly seen. This is inferred from the phrases that speak of Muslims who worship the one God, merciful, omnipotent, and creator of everything, and also wait for the Day of Judgment, when God will reward all men once they are resurrected. Therefore, they appreciate moral life and venerate God above all, with prayer, alms and fasting⁵.

The document states that the Church sees Muslims with great appreciation. They worship one God of mercy and almighty creator of everything. Two things attract attention to the document reader. The first thing is that it emphasizes what Muslims and Christians have in common and at the same time emphasizes the essential point of difference, with reference to Christ, whom Islam venerates as a prophet, and does not recognize him as God. In addition, they also honour Mary the mother of Jesus Christ and sometimes even invoke her devoutly. The document states that the Church sees Muslims with great appreciation⁶.

Igwebuiké as a hermeneutic of personal autonomy in African ontology. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 14-22.

³Cf. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. accessed 10/07/2020. *Evangelii gaudium*, nn. 217-237.

⁴ Cf. *Nostra aetate*, n.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, n.3

⁶ *Ibid.*

Undoubtedly, a mention of Jesus and Mary is a sign of the special place they occupy within the Quran. It describes Jesus not only as a prophet and messenger of God, but also as the Word of God (cf., Quran 3:45; 4.171) strengthened by the Holy Spirit (cf. Quran 2:87, 235; 5.110). These notes mentioned above also open up the possibility of cooperation between the two religions, in situations of religious conflict, especially in today's world. The phrases at the beginning of this document appear only as an ordinary preamble, but it is a fact that makes the statement exceptional.

This official declaration on Islam made by a Church council should be seen as a point of reference and an absolutely new beginning. The Creed and the worship of one God are the center of the Muslim religion, as it is also for Christians whose faith solemnly professes, "*Credo in unum Deum*". The document briefly mentions some aspects of Islamic eschatology, referring to the final judgment. This aspect is essential for both the Christian religion and Islam. As you study these aspects in more details in both religions, you will no doubt see that there are notable differences. However, in both the New Testament and the Quran, it is mentioned that in the final judgment, each will receive his/her reward, according to the actions performed during his/her pilgrimage in the world. In addition, if you look closely at the document, three basic elements of the Muslim religion are also mentioned in it: prayer (salat), alms (zakat) and fasting (sawm)⁷. As regards to its profession of faith, (shahada; there is no God but Allaah), it has been mentioned in the beginning of the document.

The second part of the document deals with the prospects for understanding and collaboration between Christianity and Islam in the present and in the future. The hatred and war of the past must be forgotten, not ignored but overcome, in order to achieve a mutual understanding, which is the goal that the two religions must secure. It says; "*Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom*"⁸.

To succeed, therefore, in addition to seeking sincere understanding, believers have the responsibility and need to go beyond a simple dialogue between

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Christians and Muslims. Our greatest responsibility as believers is to actively cooperate in preaching and in the experience of the message of peace and dialogue that our faith in God demands. In this message, we are all called to reproach as alien to the Spirit of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to maintain good fellowship among the nations (1 Peter 2,12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven, thereby building a better world⁹.

Practical Actions of the Popes in Relation to the Declaration *Nostra aetate*

The progress of interreligious dialogue since the Second Vatican Council has certainly been positive and deserves praise. The first protagonists of this are the Popes themselves. It is worth emphasizing the role of the Popes in this mission as a service to the unity exercised by them on behalf of the whole Church, so that the prayer of Jesus, “*that all may be one*” (Jn 17,21) may continue to strengthen his Church.

Pope John XXIII himself, when he convened the Ecumenical Council, had in his mind the idea of dialogue, which we know or we heard of his famous saying; “let the wind of change blows into the Church.” This is a clear sign of his desire for dialogue. It can be said that this idea underlies the whole Council. If we take a look at his encyclical *Pacem in terris* of 11 April 1963, it speaks on peace among all peoples that will be founded on truth, justice, love and freedom; an encyclical intended not only for Christians, but also for all men of good will.

Paul VI, in whose hands was the task of presiding over and concluding the Second Vatican Council, was thinking of the prevailing need for dialogue among all humanity. This is evident in his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* of 6 October 1964, which deals with the Church's mandate in the contemporary world. Number 27 of the document deals specifically with this idea of dialogue. For its part, the practicality of its actions is a very significant element, of its willingness to promote a Church in dialogue with the world. In January 1964, he paid a visit to the holy land, where he embraced the patriarch of Constantinople Atengoras. That same year, he went to Bombay in India, preaching once again the gospel of dialogue. He then paid a visit in 1969 to Africa in Kampala Uganda, during

⁹ *Ibid.*, n.5.

which he had some meetings with Muslims. And in Manila, the Philippines in 1970, he made great praise of the religious wealth of the Asian continent.

