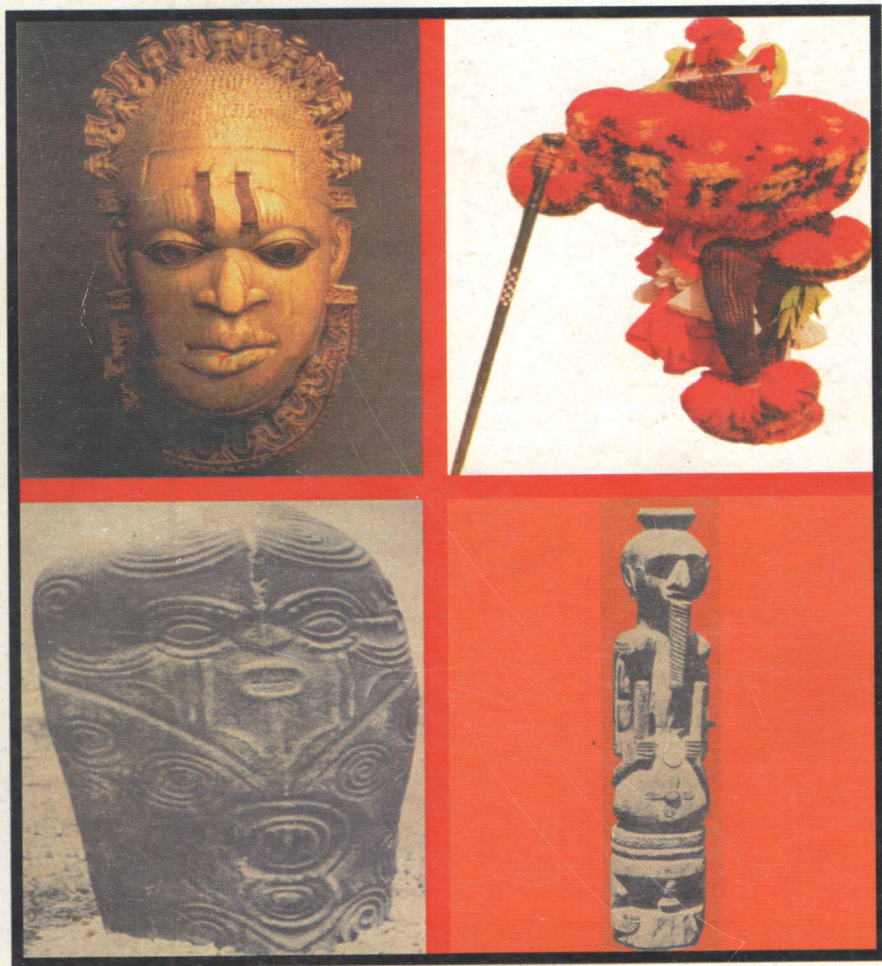


18

# AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY



*Edited By*  
**Etim E. Okon PhD**



# **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**

*Edited By*

**Etim E. Okon Ph.D**

*Senior Lecturer*

*Faculty of Arts*

*Department of Religious and Cultural Studies*

*University of Calabar, Nigeria*

University of Calabar Press  
In Association with  
AfriPentecost Publishing

First Published 2013

In the

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Calabar

By

**University of Calabar Press**  
Calabar, CRS, Nigeria

In Association with

**AfriPenticost Publishing**  
*A Subsidiary of*  
**AfriPenticost Communications and Technologies Ltd**  
P.O. Box 2897  
Calabar, CRS, Nigeria  
Phone: +2348021428880  
+2348079604291  
+2348184611065  
E-mail: contributionsforafripenticost@gmail.com  
Info.iscprce@gmail.com  
Website: www.iscprce.org  
www.etimeokon.org

Bibliographical References and Indexes

ISBN 978-203-401-X

- 1) African Traditional Religion
- 2) African Traditional Philosophy
- 3) African Studies.

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of AfriPenticost Communications and Technologies Ltd.*

Printed in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, By

**AfriPenticost Communications and Technologies Ltd.**

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface	x
Foreword	xiii
Introduction: Prof. Udobata R. Onunwa	xvi
<b>PART 1: AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION</b>	
CHAPTER 1: Derogatory Descriptions of African Traditional Religion Dr. Etim E. Okon	1
CHAPTER 2: Chukwu: The Supreme God in Igbo Religion Prof. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh	11
CHAPTER 3: God and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion Prof. Justin S. Ukpong	20
CHAPTER 4: Yoruba Sacrificial Practice Prof. J. Omosade Awolalu	35
CHAPTER 5: The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Yoruba Traditional Thought Prof. Oladele A. Balogun	47
CHAPTER 6: Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion Prof. J. Omosade Awolalu	62
CHAPTER 7: Religion in Igbo Traditional Society Prof. Emele M. Uka	77
CHAPTER 8: Religion and Society in Ancient Egypt Dr. Etim E. Okon	85



