

DOES GOD'S KINGDOM HAVE SPACE FOR MUSLIMS?

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Preamble

On February 4, 2019, Pope Francis and Sheikh Al-Azhar¹ (Ahmad Tayyib) jointly signed “A Document on Human Fraternity for world Peace and Living Together” in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). It was on the occasion of the first visit of a Pope to the Arabian Peninsula. At this, some Catholics wondered why is he going to Saudi Arabia and signing encyclical with Muslims. Of course, this comment is borne out of poor knowledge and some elements of prejudice.

The Pope did not sign an encyclical with the Sheikh. It was only a joint declaration to work together for the elimination of religious extremism. This gesture of the pope and the Sheikh is also an effort at a joint establishment of the kingdom of God on earth by both Christians and Muslims. The Church cannot do it alone. While Christians are taught to pray and work for the coming of God's kingdom (cf. Mt. 6:10), a similar demand is also made on the Muslims.

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

“Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah.” Āl ‘Imrān (Q. 3:110).²

In the face of this obvious common objective, can we say that the Muslims have some space in the “already” and “not yet” of the kingdom of God? But before we examine that, we will first see if the kingdom of Allah has a place for the Christians.

Do Christians have a Place in the Kingdom of Allah?

This sub-title was chosen on purpose. It represents an error that keeps Christians and Muslims divided. It suggests that the kingdom of Allah is for the Muslims and

¹ The Sheikh Al-Azhar is the highest ranking Sunni authority in the world of Islam, although with contestation. He is the head of the oldest and most orthodox Islamic university in the world located at Cairo Egypt. Since the Muslims do not have a hierarchy as the Church, he is seen as the voice of Islam in today's world.

² All English interpretation of the Quran is taken from Pickthall Marmaduke.

the kingdom of God is for the Christians. When Allah is mentioned most people think of the Islamic God. At one of the Wednesday Papal audiences, the Arabic interpreter in translating the words of the Holy Father mentioned the phrase *Allahu Akbar*. Many people were taken aback. “Why is this Muslim thing being mentioned here?” Little did they know that it was not just said by the Pope but written in several places in the Bible. *Allahu Akbar* is just the Arabic translation of “God is great” which is seen in Ps. 70:4, 95:3, 147:5, among other places in the Bible.

There exist millions of Arab Christians who have no other term for God but Allah. They celebrate the Mass in Arabic, calling the name of Allah. Besides, the term Allah was used by the Arabs before the advent of Islam. With the coming of Islam and her influence in various parts of the world, Allah is used by both Christians and Muslims as God’s name in many languages.

The place of Christians in Islam is much more than what the Islamic fundamentalists present it to be. The Quran refers to the Christians, Jews and Serbians as *Ahl al-Kitāb* - people of the book/scripture (Q. 4:159, 5:19). They are so called because they possess a testament from God. In many instances in the Quran, the prophet of Islam Muhammad (*Pbuh*) was directed to ask the people of the book before him (example Q. 10:94). He himself repeatedly said that he has not come to bring a new thing but to purify and confirm previous religions (Q. 2:29) prophets (Q. 4:163). The Christians in particular are referred to as *Al-Nasār* (the Nazarenes); those who follow Jesus of Nazareth (Q. 5:51, 57: 27). The Muslims should collaborate with them (Q. 3:64) since they are the nearest to Muslims.

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةً
لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيَّيْنَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

“Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud.”
Al-Maida (Q. 5:82).

Islamic theology developed from this through the *hadith* and made a space for the Christians in the Islamic community. In 631 AD, a Christian delegation from Najaran met with Muḥammad (*Pbuh*) in Medina. He treated them well and even gave them his mosque for their prayer. “Whoever hurts them” he said, “will answer for it on the last day” (Abu Dawud 3052). He also respected their religious processions including that of burial (cf. Al-Buḥari, Bk 23, 667). Thus in Dar al-Islam (Household of Islam) there is a provision for the people of the book which

includes the Christians. They are referred to as *Ahl Dzimma*- protected people. But those outside the household (Dar al-Harb- Domain of war) can be fought against.

The main grudge the Quran has for Christians is that they take Jesus (*Isa*) and even his mother *Maryam* as gods. But on the last day Jesus himself will witness against them for this crime (Q. 5:116-118) which may probably prevent them from getting into heaven the kingdom of Allah (*Al-Janna*). The Islamic creed testifies that there is no other god but Allah. That notwithstanding the Quran still talks of all who do good, whether Muslims or Christians as being capable of entering the kingdom of Allah on the last day (Q. 2:62). Probably they will be forgiven since many of them did that in ignorance.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned sources that are favourable to the Christians, there are numerous others that seem to exclude the Christians from the kingdom of Allah both on earth and in heaven.

