

## **Resolving the Conflicts of Secularism and Religion in the Dialogics of African Communalism**

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### **Abstract**

*The religious conflicts that were exacerbated by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Europe led to the emergence of secularism as a controlling movement. This however grew to a version of anti-religious sentiment and policy. While the claim to annihilation of religion was growing in Europe, religious theocracy and fundamentalism was also growing in some other parts of the world. In any case, neither theocratic totalitarianism nor secularist anti-religionism provided the forum for social peace and harmonious social relations in the multi-religious, multi-cultural demography that most states and societies have become in contemporary times. The ensuing conflicts and turbulent social existence, necessitated the study of the relations of religions and secularism in the world today with a focus on Africa. Part One of this study published as *The Conflicts of Secularism and Religion: From Europe to Africa* explored the origin, concepts and migration of secularism and its conflicts with religion from Europe to Africa. As more societies become more plural, multi-religious and multicultural, dialogue between religions on the one hand, and between secularism and religion on the other hand becomes more imperative. Apparently however, the willingness for such a dialogue is lacking, probably arising or motivated by the extant frameworks of operation and understanding. In this context, this Part Two of the study employs the dialogic method within the frameworks of African communalism to seek fresh understanding of the phenomena and proffer some proposals for more harmonious living in our world today.*

**Key words:** Africa; secularism; religion; communalism; dialogics; African communalism; secular state; religious state; post-secularism; religious politics.

### **Introduction**

The emergence of secularism in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was occasioned by a number of factors. Principally and proximately however, it was a response to the internecine rancor and conflicts between the various denominations of Christendom consequent on the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the

European Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> The origins, concepts and migration of secularism from Europe to Africa have been discussed in the Part One of this study in the paper: *The Conflicts of Secularism and Religion: From Europe to Africa*. The conflicts have continued and in the African context, have taken the form of religious politics and the confusion of the secular and the religious State.<sup>2</sup> This paper conceptualizes African communalism and the place of the dialogics in that communalism. It attempts to apply the dialogical method for privileged access into this insight. It is hoped that seeking this insight within the frameworks of African communalism will provide new platforms for possible solutions to the troubled relations of religious groups on the one hand, and of secularism and religion on the other.

### **African Communalism**

The thought of suggesting communalism as possible solution to any problem in our age of triumphant individualism and capitalism seems preposterous. This is more so on the backdrop of the many criticisms that hunt the concept, not many of which would seem to have been significantly addressed. And yet, we recall the reply of Einstein that the possibility of uncovering the reality of relativity arose from the incredible thought of questioning an axiom. We also recall that when the reverend sisters reported to the Mother General in the classic opera *Sound of Music* that they had searched in all the usual places and could not find Maria, the wise and

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1. Harvey Cox. *The Secular City Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Macmillan, 1966),
  2. D.E. Agbibo. "The Nigerian Burden: Boko Haram and Religious Terrorism in Nigeria." *Conflict, Security and Development* 13, no.1 (2013a): 1-29; D.E. Agbibo. "Peace at Dagger's Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 37, no.1 (2013b): 20-39; Jacob Zenn. "Boko Haram's International Connections." CTC (Combating Terrorism Center) *Sentinel*, 6, no. 1 (2013): 7-12; A. Shorter and E. Onyancha. *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997) and R.D. Abubakre, "Islam Nostrum for Religious Tolerance in Polity of a Multi-Religious State: The Nigerian Experience". In: J.O Onaiyekan (ed.), *Religion, Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: NACS, 1984)

experienced Mother General urged them to search in all the unusual places as well knowing that Maria was not just any usual nun. And so considering that the current confrontation of religionism, pluralism and secularism is not any usual confrontation, considering the enormous weapons of mass destruction that are now available to the many ready to use them in the name of God and religion, and considering the apparent failure of many of the usual and prevailing solutions, we think it necessary to search for radical solutions to our radical problems. Einstein discovered relativity and Maria ultimately presented herself to the searching party. We hope to either discover some solution to the overwhelming confrontation or have these solutions present themselves in the course of our search. But even if neither happens, we can still beat our chest and declare with Charles Beard, “If nothing ever comes of it, its very existence will fertilize thought and enrich imagination”.<sup>3</sup> And who will say this is not enough concern for a philosophic inquiry?