## **PART 2: RELIGION, LAW AND MORALITY IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY**

<b>CHAPTER 9:</b> Afutang and Ndum: Ancestral and Marital Fidelity Deities in Bekwarra Traditional Morality and Ethics Dr. Gabriel U. Ntamu Dr. Joseph O. Ajor	97
<b>CHAPTER 10:</b> Ala: The Earth Divinity and the Moral Order in Owerri Traditional Society Dr. Chike A. Ekeopara	102
<b>CHAPTER 11:</b> Ethical Claims of Ibibio Social Norms, Values and Beliefs Dr. Essien D. Essien	109
<b>CHAPTER 12:</b> Ukpa'aween: Shrine as Temple of Justice in Ugep, Nigeria Dr. Utre E. Iwara	130
<b>CHAPTER 13:</b> The Concept of Justice in Igbo Traditional Society Dr. Iheanacho M. Alala	137
<b>CHAPTER 14:</b> Crime, Punishment and Judicial System in Pre-colonial African Society: The Bekwarra Practice to 1927 Dr. Joseph O. Ajor	145
<b>CHAPTER 15:</b> The Religio-Political and Judicial Functions of Ekpe In Pre-Colonial South Eastern Nigeria, 1600 1900 Dr. Asuquo O. Anwana	160
<b>CHAPTER 16:</b> Okonko Ethos and Values in Creative Tension: * the Igbo Perspective Dr. Patrick U. Nwosu	176
<b>CHAPTER 17:</b> The Dynamics of Religious Language in the Interface of Libation Rituals in Ibibio, Nigeria Dr. Essien D. Essien	187
<b>CHAPTER 18:</b> The Concept and Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Africa Dr. Patrick U. Nwosu	200

### **PART 3: AFRICAN TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

#### **METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

- CHAPTER 19: African Philosophy and the Method of Ordinary Language Philosophy  
Dr. Gbenga Fasiku 210
- CHAPTER 20: Odera Oruka's Philosophic Sagacity: Problems And Challenges of Conversation Method in African Philosophy  
Prof. Godwin Azenabor 222
- CHAPTER 21: "Ethno-philosophy" Redefined?  
Prof. Barry Hallen
- CHAPTER 22: Symbolism: African Way of Philosophizing  
Prof. Chris O. Ijiomah 248

#### **EPISTEMOLOGY AND LOGIC**

- CHAPTER 23: Whither African Epistemology?  
Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba 259
- CHAPTER 24: Igbo Traditional Epistemology  
Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba 271
- CHAPTER 25: Traditional African Epistemology and the Question of Rationality  
Dr. Chris Akpan 280
- CHAPTER 26: An Excavation of Logic in African World-View  
Prof. Chris O. Ijiomah 292

#### **METAPHYSICS AND SCIENCE**

- CHAPTER 27: Hylozoism in African Metaphysics  
Prof. Kyrian A. Ojong 303
- CHAPTER 28: Metaphysics in African Traditional Philosophy  
Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba 311
- CHAPTER 29: Categories of African Ontology  
Prof. Andrew Uduigwomen 322

CHAPTER 30:	Comparative Analysis of Causality in Buddhism and African Philosophy Dr. Chris O. Akpan	329
CHAPTER 31:	The Implications of Africa-Centered Conceptions of Time and Space for Quantitative Theorizing: Limitations of Paradigmatically-Bound Philosophical Meta-Assumptions Prof. Nikitah Okembe-RA Imani	346
CHAPTER 32:	A Critique of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time Prof. A. Scott Moreau	356
CHAPTER 33:	The Problem of "the One and the Many" in African Traditional Philosophy. Dr. Chris O. Akpan	370
CHAPTER 34:	African World-view and its Approach to Science Prof. Kyrian A. Ojong	381
CHAPTER 35:	Analytic and Synthetic Dimensions of African Science Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba	392
<b>SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY</b>		
CHAPTER 36:	Integrative Humanism: The Spirit of Contemporary Philosophy Prof G. O. Ozumba	398
CHAPTER 37:	National Consciousness, Value Re-orientation and Identity: An Integrative Humanist Approach Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba	409
CHAPTER 38:	African Philosophy of Being: An Insight from Asouzu's Complementary Ontology Dr. Chris A. Udofia	420
CHAPTER 39:	Complementary Reflection and the Hierarchy of Social Order Dr. Ephraim A. Ikegbu	430
CHAPTER 40:	The Insufficiency of Humans and the Logic of Complementarity in the 21st Century Prof. Godfrey O. Ozumba Dr. Ephraim A. Ikegbu	444