I kill you for the sake of Allah's Kingdom

Notwithstanding the quranic and orthodox understanding of the Christians within the kingdom of Allah, there exist some Muslims who practice what is referred to as *Takfir* (a declaration of a person as an unbeliever). This group of Muslims deny that Christians belong to Dar al-Islam (household of Islam). Even though Islamic tradition allows Muslims to eat the food and meat prepared by the Christians as *halel* (allowed), these Muslims, consider such a practice as *haram* (forbidden). They reject not only the Christians but also Muslims who they feel that are not good enough. Their claims according to them are founded on the Quran:

قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.” Al-Tūba (Q. 9:29)

To further consolidate their position, they allude to the verse that says that the earlier covenant made with the Christians have been voided because of their disbelief. (Q. 5:14). In other words, all the good things earlier said about the Christians and the need to incorporate them into Dar al-Islam is no longer valid. Muslims are no longer to befriend them (cf. Q. 5:51). The Quran in other place talks of some Christians as worst of created beings (cf. Q. 98:6). Therefore the need for them to be eliminated

becomes paramount. When confronted they would say like the apostles of Jesus (cf. Acts 5:29) “Obedience to God comes before obedience to man. God’s right takes precedence over human right.”

It would be nice to acknowledge the piety and zeal of these extremists before we proceed. We remember that the righteous anger of Mattathias made him to kill the officers who came to enforce the law of sacrifice in Modein (cf. 1Mac. 2:24-25). Zeal can sometimes be misplaced and uncontrollable especially when it pertains to religious issues. The extremists are convinced for sure that what they are doing is the right thing for the establishment of the kingdom of God. It does not stop there; it is for the sake of gaining admittance into the heavenly kingdom of Allah that they are carrying out these activities with a sincere but erroneous conscience. It reminds us of the words of Jesus: “Indeed the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy service to God” (Jn.16:2).

But we know that a sincere and even certain conscience can still be wrong. Issues should be looked at holistically. It is the same chapter of the Quran which said that Christians should not be close to Muslims (cf. Q. 5:51) that also says that he who kills a soul is as if he has killed the entire humanity (cf. Q.5:32). It is also the same Quran that says in various passages that if Allah had willed, he would have created the entire humanity as one people and one religion (cf. Q. 5:48, 10:99, 11:118). And if Allah chose not to do that, why would mere mortals fight for it?

Every verse of a sacred scripture must be read within its context. It was Hans Kung who made an important remark in this regard. “Islam is not in itself to blame, nor is a particular paradigm, as long as it is appropriate to the times; what is to blame is the perpetuation of a paradigm beyond the period which is appropriate for it.”³ The Tunisian Muḥammad Talbi (b.1921) is a strong promoter of Interreligious Dialogue. For him the verses that call for confrontation should be understood as limited to its time and was only to be used as a last resort. Majority of Muslims do not subscribe to this extremist view of exclusion but the problem is that the voice of the extremists is too loud that it overshadows that of the Muslim majority. And since they are violent even to fellow Muslims, many would prefer to keep quiet for the sake of their lives.

I die for the sake of God’s kingdom

On the extreme side of those who kill for the sake of the kingdom of heaven are those who long to die for the same course. In the early Church history, martyrdom

³ H. KUNG: *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, John Bowden trans., The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2007, 393.

appeared to be the crown of all virtues. It then became fashionable to seek to die for the sake of the kingdom of God. There is nothing wrong with a faithful that is willing to die for his belief but it is out of place to seek death for the sake of the kingdom of God. Surely some verses of the bible can be cited to support their view, but again like the case of those who kill for the kingdom of God, a holistic understanding is needed. Martyrdom is not the only gateway to the kingdom of God. Jesus himself told his disciples while he was sending them out: "When they persecute you in one town flee to the next" (Mt. 10:23).

Building on this, the Church upholds self-defense as a legitimate right of every human being which is recognized by every law. Peaceful resistance to governments' misrule, asylum seeking, appeal of cases, are all elements of self-preservation. No one has a right to take the life of another, worse still, unjustly or illegally. A man of faith must resist rather than give in to it for the sake of the kingdom of God. That is not piety but a misunderstanding.