It is almost impossible to cover all the teachings of John Paul II, on Christian-Muslim dialogue. But he certainly kept in line with his predecessors by emphasizing the need for dialogue. In most of his papal trips, he had meetings and conversations with different Muslim leaders, for example, his speech to young Muslims in Casablanca in Morocco in 1985 and his visit to Egypt in 2000. On one of his visits to Turkey, he addressed the people with words of dialogue. On the other hand, it shows much of the dialogue and relational character that the Church must play, with his gesture when he entered a mosque in Damascus on 6 May, 2001, an action that many people today remember as a great display of love and dialogue.

Benedict XVI also made works to strengthen dialogue between Christians and Muslims, like the meeting with representatives of Muslim communities in Germany in August, 2005. Also, the current Pope, whose pontificate is still young, has already made many visits to the Middle East, Central Africa, preaching a message of peace and mercy. It is worth mentioning the importance of his commentary on the current situation of terrorism in the world as the beginning of the third world war.

These practical examples presented show the evident actions and efforts of the Popes in the implementation of the Council's teachings not only in their words, but above all in their actions. If we look at the efforts and the results that have come out of all of them, we can confidently say that, although it has not been easy, and despite the apparent setbacks, progress has been made on the path of reconciliation.

As Christians and Catholics, at this time full of challenges and difficult situations to manage, let us not forget the words of Jesus: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). We must encourage one another to preach peace and dialogue. Our Christian conduct towards dialogue must be a translation of the values of the Gospel, which we are called to live with hope, even if the other does not want it. That is not why we must be discouraged, because, "though the fig tree do not blossom, no fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3, 17-19).

Benefits Church's Teaching on Interreligious Dialogue to Igwebuike Philosophy

From the above discourse on the Church and interreligious dialogue, it is clear that the central message is about peaceful coexistence amongst people of distinct religious beliefs and practices; this will rightly contribute good ideas to this African philosophy of complementarity. One of the principles of the *Igwebuike* philosophy is unity. In fact, it is the inner or underlying principle of this African philosophy¹⁰. This unity stems from the coming together and putting into one place the various and different existing realities. The principle points to the fact that in spite of the contrariety of reality, in spite of the singular identity of each reality, there is something common to everything. *Igwebuike* understands every individual reality as part and completion of the whole, and thus there is a unity in the midst of diversity. *Igwebuike* presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Thus, 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am"¹¹.

The document *Nostra aetate* emphasizes aspects that Muslims and Christians have in common. And like we have seen, at the heart of this similarity is the act of belief in only one God. God is the binding force and the belief in this one supreme God is at the heart of the interaction and dialogue. It is, therefore, obvious that what is involved here is very important and serves as the basis on which all other dialogues can be established. Consequently, this of course, without any doubt, fits well for the *Igwebuike* philosophy which preaches

¹⁰ Cf. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria. In Mahmoud Misaeli (Ed.). *Spirituality and Global Ethics* (pp. 300-310). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for the protection of the environment. *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 4. pp. 28-38. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 162-179. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuike* and question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol.3 No1. pp. 131-138.

¹¹ Cf. Kanu, I. A. *Igwebuike and the Logic (Nka) of African Philosophy*, 14. Kanu, I. A. (2018). *Igwe Bu Ike* as an Igbo-African hermeneutics of national development. *Igbo Studies Review*. No. 6. pp. 59-83. Kanu, I. A. (2018). *Igwebuike* as an African integrative and progressive anthropology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 151-161. Kanu, I. A. (2018). New Africanism: *Igwebuike* as a philosophical Attribute of Africa in portraying the Image of Life. In Mahmoud Misaeli, Sanni Yaya and Rico Sneller (Eds.). *African Perspectives on Global on Global Development* (pp. 92-103). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

complementarity and unity. “*I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am*”. And because of this strong sense of togetherness and unity, everyone in a given community considers the next person as a brother. As such dialogue can easily be made, and by the very nature of this belongingness and togetherness, there is intimacy in existence dialogue because no one is considered different or outside of the circle that binds the community. To be identified as an individual one is first considered as part of the whole group. It is the whole that gives meaning and importance to the individual or a particular reality and aspect. That is dialogue in play.

Interreligious dialogue increases the understanding Christians and non-Christians have of the beliefs and practices of the other. This enhanced understanding can lead to a more peaceable coexistence in the pluralistic culture of the 21st century Africa. As people of different religious communities encounter another in mutual service in schools, in government, and in civic activities, the foundations established through dialogue will enable these people to know the areas in which mutual activity can enhance society (as well as to know in advance the areas in which religious differences can make mutual undertakings difficult).

As stated above, dialogue enhances the efficacy of peaceful coexistence. The clarified understanding of other religions will be published in books and articles about the religions, many of which will be read by all, as well as transmitted to everybody person. This, therefore, effectively addresses and shapes the thinking of one group of people about the beliefs and cultures of the other group. It helps each group to better understand their own faith. Because the focus of interreligious dialogue is on the differences between religions, people are forced to examine their own beliefs in order to support these positions. This examination will increase the self-understanding of Christians and Muslims, helping them to see the great values they both possess. This enables both groups to identify and contextualize the teachings of other religions, and to present a reason as to why each believes differently.