CHAPTER 41: Celebrating Nigeria's Centenary, the Igbo Perspective 1966- 2013 Dr. Michael O. Okoro	460
CHAPTER 42: Current Value Conflict in Nigeria Dr. Enyimba Maduka	486
CHAPTER 43: Election or Selection: The Dilemma in Nigeria's Democracy Dr. Michael O. Okoro	493
CHAPTER 44: Kwame Nkrumah and the Philosophy of Consciencism Dr. Chris A. Udofia	503
CHAPTER 45: Kwame Nkrumah: The Fallen and Forgotten Hero of African Nationalism Dr. Etim E. Okon	514
<b>OTHER TOPICS</b>	
CHAPTER 46: Obscenity as Aesthetic Category in African Arts Prof. Andrew F. Uduigwomen Dr. Chris Akpan	540
CHAPTER 47: A Comparative Analysis of the Western and African Concepts of Self Prof. Andrew F. Uduigwomen	552
CHAPTER 48: African Philosophy and Igbo Cultural Experiences Dr. Maduka Enyimba	559
Contributors	571
Bibliography	574
Index	580

## Acknowledgements

We appreciate the permission granted to the Vice-Chancellor, a visionary leader, for the atmosphere for the Dean of Arts, Prof. book project. We thank to my He and his beloved support. We appreciate African Traditional International Centre University of Benue offer to write the renowned expert was the chief editor the Department altruistic in rendering

Special Press, and of publication. W. Okon, Mr. Elija tirelessly to provide and full support daughters, Abi recognized and

### Acknowledgments

We appreciate and recognize all the authors and publishers who granted permission for their works to be included in this book. Special thanks to the Vice chancellor of the University of Calabar, Prof. James Epoke, whose visionary leadership and fecundity as granted favorable academic atmosphere for intellectual progress and development in the University. The Dean of Arts, Prof. Zana Akpagu was a major source of inspiration for the book project. We thank him for every support and encouragement. Special thanks to my Head of Department and mentor, Prof. Christian Uchegbue, and his beloved wife, Mrs. Henrietta Uchegbue for their prayers, love and support. We appreciate Ven. Prof. Udobata Onunwa, Crowther Professor of African Traditional Institutions and Culture & Executive Director, International Centre for the Study of African Culture and Development, University of Birmingham UK, who graciously and selflessly accepted the offer to write the Foreword and the Introduction for the book. As a world-renowned expert in African Traditional Religion and Culture, Prof. Onunwa was the chief editorial consultant for the book project. Dr. Patrick Nwosu of the Department of Religion, University of Illorin, Nigeria was passionate and altruistic in rendering vital editorial assistance for the project.

Special thanks to the Management and staff of University of Calabar Press, and of AfriPenticost Publishing for accepting the manuscript for publication. Worthy of mention is the painstaking efforts of Mr. Enoch Etim Okon, Mr. Elijah Etim Okon and Mr. Emmanuel Etim Okon who labored tirelessly to prepare the manuscript for final production. The commitments and full support of my wife, Mrs. Josephine Etim Okon, and my two daughters, Abigail Etim Okon and Eno-Abasi Etim Okon are highly recognized and appreciated.

## PREFACE

The focus and preoccupation of indigenous study of African traditional religion in post-colonial era is the quest for self-definition and restoration of Africa's lost identity and heritage. The denigration of Africa through slave trade, colonial conquest and occupation were viable strategies of de-Africanization. Everything African was rebranded to reflect Western perception of reality. As victims of Western orchestrated psychological warfare, many Africans including the elites adopted colonial mentality and repudiated everything that symbolized African culture. African elites were trained through Western education to behave, and speak like the white man. Thus African language, religion, art, education, economy and socio-political systems were rejected through powerful ethnocentric propaganda. The African was schooled to hate himself, his culture and religion. The African was encouraged and given incentives to admire and embrace Western lifestyle and world-view. The imitation of Western values by Africans is not surprising. The North African historian Ibn Khaldun in a down-to-earth anatomy of the consequences of defeat and humiliation informs us that:

The vanquished always seek to imitate their victors in their dress, insignia, belief, and other customs and usages. This is because men are always inclined to attribute perfection to those who have defeated and subjugated them. Men do this either because the reverence they feel for their defeat could have been brought about by ordinary causes, and hence they suppose that it is due to the perfection of the conquerors. Should this belief persist long, it will change into a profound conviction and will lead to the adoption of all the tenets of the victors and the imitation of all their characteristics. This imitation may come about either unconsciously or because of a mistaken belief that the victory of the conquerors was due not to their superior solidarity and strength but to (inferiority of) the customs and



beliefs of the conquered. Hence, arises the further belief that such an imitation will remove the cause of defeat (1950:51-52).

The challenge before indigenous African scholars is enormous, and even difficult since Western culture and *weltanschauung* has successfully, and systematically over the years, displaced the African culture throughout the continent. It is now glaring that the massive achievements of colonialism were not restricted to economic exploitation through syphoning of precious natural resources, and raw materials from Africa to Europe, but also included cognitive and intellectual enslavement of Africans through the imposition of collective inferiority complex and self-hatred. The average African does not attach any value to anything African. Even fake and inferior products from the West are accepted without question.