But we Both were Created by the Same God

Knowing that we were created by the same God should stop one man from killing the other. Both scientific and religious evidence show that the entire humanity has a common origin. While scientists refer to it as evolution, religion refers to it as creation. *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin published in 1859, gives a scientific argument toward the origin of all men from a common stock. It is migration, dispersion and habitat that have created the obvious differences we have today.

Speaking before the council of Areopagus, St Paul asserts that from one man, God made all the peoples of the earth (cf. Acts 17:26). By this he reiterates the story of creation in Genesis where Adam was created from the earth and Eve out of his rib. From the couple came all the peoples of the world (cf. Gen. 1:27-28). The Quran also affirms the same truth in several passages. One of which says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنشَأَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ فَمُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمُسْتَوْدَعٌ قَدْ فَصَّلْنَا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَفْقَهُونَ

And He it is Who hath produced you from a single being, and (hath given you) a habitation and a repository. We have detailed our revelations for a people who have understanding. Al-An'ām (Q. 6:98)

Furthermore, Christianity and Islam (and of course Judaism) are referred to as Abrahamic Religions because they all proceed from his progeny. It is then plainly contradictory when two brothers fight themselves for the sake of religion. A saying among the Igbo people of Nigeria has it that fraternal anger does not permeate the

bone (*Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu*). It is ungodly for people who profess belief in the same father, to turn against themselves with the sword. They can be angry with one another quite alright but it should not pass the limit of brotherly anger.

In the face of obvious strife in the world today between Christians and Muslims, we cannot but raise the question: “But are we serving the same God?” Surprisingly, the Quran gives an answer to that:

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

“And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better; save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender.” Al-‘Ankabūt (Q. 29:46)

What then is dividing us? Surely it is our different understanding of the same God. For this, dialogue is of the essence.

And We are Returning to the Same God

Those who are familiar with Muslim obituaries will most times notice the Quranic verse: *Innā lillahi wa innā ilayhi rājiaun* – We are indeed from Allah and unto him we return (Q. 2:156). This is no difference from the Christian eschatology. It is by the spirit of God that we came into being and when he takes his spirit we return (cf. Eccl. 12: 7, Ps. 146:4). St Augustine of Hippo puts it well in his famous quote: “You have made us for yourself O God and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”⁴

Nostra Aetate 1 restates our common origin and destination in urging us on to interreligious cooperation: “One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God.” Pope Paul VI refers to this as ‘Dialogue of Salvation’ (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 70). When two pilgrims on a journey begin to fight each other instead of supporting each other, the journey becomes longer, dangerous and surely irreligious.

Heaven or *Janna* which Christianity and Islam refers to as the eternal resting place for the just, is the Kingdom of God. It is one and there is no other because God is one and has only one kingdom. He cannot create two kingdoms: one for Muslims

⁴ Cf. AUGUSTINE: *Confessions*, R.S. Pine-Coffin trans., Penguin Books, London 1961. Bk. I.I.

and the other for Christians. An Egyptian Christian protagonist of interreligious harmony Samil Khalil Samil, thus critiques even the separation of Christian cemetery from that of the Muslims. For him, if we have lived our entire life together in one society why separate us when we die? And worst still, why separate us when we are heading to the same destination?

So Why not Journey Together?

Following from our common origin and destination, our common humanity and spirituality, the most sensible thing to do is to walk and work together and not to kill ourselves. *Nostra Aetate* 2 thus asks the faithful to enter into dialogue and cooperation with people of other faith. In other words to be truly religious in the contemporary world of pluralism is to be interreligious. During his earthly life, the prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was accused severally by Jews and Christians of having copied the Quran from their sacred books (cf. Q. 16:103). The Quran strongly refuted this claim by establishing that he was not literate so as to do that (Q. 29:48). Our point of interest here is not the claims and counter claims but the point of the similarity between these three religions even in their sacred books.

The recognition of this made 38 Muslim scholars to send an *Open Letter to the Pope*, on 13th October 2006, expressing the true teachings of Islam in a spirit of mutual intellectual exchange and understanding. This gesture marked a high point in the history of Interreligious Dialogue which before then had been seen as a Christian enterprise. It was the first time Muslim scholars and authorities from all denominations and schools of thought all over the world spoke with one voice to the Pope; an act referred to in Islam as *Ijm'a* (consensus).

