

IGWEBUIKE AS AN IGBO-AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

By

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A., Ph.D.
Department of Philosophy
Augustinian Institute, Makurdi, Benue State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com

Abstract

Nigeria is a religiously diverse society, with Islam and Christianity being the most widely professed religions. In the 1980's serious outbreaks of violence began to be manifest in the relationships between Christians and Muslims. The clashes in Kaduna and Kano states are notable. Since then, the relationship between the two religions in Nigeria has been defined by violence, attacks, counterattacks and bloodshed. This piece studies the relationship between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria with the view of seeking a solution to the recurrent conflicts between them. It further adopted Igwebuike as an Igbo-African philosophy for the resolution of conflict between Christians and Muslims. The historical and phenomenological methods of enquiry were employed in the collection and analysis of data, while the indigenous wholistic theory was adopted for the interpretation and understanding of the problem at hand. This work submits that Nigerian Muslims and Christians are first of all kinsmen before their adherence to Christianity and Islam. Both religions constitute parts of the intricate web of reality and relationships in the ontological order. Their differences is for complementarity and not conflict.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Igbo-African, Dialogue, Christian, Muslim, Relations, Nigeria, Philosophy.

Introduction

Naked fire can be used for cooking delicious food for nourishing human life, however, naked fire can also destroy human life. In the same way, religion is a very powerful force for unity, but it can equally be a very volatile force for division. A cursory glance at the unfolding of events in the history of Nigeria, right from independence, reveals an incessant tension between the adherents of Christianity and Islam. Their relationship has been characterized by mutual suspicion, hate and unhealthy rivalry. This has placed the Nigerian nation on the boil. The climate can be compared to a powder keg of frustration which often explodes at the slightest provocation.

Kukah (2012) observes that this explosion is triggered by a range of factors, like arguments over election results, the burning of Koran in any part of the world, the making of provocative statements by Christian

leaders in any part of the world, etc. For instance, 12th October 2001, in Kano, there was an anti-American protest rally spurred by the US-led strikes on Afghanistan- this led to over 200 deaths. In 2006, cartoons of Muhammad were published in Denmark, in reaction many lives and properties were lost, with many innocent people dying without knowing what it was all about. In the same year, Pope Benedict XVI questioned Islam's position on peace, this also led to the loss of lives and properties in Nigeria. These, according to Jimoh (2008), continue to affect the relationship between Christians and Muslims. More recently, the outburst of a new face of violence in Northern Nigerian under the aegis of the *Boko Haram* sect which rejects what it understands as pervasive and corrupting Western influence has deepened the mutual suspicion, hate and unhealthy rivalry between the two religions.

In the face of all these, the fundamental question that this piece asks is 'what is the way forward?' In many cases, violence has been employed to curb violence, but the end result has been more hate and division. There are also times when NGO's have come into the scene with different Western theories of conflict resolution, which hardly responds adequately to the problem of religious violence. This piece strongly believes that the engagement of an indigenous ideology/category for the resolution of religious conflicts would make more impact. It is, therefore, in this regard that *Igwebuiké* is adopted as an Igbo-African philosophy for Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Over the years, the international community has been involved in supporting African countries in the resolution of conflicts, however, only very little have changed. There still exist all kinds of conflicts that threatens existence, safety, security, moral dignity, etc. The Indigenous Wholistic Theory of Absolon (2010) is used to underpin this study on Christian-Muslim relations. The theory is based on the idea that indigenous peoples have worldviews and means of relating to the world. This worldview is rooted within indigenous epistemologies, cultures and traditions with the understanding that we are all related- each aspect relates with the whole: the dynamics of reality are based on the relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections. It is wholistic in the sense that it encompasses the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical elements of being. It forms a framework to indigenize our thoughts and actions into active healing processes that simultaneously decolonize and indigenize.

Christian-Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria 1980-2014

Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria have been predominantly on the negative. While Kazah-Toure (2003) dates this mutual suspicion and conflict from the pre-colonial period, Sangosanya and Sha (2005) argue that this phenomenon began with the colonial period- the result of the construction of ethno-religious identities by the colonial masters. Gotan (2008) opines that whatever time frame we put as the beginning of religious intolerance between the two religions, the fact remains that it is a danger that is capable of destroying the corporate existence of Nigeria. Because of the sensitive place and role of religion in Nigeria, sectional

economic and social interests, political ambition, ethnic considerations, easily take up the garb of religion, and thus, religion has become a tool in the hands of politicians and other pursuants of selfish interests to realize their quest.