The articles in this book are aimed to put the records straight, through correction of age long distortions, untruth and deliberate falsehood against Africa. The articles were written by the best brains on the continent and are presented with a combative and fighting spirit to set Africa free from all the lingering relics of colonial humiliation and inhumanity. There is a clear evidence of intellectual and scholarly rigor from all the pages. This is the voice of Africa in the twenty-first century. There is no reason for resisted illumination. All those who have good intention to study and understand the continent can do so through the articles in this book.

A dispassionate reading will show that there is nothing 'abnormal' about Africa, but that, all elements of 'abnormality' were artificial creation of the West. Even though irreversible damages has been done on the African collective psyche, the resurgence of interest in African traditional religion, culture and philosophy is a positive development capable of reinventing and reinvigorating Africa's loss heritage. That is the purpose of this book. If the articles will serve as a catalyst to generate scholarly discourse on the fate of the continent in post-colonial era, then we have achieved our aims. But then, Africans have no choice, the damage has been done and we are feeling the impact.

This is a clarion call for Africans to rise up with a gallant spirit

and break off the chains of neo-colonialism, imperialism and mental slavery. The African voice should be heard authoritatively, not beggarly, in the floor of UN General Assembly and Security Council. African leaders should transform themselves from being agents of imperialism, to team players in international development. African history, culture, religion and philosophy should form the bedrock of African foreign policy, and the pursuit of national interest. The book is presented confidently to the international academic community with the hope that Africans will accept the challenge to liberate the continent from corrupt, inept and visionless political leadership.

### References

Khaldun, Ibn (1950). *An Arab Philosopher of History*, London: Murray.

**Dr. Etim E. Okon**

*Faculty of Arts*

*Department of Religious and Cultural Studies*

*University of Calabar, Nigeria*

*August 2013*

## FOREWORD

For the past three years, I have spent my long and extended leave of absence from my university in UK in few African universities including the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the University of Calabar, the University of Pietermaritzburg in South Africa and the University of Dares-Salam in Tanzania. I interacted with senior academic colleagues and various levels of students - undergraduate, postgraduate and post- doctoral research students. One consistent impression I got is that African scholarship will not die. I arrived at this conclusion for a number of reasons. One is the doggedness, resilience and determination of both students and lecturers who are working assiduously to meet the numerous challenges that they face in their work. One of those challenges is the scarcity of current books and study materials as well as harsh academic environment.

The production of this book, *African Traditional Religion and Philosophy* is a valid evidence of the on-going efforts by indigenous African scholars to meet the contemporary needs of both students and lecturers in the universities in Africa. In other words, it is a positive and creative response to the urgent need of scarcity of good study materials in our institutions of higher learning. Dr. Etim E. Okon, one of the ebullient budding scholars has been involved in producing solid academic study materials that meet the needs of the students. I had earlier read a number of solid publications from him and come to conclude that he is a scholar with great passion for academic excellence.

He understands the needs of his undergraduate and postgraduate students and has come out with resources that meet those needs. He writes with passion, certainty and clarity. He has delved into the archives to retrieve numerous extant and lost solid academic materials which are not within the reach of many African students. His wealth of experience as Co-ordinator of Religious Studies, Acting Head of Department and Chair of Post-graduate Studies Board, besides being learned in law, social and cultural anthropology, have given him opportunity to delve into areas that are yet to be easily accessible by his peers and students.

To me personally, this book is a white plume on my hat and a crown of glory to many years of university teaching. It is coming from one of my



best and most brilliant students I taught at the undergraduate level several years ago. To be asked by my own academic product to do a Foreword to one of his numerous publications is a great reward. Obviously, there is no greater stimulus or greater reward to a committed teacher than the response of awakened minds. Currently Dr. Okon has done more works than those of us who mentored him - an achievement I am personally grateful to God for. Most of the chapters in this book are classified documents written by experts in their own rights and stored in libraries in the USA and Europe which are not easily accessible to students and lecturers in many parts of Africa. The Editor's privileged position as a widely travelled and read scholar has been used to unearth otherwise hitherto best hidden secrets and academic jewels for the benefit of those who are in the business of promoting functional education in Africa.

The academic communities in Africa should be grateful to scholars like Dr. Okon for bringing back to our tables and libraries a wonderful repository of knowledge which had hitherto been lost to our modern generation of students and teachers of African Studies. This work is indeed a treasure too precious to be stocked away in many libraries and archives in Europe and America. They are now within reach in a single slim volume that is not too big to be used as a handy text. It is not a Reference Book but a text book that everyone needs-teacher or student! The strength of this book lies in the ability of the editor to put on our tables and into our hands lost treasures of old which many young scholars have no access to. We are now able to read afresh in this volume the works of many erstwhile scholars and contributions from modern researchers of our contemporary periods.