Exactly one year after that letter, on October 13th 2007, 138 Muslim scholars, clerics, intellectuals and authorities (including the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar III), sent an open letter titled: *A Common Word Between Us and You*, to Pope Benedict XVI and other world Christian leaders. They desired that there should be a common agreement between them and the Christians; an act that finds its root in Qur'ān Q. 3:64. In response to this, the Catholic-Muslim Forum was formed by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a delegation of the 138 Muslim signatories of the document. The first meeting was held in Rome November 4 – 6, 2008 with the theme "Love of God and Love of Neighbour". From here a common platform for world Christian Muslim dialogue in the contemporary time was formed. Successive meetings have continued since then.

Apart from this dialogue on the high level which is mainly of theological exchange, there are other forms of dialogue. We have *Dialogue of Life* which is at the basis of all Interreligious Dialogue. Christians and Muslims living in a community

are exchanging their lives even without saying anything about their religion. In the *Dialogue of Engagement* Christians and Muslims partake in enterprises that pertain to their common humanity. The engagement of Pope Francis and Sheikh al-Azhar is an example of this. In a community, the witch bites both Christians and Muslims. And so, coming together to cure this spiritual problem will lead to a *Spiritual dialogue*⁵ between Christians and Muslims.

In as much as we identify these four levels of dialogue, we must note that they are not mutually exclusive; one leads to another and the other is imbedded in the one. Too much concentration should not be laid on dialogue of theological exchange because if not well handled by competent hands, it can even lead to more conflicts. Learning to journey together is thus the only wise thing to do in our contemporary situation.

The Place of the Muslims in the Church

Since Christianity predates Islam, we cannot find a discourse on the Muslims in the Bible as the Quran has for the Christians. We then rely on Tradition to demonstrate the place of Muslims in the Church. But for the sake of time and space we shall take a big leap into the middle ages when the expression attributed to St. Cyprian of Carthage: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus- Outside the Church there is no salvation*, pervaded the atmosphere. This is a truth of the Church but taken out of its context. No wonder the 1992 Catechism of the Church 846-848 had to establish the proper understanding as the Church of Christ being a necessary instrument of salvation.⁶

The Second Vatican Council gave a new orientation to this by defining the Church in an inclusive way as the family of God. Consequently, no one is to be excluded. “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind” (*Lumen Gentium*, 16). It went further to say that those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience can also attain to

⁵ *Spiritual Dialogue* is an attempt at sharing the common spirituality between Christians and Muslim.

⁶ This discourse is articulated by the declaration ‘On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church’ *Dominus Iesus*, issued in the year 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of faith especially nos. 20-22.

salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16). This is restated at the fourth Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass when the Church prays for those who seek God with a sincere heart.

The 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions' states: "The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems" (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). It then went on to state our various bonds of unity with them. It ends with the following exhortation: "We cannot truly pray to God the father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion for all men are created in God's image" (*Nostra Aetate*, 5). This exhortation is again reiterated by the Declaration on Religious Freedom; *Dignitatis Humanae* of the same Council. The first encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) again reiterates this position of the Church. Christ is the redeemer of the entire mankind and not only the Christians. Therefore we do not have the right to exclude people from the kingdom of God.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was established by Pope Paul VI in 1964 to further this goal of Vatican II. It was named *Secretariat for non-Christians* until June 28, 1988 when it was upgraded to a Pontifical Council, by Pope John Paul II. Through this council, the Church has continued to draw the Muslims closer to herself because we can no longer treat them as having no place in the kingdom of God. Local Churches are also replicating this. If Christ himself did not rebuff the repentant thief on the cross but rather welcomed him into his kingdom (cf. Lk. 23:43), why should we exclude. When John the apostle told Jesus of their encounter with the man casting out demons in his name and how they tried to stop him because he was not one of them, Jesus replied: "Don't stop him, because whoever is not against you is for you" (Lk. 9:49-50).

It is God Himself who Owns the kingdom

The theme of this publication clearly shows that we are talking about the kingdom of God. It is God's kingdom and not a human institution. It is God himself who administers it. As for the kingdom of God on earth, it is God who determines its members. And for the kingdom of God in heaven, it is also He alone who dictates those who can enter it. Jesus said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself" (Jn.12:32). He intends to draw all and not some. It is the will of God that all men should be saved (cf. 1Tim. 2:4). If therefore God welcomes you into his kingdom, do not bother to shut the door after you in order to prevent others from coming in. It is not your business.

Establishing the Reign of God's Kingdom among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria

In the continent of Asia, the Muslims are more dominant than the Christians. In Europe and America, the Christians are more. In Africa, the population is evenly distributed. Nigeria is a West African country where Christians and Muslims are of equal strength. For this reason, it is a perfect test for interreligious relationship. The occasional clashes between the two major religions in Nigeria call us to seek more earnestly the coming of the kingdom of God where peace and justice shall reign. We should pray for and work for the realization of this kingdom.