A glance at the Nigeria history reveals that in 1980-1985, there were the Maitatsine religious riots; in 1987, at the College Education, Kafanchan, there was a religious riot; in 1990- Bauchi; in 1991, 14th October in Kano which was a reaction to Reihard Bonke's crusade; in 1992, in Zangon Katab; in Kaduna February 2000; In Bauchi, 2001 June, as a result of the introduction of the Sharia Law legal system in the state; In Jos, September 2001; in Kaduna, November 2002. Table 1 below is a summary of the religio-political crisis from 2009 to 2013 between Christians and Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria, giving a picture of the relations between the two major religions in Nigeria.

Table 1: Summary of the religio-political crisis from 2009 to 2013 between Christians and Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria

Date	Place	Number of Deceased
<u>2009</u>		
26th July	Bauchi	Over 1,000
27th July	Yobe, Borno, Bauchi and Kano	800
<u>2010</u>		
January	Borno	4
13th March	Plateau (Jos)	300
1st October	Abuja	12
24th-29th December	Plateau (Jos) and Borno	94
<u>2011</u>		
January	Plateau (Jos)	200
28th January	Borno	6
3rd March	Niger (Suleja)	14
16th April	Borno	6
25th April	Borno	5
28th May	Borno (Damboa)	5
7th June	Borno	14
16th June	Abuja	2
26th June	Borno	25
10th July	Niger (Suleja)	6
1st August	Borno	1
26th August	Abuja	24
4th November	Yobe (Damaturu)	150

Table 1: Summary of the religio-political crisis from 2009 to 2013 between Christians and Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria, cont'd

Date	Place	Number of Deceased
<u>2011 cont'd</u>		
27th November	Yobe	7
22nd & 23rd December	Borno and Yobe	100
25th December	Niger (Madalla)	46
30th December	Borno	7
<u>2012</u>		
5th January	Gombe	6
6th January	Adamawa	17
20th January	Kano	200
3rd June	Bauchi	15
17th June	Kaduna & Plateau (Jos)	50 & 150 respectively
August	Kogi	19
3rd October	Adamawa (Mubi)	50
28th October	Kaduna	8
December	Kaduna (Jaji)	60
<u>2013</u>		
18th March	Kano	22
7th May	Borno	55
6th July	Yobe	42
28th July	Borno	30
29th July	Borno	40
7th September	Borno	74
18th September	Borno	166
20th September	Borno	142
21st September	Abuja	17
29th September	Yobe	78
30th September	Adamawa & Yobe	2 & 62 respectively
8th October	Borno	30
11th October	Plateau	21
16th October	Borno & Yobe	900
21st October	Borno	20
25th October	Borno	74
4th November	Adamawa	30

From the above figures, dating from July 26th 2009 to November 4th 2013, 5,248 lives were lost, not counting the property also lost. In 2014, which is not in this collection, many more lives were lost, for at this time preceding the election of 2015, more heinous crimes were committed by the *Boko Haram* sect.

Igwebuike: Ontologico-Existential Foundations

Igwebuike is an indigenous philosophy of the modality of being for the realization of being. It is from the word *Igwebuike*, which is a combination of three words. Thus, it can be understood as a word or sentence: as a word, it is written thus *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is in this form: *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power'.

Igwebuike is based on the nature of the Igbo-African cosmology. Cosmology, etymologically, is from two Greek words: *cosmos* and *Logos*, meaning 'universe' and 'science' respectively. Put together, it is the 'science of the universe'. Scholars like Wambutda (1986), Ejizu (1986), Achebe (1986), Onuoha (1987), Metuh (1987), Quarcoopome (1987), Arinze (1970), Madu (2004) and Kanu (2012) have dealt profoundly with the topic of African cosmology. The Igbo-African cosmology is simply the way Igbo-Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is the Igbo-African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning. Igbo-African cosmology is essentially the underlying thought link that holds together the Igbo-African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies.

According to Edeh (1983), Abanuka (1983) and Unah (2009), the Igbo-African cosmos has the physical and spiritual dimensions. At the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being, and seats at the apex of power. In the physical world, man dominates, occupying the central position in the scheme of God's creation. These physical and spiritual dimensions, in the perspective of Ijiomah (2005) consists of three levels: the sky, the earth and the underworld: "the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth where man, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where ancestors and some bad spirits live" (p. 84).