In other words this book serves as a sort of *Continuity and Discontinuity* in our modern scholarship. In effect Dr. Okon has tried to bring back to life what many generations of scholars and students seemed to have lost and complementing it with current research results of modern scholars. It is indeed a form of scholarship which can be described as *Ancient and Modern combined*. One other strength of this work is its clarity and simplicity which makes it easily comprehensible to any class of readership - young university students, senior academic, administrators, policy makers and anyone interested in African Studies in general. The book has therefore got enormous academic merit and market potential. It is not a book that is exclusively open to professionals with strong intellectual knowledge in the

discipline b  
As a  
Dr. Okon  
progressiv  
particular  
together  
comprehen  
moves from  
to light the  
universities  
scholars w  
of the Africa  
African mo  
out of the  
intended a  
showcase  
from differ  
of Africa  
Philosophy  
I am  
deserves.  
makers, a  
Traditions  
departmen  
Theologica  
General  
missionari  
superficial  
Udobata  
Crowther  
& Executi  
Internatio  
and Devel  
Fellow, N  
27th Augu

discipline but a Book for All.

As a good teacher, skillful author and strong research expert, Dr. Okon has carefully and skillfully arranged the chapters in a progressive and thematic system. Each section treats in details a particular theme. It is not like a chaotic assemblage of materials put together like newspaper cut and paste model. There is comprehension, continuity and flow of thoughts and ideas as one moves from one section to the other. Finally, the editor carefully brings to light the fastest growing discipline of African Philosophy in many universities today. We are blessed with eminent African thinkers and scholars who are coming up with new ideas, exploration into the minds of the African Personality and the exposition of the age long tradition of African mode of thinking. No wonder this section has thirty chapters out of the forty-eight of the entire volume. It is not an error but an intended academic presentation of a very urgent and current need to showcase African culture, spirituality and mentality. Each contributor from different parts of our African universities is a Socrates or Aristotle of Africa in himself. Kudos for the growing discipline of African Philosophy!

I am therefore commending this work to a wider readership it deserves. In other words, students of all levels, teachers, policy makers, and anyone interested in African Cultural Development and Traditions would find this book most handy and useful. Various departments in Social Sciences, Arts, Law, Humanities and Religions, Theological Seminaries and Colleges of Education and Units of General Studies would find this book very helpful. Foreign missionaries and diplomats who would like to know more than superficial lurid tales about Africa would find this work most helpful.

**Udobata R. Onunwa FNAS, PhD.**

*Crowther Professor of African Traditional Institutions and Culture  
& Executive Director,*

*International Centre for the Study of African Culture  
and Development, University of Birmingham UK*

*Fellow, New York Academy of Sciences*

*27th August, 2013, Birmingham, UK.*

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

---

# THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN AFRICA

---

*Dr. Patrick U. Nwosu*

### Introduction

One major challenge adherents of different religions face, particularly in Nigeria is how to relate their faith with the truth of the other religious traditions. The shrinkage of space in the 21st century has made actual the fact that great number of human beings of diverse religious affiliations exist. The diverse religious traditions, practiced out there can no longer be suppressed or exterminated by sword. Thus, the concept of interreligious dialogue is placed in the front burner of contemporary discourse. The paper offers an ecumenical approach to the understanding and practice of interreligious dialogue within a pluralistic society. The discourse is applying historical and analytical methods, argues that interreligious dialogue is a sure path that promotes respect among members of different religions. The paper suggests practical ways of engaging in dialogue with adherents of other religions and concludes that exclusivist and inclusivity positions have no grounds for real religious acceptance.

The religious picture of the world today is an ever changing one. Urbanization, mass migration, refugees, secularization of religious centered countries, and new religious movements have done away with religious realities



that were once clear and well defined. In other words, humanity's religious experience is that of religious pluralism. Jacques Dupuis captured the picture better when he said:

Everyday new knowledge of the other religious tradition comes to us creating new awareness of humanity's multi-religious context. Modern means of communication comes to add to this fact of the daily coexistence of various traditions (Dupuis 1991:3).

Thus, it could be said that religious pluralism is here to stay. This accounts for the reason why the concept of inter-religious dialogue is being discovered anew even when it is a reality that has always existed. To buttress this point, Theresa Seow submitted that, "inter-religious dialogue is not merely a human initiative but truly the call of God to discover Him as the only source of all living being" (Seow 2003:85). So, there is no longer a homogeneous country with homogeneous religion. Since we are more aware of inter-religious dialogue today than ever before, we cannot but wonder how we should act in regard to it. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is an attempt towards the definitions of inter-religious dialogue and its practice from a Christian perspective. We shall look at definitions from various sources and scholars. It is from the data gathered that we shall highlight the need for inter-religious dialogue.

### Theoretical Framework

One of the key words that emerged from Vatican Council II was that of "dialogue" along theological and social lines. Vatican Council II was the gathering of more than two thousand bishops of the Catholic Church during the reign of Pope John XXIII. This Council took place in Rome and it called for a spirit of renewal to regenerate methods that will direct the Roman Catholic Church in relation to other Faith Traditions. The Council took place from 1962-1965 and it assumed that no one has a monopoly on the truth.<sup>3</sup> It is within this context that John Paul II described interfaith dialogue as a,

Path that can promote respect among members of different religions and help to bring peace and harmony to a world torn by conflict and war, poverty, and the destruction of the environment (Sherwin and Kasimov 1999:2).