The Nigerian Interreligious council (NIREC) came into being on September 11, 1999 to serve as a platform for high-level dialogue between the leaders of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It helps to promote mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. The Council is co-chaired by the president-general of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (The Sultan of Sokoto), and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). In the larger continent of Africa there also exists *African Council of Religious Leaders* that works for the same objective.

The fruit of this body has not penetrated very well to the grassroots because of some obstacles. Among them, ignorance is paramount. The scripture says: "My people perish for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Many Christians need to drop their prejudice of the Muslims because of the extremists. And the Muslim extremist who is struggling to kill all non-Muslims should realize that the Quran has declared that there is no compulsion in religion:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ
اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower." Al-Baqara (Q. 2:256).

Christians and Muslims in Nigeria must jointly establish the earthly kingdom of God while they await the heavenly one. *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011) of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI respectively, eulogizes the richness of Africa in all ramifications and calls for Africa to take her proper place as the life spring of the world especially in terms of religiosity. We cannot allow the riches in our country to be destroyed by our own hands.

In the face of current state of insecurity in the nation, Christians and Muslims are putting heads together to create the kingdom of God by appealing for peace

and calling on the government to be responsible in her duties to the people. Bad governance, religious extremism, corruption and injustice all create poverty and unemployment thus breeding violence. The government therefore has an indispensable role to play in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. After all it is made up of Christians and Muslims. John Cardinal Onaiyekan laments the politicization of religion in Nigeria.⁷ Politicians do sometimes exploit the religious sensitivities of adherents in a bid to win power. All hands must therefore be on deck.

God is love and he who lives in love lives in God (cf. 1Jn. 4:16). Pope Benedict XVI amplifies this in his encyclical *Deus Caritas est* (2005). Nigerian Muslims and Christians will establish the kingdom of God in the nation when they learn to love one another. Where love and charity abide there God is found.

But where is God while Muslims are killing us

While this article was being written, on Easter Sunday April 21, 2019, Muslim extremist bombed three Churches and some hotels in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa in Sri Lanka. As of the last count, 359 people died and scores were injured. On April 24, 2018 while celebrating Mass in a cool village of Mbalom in Benue state, two priests and 17 parishioners were killed by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. On Christmas day December 25, 2011, 37 people were killed and 57 injured by Boko Haram at St. Theresa Catholic Church Madalla, Niger State. These three incidents are just but to mention a few.

There is no way a discourse of this nature will be complete without raising the question of “The Silence of God”. But to give an answer to this question of where God is while all these things are happening is not my intention here because no one living or dead has ever been able to do that. It is one of the mysteries of our religion that God seems to sit back and watch while evil men are having a field day. He also sat back and watched while the Jews killed his only begotten son Jesus Christ.

It is my sincere desire that an answer to this question comes handy sooner than later. Meanwhile, the Lord assures his children that he is close to the broken hearted; those whose spirit is crushed, he will save (cf. Ps. 34:18). God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts not our thoughts (cf. Is. 55:8-9).

Epilogue

It is a religious anomaly that Christianity and Islam came into a peaceful world and set it on fire on account of the kingdom of God. The adherents of

⁷ J.O. ONAIYEKAN, *Seeking Common Grounds: Interreligious Dialogue in Africa*, Paulines, Nairobi 2013, 172-173.

African Traditional religions were living peacefully with each other in Nigeria before the coming of Islam and Christianity. The two religions came in, converted them and set them against one another. The earlier we begin to rebuild our mess, the better it would be for us. The time for trying to eliminate one faith for the other in Nigeria is over. Anyone having such dreams should be properly termed a dreamer. The two faiths have come to stay in Nigeria. The way of violence cannot create the kingdom of God in the country. Dialogue is the only way out. The bible calls for it; the Quran calls for it and humanity longs for it. In the various document of the Church already examined, it has been reiterated.

Since Christians and Muslims constitute over 50% of the world population, there can never be peace in the world if there is no peace between the two religions. This is no time for blame game. All have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God (cf. Rom. 3:23). God reconciled the world to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:19-20). We cannot afford to fail him. Dialogue is a veritable way of doing this. Praying for the coming of the kingdom of God should be accompanied by working for it. For as the scripture says: Faith without good works is dead indeed (cf. Jas. 2:17).