Finally, interreligious dialogue increases and breeds love and unity. This is another aspect that the *Igwebuiké* philosophy stresses, the advantage that stems from this union of various parts. According to the study of Kanu, *Igwebuiké* strongly holds that the whole is greater than the corresponding parts. It is also a view that maintains that by the coming together of the individuals or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the

brim purpose of their existence¹². The coming together of the parts to form one single unit makes the various parts strong and powerful. In line with this, it will be relevant the teaching of *Nostra aetate*.

It emphasizes this concept of dialogue, because to produce fruit, there has to be strongly in place understanding and integration - a community that is together in harmony and dialogue. *Igwebuiké* philosophy preaches harmony and relationship. According to the study done by Kanu, *Igwebuiké* is an ordered relationship, even though the idea of *Igwe* (large number of people or group) may give the impression of a mob or disordered relationship. *Igwebuiké* is a relationship guided by the Igbo-African principle: *egbe bere ugo bere* (Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch).

The idea of *egbe* (kite) and *ugo* (eagle) speaks of a variety of positions, personality, creed, culture, etc., and in fact, differences in life, which is found in the world, and yet must coexist together. When the *egbe* settles in the *uwa* (the world) and imagines that the *ugo* has no right of existence and then begins to castigate *ugo* and to push it out of being, at that point, the *egbe* alienates the being of the *ugo*. When *egbe* castigates and condemns the *ugo*, it thinks that it is making progress; it is rather alienating itself, because the being of the *ugo* has an existential and fundamental contribution to make to the being of the *egbe*. It is such that when *egbe* kills the *uUgo*, the *egbe* also kills itself. To be in the world, Kanu assert that the *egbe* and the *ugo* must dialogue. The world is such that differences would always exist and to try to destroy the other as a result of difference is to waste one's time; to end the variation of reality is to end reality itself, for reality is by its nature variegated. *Egbe beru, ugo beru* (Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch).

This implies they must dialogue and, therefore, must have a relationship. They have the options of either relating and being happy or being in perpetual discord which alienates their being in the *uUwa*. When the *egbe* and *ugo* harness their energies towards a common project, need and desire, they can constitute an insurmountable force in pursuing their collective vision. Only then can they

¹² Cf. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikécracy: The Igbo-African participatory socio-political system of governance. TOLLE LEGE: An Augustinian Journal of the Philosophy and Theology. 1. 1.* pp. 34-45. Kanu, I. A. (2019). On the origin and principles of *Igwebuiké* philosophy. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations. Vol. 11. No. 1.* pp. 159-176. Kanu, I. A. (2019b). An *Igwebuiké* approach to the study of African traditional naming ceremony and baptism. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations. Vol. 11. No. 1.* pp. 25-50.

overcome their collective difficulties. In the same way, only when Muslims and Christians come together in existential solidarity, which is a correlative and complementary solidarity, a 'we' relationship, can they fulfill their divine mandates. Both religions have something to learn from each other, and to avoid or alienate the other is to deny oneself of knowledge and growth, and, thus, expanding the capacity of ignorance. When both religions slight each other, look down on each other, segregate each other and reject the contribution of each other, they are committing the ontological evil of alienation¹³. *Nostra aetate*, in the concluding part, warns against all these negative aspects amongst the different religions calling for dialogue and understanding.¹⁴

Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue involves meeting people themselves and getting to know their religious traditions. Inter-faith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings. In Nigeria, for example, Muslims and Christians live on the same streets, use the same shops, buses, and attend the same schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue, therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only - it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with another directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible. Christian-Muslim dialogue should always aim at providing a positive alternative to destructive violence, especially in situations of tension and strife. The situation in Nigeria calls for dialogue, if people must live in peace with one another. Wherever Christians and Muslims live in peace, dialogue between them should aim at addressing common problems for the good and peaceful coexistence of the society. This is important because today Muslims and Christians are now neighbours, colleagues at work, members of the same political parties and football clubs. Their children attend the same nurseries, schools and universities. Having seen

¹³ Cf. Kanu, I. A. (2019). Collaboration within the ecology of mission: An African cultural perspective. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. Vol. 15. pp. 125-149. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuike* research methodology: A new trend for scientific and wholistic investigation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAAJAH)*. 5. 4. pp. 95-105. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikeconomics: The Igbo apprenticeship for wealth creation*. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAAJAH)*. 5. 4. pp. 56-70.

¹⁴ Cf. *Nostra aetate*, n.5.

the relationship between the teaching of the Church on dialogue and philosophy, one can see how theological values can help to improve as well the values already existent in the *Igwebiuke* philosophy.