In other words, John Paul II emphasized mutual respect for cultures and interfaith dialogue can help to transform the world; especially the world where violence and destruction are being carried out in the name of religion. It is often the case that when religion, cultural and ethnic identity coincide, religion becomes a pretext for conflict. In this regard, interfaith dialogue brings together the reality

of reciprocal relationships of different faiths. Therefore, the context for understanding different attitude towards other religious traditions hangs on three major poles: the exclusivist view, the inclusivist view, and the pluralist view (Race 1982:10). It was Alan Race that put the typology of pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism firmly on the map of the study of religions. His influential work is titled: *Christians and Religious Pluralism*.

From the early centuries, the predominant Christian approach to other faith traditions has been that of exclusivism. Within this perspective, exclusivism is defined as:

holding that only one single revelation is true or one single religion is true and all other revelations or religions are ultimately false. Truth, revelation, and salvation are tightly and explicitly connected (D'Costa 2000:20).

In its most strict application, exclusivism would mean, for instance, that Christianity is the only true way to redemption. The Christian exclusivists refer to some scriptural passages in support of their stand. For example: "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the father except by me" (John 14:6). In the past, the Roman Catholic Church supported a literal interpretation of the above passage. And in 1215, according to John Leith, the fourth Lateran Council stated, "There is one universal Church of believers, outside which there is no salvation at all for any" (Leith 1963:58). It is worthy of note that we can have a Buddhist or Afrelist version of exclusivism that insists that fundamentally only one single religion is true and all other religions alike are finally false (D'Costa 2000:20).

The inclusivists have much more positive view of other faith traditions. According to this approach, adherents of other traditions may attain redemption due to the fact that the grace of God is present in their traditions. Within this perspective, it is argued that truth can be found in various forms within other religions and within their different structures. The inclusivist view was developed in great detail by Karl Rahner (1904-1984). Rahner argued that the Christian tradition is "the absolute religion, intended for all people, who cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right" (Rahner 1981:56). However, since God desires salvation for all people, "there are supernatural, grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions" (Rahner 1981:56). Rahner makes bold to submit that salvation is caused by the power and grace of Christ. In fact, he considers other people outside the Christian fold to be "anonymous Christians". The traditional implication of this position is that Christianity is regarded as the fulfillment of other religions. To what extent this stance facilitates better inter-religious dialogue remains questionable.

The thrust of the pluralist view holds that all religions have true revelations and therefore no single religion can claim final and definitive truth. This means that all religions equally have valid paths to redemption. It is within

this perspective that Brian Hebblethwaite wrote that:

Christians must cease to think their faith as bearing witness to God's final and absolute self-revelation to man. Rather, they must learn to recognize their experiences of God in Christ to be but one of many different saving encounters with the divine which have been given to different historical and cultural segments of mankind (Hebblethwaite 1981:8).

The question of the interpretation of scriptural texts and experience are the two main points which pluralists usually apply as strategies against any claim of absolute truth by any religion. Based on the foregoing, Paul Knitter, in a most persuasive manner, noted that,

other religions may be just as effective... in bringing their followers to truth, and peace, and well-being with God as Christianity has been for Christians; these other religions, again because they are so different from Christianity, may have just as important a message and vision for all peoples as Christianity does (Knitter 1995:30).

Paul Knitter, following his submission, has a strong commitment to Christian tradition. But at the same time holds that there can be numerous paths by which human beings can seek and attain truth. Hence, the advantage of pluralist stance is that genuine respect and autonomy of different religions a possibility. Furthermore, it facilitates cordial inter-religious dialogue and harmony. Though, the need to speak clearly and objectively about a given tradition in a language that can be judged to be adequate remains one of the greatest challenges of inter-religious dialogue. This shows that the path of inter-religious dialogue is not an easy one.

### The Concept of Inter-religious Dialogue

As we noted earlier, the contemporary situation of today is trapped in an irreversible trend of mingling cultures and peoples. The co-mingling of cultures is so intense that one another's beliefs and religious commitments can no longer be ignored. This kind of trend inevitably leads to many questions; questions that are beyond mere speculations but are immediately practical in this present time. This has caused some religious bodies like World Council of Churches (WCC) and Vatican II Council to issue documents that put a stamp of official approval on a more open-minded approach to other religious traditions. Today, we talk and encourage inter-religious dialogue.

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th Edition, dialogue is about formal discussion between two groups, especially when they are trying



to solve a problem, end a dispute and understand themselves (Wehmeier 2001). Dialogue, from every indication is becoming one of the basic principles in human relations. This is so because human mind does not know ultimate truth and we do not know other faith traditions from the inside. Again, dialogue deserves attention since others are worthy of respect and we learn from one another. It is within this context that we can see dialogue as a gate way to mutual respect, acceptance, interfaith harmony and personal friendship. As Onaiyekan noted, "dialogue is to be seen as a gentle listening to each other so as to discover those things which we hold in common so that on the basis of this common ground we can face together common challenges" (Onaiyekan 2010).