These divisions into spheres and levels does not in any way mean that the Igbo-African cosmology is composed of irreconcilable realms. The spiritual and physical realms overlap and harmoniously interact. There is a corporate existence of reality in the African universe which is not brought to an end by the death of the human person but extends into the hereafter. Thus, Ekwealor (1990) avers that:

It is important to note that although the Igbo universe is divided into these three broad structures, there is the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements. (p. 30).

In this interaction, the human person communes with God, the angels, the ancestors and vice versa. The beauty of their being together is found in the diversity of their being. While the ancestors do for human beings what they cannot do for themselves, human beings do for the ancestors what they cannot achieve by themselves. The African world has a unified frame of reality. The interactive character of the Igbo-African universe has instilled a strong sense of community consciousness, with an intricate web of relationship between the living, the dead and the yet-to-be-born. This intricate web of relationship is the ontological foundation of *Igwebuike*. Every dimension of reality was created to interact with and complement the other, not withstanding their differences.

***Igwebuike* and its Prospects for a Better Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria**

Kanu (2015a) avers that *Igwebuike* rests on the principles of solidarity and complementarity; 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. Kanu (2015b) argues that this is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle of African philosophy and religion, and as such, the unity of the African philosophical experience. Therefore, to be with the other becomes the modality of being in African ontology. This, according to Kanu (2015c) is anchored on the African cosmology which is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. The communal-individuality of the African is expressed in the Igbo proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be in danger). Mbiti (1970) classically proverbialized the community determining role of the individual when he writes, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108). The existence of others assures me of their solidarity and complementarity without which I cannot be. Achebe (1958) brings the essential nature of the Igbo-African communal relationship to a higher and more fundamental focus when he writes:

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him. (p. 132).

Igwebuike philosophy argues that existence is not only meaningful, but also possible only in a community. In relation to the Christian-Muslim divide in Nigeria, the adherents of the two religions must understand themselves as kinsmen and women, for that is what they are. Their religious affiliations are only secondary to their kinship bond- they were brothers and sisters before the advent of these religions.

In the contention of Kanu (2015d), *Igwebuike* 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. *Igwebuike* is a relationship guided by the Igbo-African principle: *egbe bere ugo bere* (Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch). Iroegbu (1994) writing on being as belongingness avers that: "*Isiokwu bu EBUB egbe bere ugo bere*). *Nihi na o wegghi onye e kere kan nani ya biri n'uwa*) the central thing is live and let live. For none is created to live alone

in this world” (p. 378). 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 *Ugo*, the *Egbe* also kills itself.

To be in the world, Kanu (2014) avers 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 live face to face with each other, 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 *Uwa*. 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 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 alienation.

Conclusion

Religion is a unique phenomenon in the Nigerian society. Although it is one of the few factors that has succeeded in bringing together a good number of Nigerians under one umbrella, irrespective of ethnic considerations, Onwukeme (2008) avers that Christianity and Islam in Nigeria has been associated with conflicts and violence which has dealt a terrible blow on the nation's unity and brought untold hardships on the people. Religion has been politicized, manipulated and militarized by unscrupulous people to fan the embers of rivalry, antagonism and ethnic discrimination. One lesson that is evident in the incessant quarrel between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is that both religions have come to stay. Although both religions have misunderstood themselves by dwelling more on their differences, there is the need for dialogue, which does not deny the significant differences between the two religions. So much energy has been dissipated on violence instead of using it for solving the problems of human suffering and other socio-economic and political challenges that face us in the eye. After several years of interventions, *Igwebuiké* is proposed in this work as an indigenous philosophy to help the adherents of both religions to focus on the things that unite them, that is, the importance of dialogue to our common existence. *Igwebuiké* is a model that is built on the traditional categories of the Nigerian-African. It refocuses attention on the fact that Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have so many things in common as believers and as human beings: the adherents of both religions live

in the same world, in the same Nigeria beset by the same socio-economic and political problems. To fight one another is to engage in a futile enterprise and more so, worsen their conditions. *Both religions constitute parts of the intricate web of reality and relationships in the ontological order. Their differences is for complementarity and not conflict.*

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