It is in the light of the above point that Monika Hellwig described dialogue as knowledge, which leads to greater appreciation of the other's position and conviction in various matters of human concern. She added that dialogue: "embraces a sincere desire to know more about one another's traditions and to disseminate that knowledge in order to dispel prejudice and suspicion" (Monika 1992:150). In a very broad sense, dialogue involves constant efforts to collaborate for peace on a worldwide basis and on all levels of society. It is an activity or exercise geared towards constant explorations for possible ways of meeting urgent human needs for peace. It is a necessity for the search for common values in human society. Ursula King puts it clearer when he said that: "dialogue is about voice of difference, about different moods and experiences, about different ways of living and experiencing, different ways of knowing, thinking, feeling, and acting" (Ursula 1997:116). Ursula is more or less saying that true dialogue is an art, which must be understood and practiced. And because human beings have an inborn internationality for communication and interaction, dialogue presents itself as an activity that is not static by dynamic.

The requirements for dialogue between people of different faiths go beyond those of ordinary day-to-day conversation and human contact. This is the domain of inter-religious dialogue. The document: "Dialogue and Proclamation" puts it thus:

in the context of religious pluralism, dialogue means all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom (1991).

Dialogue at the purely human level can mean reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal. At a deeper level it means inter personal communion. In the light of the great command given by Jesus Christ to the apostles to go and preach to the whole nations, dialogue becomes an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates all activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church. This is appropriately known as the spirit of dialogue.



Hans Kung, a German theologian saw inter-religious dialogue as an indispensable element in dealing with global situation of the present (Kung 1999:169). In this light, John Paul II speaking to the religious leaders of Sri Lanka, declared:

Inter-religious dialogue is a precious means by which the followers of various religions discover shared points of contact in the spiritual life, while acknowledging the differences, which exist among them (John Paul II 1995).

Inter-religious dialogue therefore, is the interactions between people who belong to different religions. It is understood and practiced as a dimension of mission. It involves believers from different faiths living together in a civil society. Inter-religious dialogue in the context of religious coexistence accepts religion as life. In this case believers draw inspiration from their respective religions for their public conduct. It is here as well that adherents of different faiths seek to collaborate to provide a moral-religious base for the creation of a society of justice, freedom and friendship. This informs Michael Amaladoss' argument that the goal of inter-religious dialogue is harmony (Michael 2000:112).

### **Inter-Religious Dialogue in Practice**

There are four basic ways of engaging in inter-religious dialogue. They are described as: dialogue of life, dialogue of work, dialogue of theological exchanges and the dialogue of religious experience (Salihi 2005:23). The dialogue of life refers to an ongoing friendly exchange between believers in the course of daily life in any community. The dialogue of life prompts people to participate in some way in each other's festivals and life cycle rituals. This form of inter-religious dialogue leads to the removal of prejudices. At this level, love for humanity, for each individual person is recognized and appreciated. It is at this level that transformation of the world begins. Again, at this level every man and woman is accepted as created by God. It was in approval of this form of inter-religious dialogue that John Paul II, speaking to participants at the World Conference on Religion and Peace in 1994 stated:

The religious leaders must clearly show that they are pledged to the promotion of peace precisely because of their religious belief. Religion is not, and must not become, a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identities coincide (John Paul II 1994).

John Paul II was convinced that inter-religious dialogue as a dialogue of life is a path that can promote respect among members of different religions and help bring peace and harmony to a world torn by conflict, war and poverty. Thus, dialogue of life shows or challenges human minds to learn to acknowledge and appreciate each other as persons prior to religious affiliations.

The dialogue of work as another form of inter-religious dialogue is sometimes called dialogue of collaborative action. It urges different believers to collaborate for

the integral development and liberation of people. This is what Hans Kung, in his "Global Project" means when he said that inter-religious dialogue has become an indispensable element in dealing with global situation of the present (Kung 1999:169). The dialogue of collaborative action is a dialogue chiefly for humanitarian purposes. It is about the defense and promotion of common human and spiritual values. Religious freedom, human and social rights come under this level of dialogue. Thus, the liberation of people is accepted as an aspect of inter-religious project.

Another form of inter-religious dialogue is dialogue of spiritual experience. This form of dialogue is at time described as dialogue of theological exchange. At this level people are encouraged to share their spiritual experience and to seek to understand each other at a certain religious depth. The document "Dialogue and Proclamation" indicated that dialogue of theological exchange is: "where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other's spiritual value" (Dialogue and Proclamation 1991). The practice of this dialogue takes various forms like sharing methods of prayer, spiritual efforts, and scriptures. This form is oriented towards personal and social transformation.

Lastly, there is dialogue of reflection or religious experience. It is the level where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches. This is practiced in the light of prayer and contemplation. The goal is to deepen faith and ways of searching for God. Amaladoss gave weight to this when he noted that,

The dialogue of reflection brings different believers together either to reflect on common challenges they all face from other areas of knowledge or to challenge each other to clarify their perceptions... of life and reality (Michael 2000:113).

The practice of this form of inter-religious dialogue easily leads to a deepened understanding of oneself as well as of the other person. So far, the analyses above clearly indicate that there exist different forms of inter-religious dialogue. There is need to note that they are practiced without the claim to establish among them any order of priority.

### **Conclusion**

We are aware that today there is enhanced appreciation of religions, culture, and gender equality. These are the signs of the times in the world that reveals the presence, the power and the purpose of God. This inspires inter-religious dialogue. That is why, in one of the documents of Vatican II Council, the Catholic Church:

... rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways... of life, precepts, teachings which ... reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (Vatican II Document 1965).

Therefore, the exclusivists and or inclusivity positions have no grounds for real openness and tolerance towards other religions. The consequence of such severe

position is what is often, politically translated, in Nigerian context, as a do or die missions. That is why today inter-religious dialogue has come to stay and make room for the active sanctifying role of the Holy Spirit for peaceful coexistence on earth. Inter-religious dialogue is a courageous attempt to condemn all forms of discrimination encouraged in the name of religion. We note that where religious leaders have built up mutual knowledge and esteem, it becomes possible for them to protest together against injustice and other social ills. This is certainly one service that inter-religious dialogue contributes to the world and African nations in particular.

Today we are much more ready to learn from other cultures since the assumption of the superiority of one culture over others no longer grips us. Through scholarship and personal contacts, inter-religious dialogue offers us access to other traditions which our ancestors lacked. Even though the encounter with other religious traditions, while it offers fresh opportunity for growth and vigor, can lead to the sterile choice of narrow-minded bigotry or lukewarm compromising liberalism, the option of faith comes as an antidote. That requires once again clarifying what faith traditions really stand for. John B. Cobb noted this point from a Christian view thus:

we must show that faith in Jesus Christ is neither an attitude of rigid defense of inherited doctrines and attitudes, nor the pretense of standing on some neutral ground and supposing that from that perspective we can judge the merits of all the world's great religious traditions (Cobb 1982:356).

John B. Cobb is saying that insofar as we lack faith, we will try to establish our own security. We do so either by absolutizing our relative heritage or by claiming neutrality and objectivity. If we do have faith, we will abandon the effort to establish our own security and will trust Christ instead. That means we can listen non-defensively to what others believe and learn from them even when they deny Christ. In the early Church, faith led to the assimilation and transformation of Hellenic wisdom. In the process, the biblical heritage was itself transformed.

#### REFERENCES

- Cobb, J.B. (1982). *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Tradition and Tasks*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 356.
- Costa, Gavin D. (2000). *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Dialogue and Proclamation*, Rome, June 20, 1991.
- Dupuis, J. (1991). *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*. New York: Orbis book.
- Hebblethwaite, Brian (1981). Introduction to Hick, (ed.), *Christianity and Other Religions*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- John Paul II (1995). "To the Religious Leaders of Sri Lanka"



- Colombia, January 21.
- John Paul II (1994). "To the Participant in the 6th Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), Rome, November 3.
- Joseph Salihu (ed.) (2005). *Inter-religious Dialogue and the Sharia Question*, Kano: Jaleyemi Group Press.
- Knitter, Paul F. (1995). *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, New York: Orbis Books, 30
- Kung, Hans (1999). "Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue" in John, B.C, (ed) *Transforming Christianity and the World*, New York: Orbis Books, 169.
- Michael, A. (2000). "Interreligious Dialogue" in Virginia, F. (ed.), *Dictionary of 3rd\_World Theologies*, New York: Library Congress, 112.
- Monika, H. (1992). *What are the Theologians Saying Now?*, Dublin: Mammalian.
- Nwosu, P.U. (2010). "A Critical Analysis of Okonko Society and Christianity in Igboland, Nigeria," *Ph.D. Thesis* in Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, 34.
- Leith, John (ed.) (1963). *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, New York: Doubleday Press.
- Onaiyekan, John (2010). *Dividends of Religion in Nigeria*, Public Lecture at the University of Ilorin, organized by the Department of Religions, Wednesday, 12 May.
- Race, Alan (1982). *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Rahner, Karl (1981). "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions" in John Hick (ed.), *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 56.
- Seow, Theresa (2003). "Inter-Religious Dialogue as a Way to Face Together the Various Problems..." in *Pro Dialogue Bulletin* 112, 1, 85
- Sherwin, Byron L. and Harold Kasimow, (eds) (1999). *John Paul II and Inter-religious Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Wehmeier, Sally (ed) (2001). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th ed, Oxford University Press.
- Ursula, K. (1997). *Christ in All Things*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Vatican II Document (1965). "*Nostra Aetate*", No. 2, Rome, October.