Communalism took centre stage in African thought and philosophy in the course of the nationalist struggles for independence from European colonialism and has remained on that stage as a major instrument of mobilization of the people towards nation-building and the development of cultural identity. As long as it has preoccupied African scholars, communalism has garnered as many critics as propagators. It has been variously perceived and conceptualized. While many scholars have glamorized it as the quintessential instrument of social cohesion deriving from African traditional mode of social existence, others have criticized it for the many social conflicts besieging the African continent and impeding the

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3. David, Eaton, *The Political System. An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, (New York: Knopf, 1971): viii

development of national identity and cohesion in many emergent African states.<sup>4</sup> The criticism of communalism as the source of communal clashes derives mainly from the confusion of communalism and ethnicity or tribalism which restricts the concept of community to the ethnic group or tribal geography. This criticism has also been presented in another guise in the conceptualization of communalism as primitive communalism where the scope of membership of the community is limited to kinship ties.<sup>5</sup> In this scenario, anyone outside this kinship circle is not covered by the sphere of communalism and so is not entitled to any of the rights of membership and protection of the community. To this criticism Wiredu<sup>6</sup> has answered that the scope of the interplay of rights and obligations allows of easy extension to neighborhood, town, region, nation, and so on. He argues that the sorts of things around which the obligations and rights revolve are all the different kinds of needs that arise in human existence and interaction. The criticism however draws attention to the need for clearer conceptualization of this mode of social existence and relations.

Communalism has been so extensively claimed by African scholars that it has become necessary to ask for the ownership of the phenomenon. Among the critics of

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4. Emil Nagengast. "Communalism and Liberalism in the Struggle for Human Rights in Africa" *Juniata Voices; Huntingdon* 15, (2015): 80-86; Olufemi Vaughan. "Communalism, Legitimation and Party Politics at the Grassroots: The Case of the Yoruba". *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 7, (1994): 419-440; C.B. Nze. *Aspects of African Communalism* (Onitsha: Veritas Publishers, 1989); T.U. Nwala. *Igbo Philosophy* (Lagos: Literamed Publications (Nig) Limited, 1985) and John Mbiti. *Africa Religion and Philosophies* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970).
  5. R.J. Jagers. "Communal Orientation and Cooperative Learning Among Afro-American College Students." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Howard University, Washington, D.C, 1988
  6. Kwasi Wiredu. "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries Concerning Communalism and Communitarianism" *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2008).

the popular claims, Oguejiofor<sup>7</sup> raises the question: “How African is Communalism?” In search of answer to the query, he distinguishes three possible senses in which communalism may be African: 1) Communalism characterizes Africa; 2) Communalism is specific and exclusive to Africa; 3) Communalism is essential to being African. Oguejiofor argues that while communalism may be African in the first sense, it will be erroneous to attribute communalism to Africa in the second and third senses. He further argues that, even for the first sense, many of the conditions that qualified Africa are no longer available in contemporary African society. It may be responded here that while much of the traditional African community may have been eroded, much of that community still abides even with the many corruptions and confusions. Taiwo calls attention to the many confusions that attend to the usage of the term communalism. He distinguishes three theses or models of communalism in the extant literature: 1) the ontological thesis where being human means being-in-community; 2) the methodological thesis whereby humans are best understood in their being-in-the-world from the perspective of community; and 3) the axiological thesis where communalism is claimed to provide the tool for measuring the worth of being-in-the-world.<sup>8</sup> Some other scholars have argued that although it is not exclusive to African peoples, communalism is seen as central to the Afro-cultural social ethos.<sup>9</sup>

7. J.O. Oguejiofor. “How African is Communalism?” In Ike Odimegwu (ed.) *Perspectives on African Communalism*. (London: Trafford Publishers, 2007).

8. Olufemi Taiwo “Against African Communalism”. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (2006): 81-100

9. Ifeanyi Menkiti. “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought”. In Richard A. Wright, Ed., *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. (Lanham University Press of America, 1984), 171-181; Kwame Gyekye. “Person and Community in African Thought” in Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu. *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, (Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 193-206; Boykin Wade, Robert Jaspers, Constance M. Ellison and Aretha Albury, “Communalism: Conceptualization and Measurement of an Afro-cultural Social Orientation”. *Journal of Black Studies*, 27, no. 3 (1997): 409-418.

Communalism may be understood as that conception of the self and society that connect and mutualize the concerns and interests of the individual and the community so that realizing one will require and result in realizing the other.<sup>10</sup> A review of the descriptions and theorizations on communalism reveals community of existence, familyhood, openness, commitment and cooperation, commitment to integrity among the principles that underlie this mode of social existence.<sup>11</sup>

The result is a concept of communalism which refers to the social web generated by prevailing sense of bonding in human relations which presents all humans as belonging to one community. This concept of communalism is integrative.<sup>12</sup> It is a web of unfolding and enfolding loci of presences. The community is seen as unfolding from the family. And the family is seen as the integral web of the various loci of presences that constitute human personhood. This concept of communalism involves the realization of individuality in the community as well as the realization of communality by the inter-presencing of individual persons.<sup>13</sup>

### **Dialogics in African Communalism**

The dialogic is important in the development and understanding of communalism. It is fundamentally so for relations and communications in a communalist society. It is essential for the development of the form of personhood that grows from and sustains communalism. African communalism, theorizing the mode of social existence that has been ascribed in a variety of ways to the African, operates on the

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10. S. Masondo. "The Practice of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa". In T.W. Bennett. (ed.), *Traditional African Religions in South African Law* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2011), 19–36.
  11. I. Odimegwu. *Integrative Personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology* (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2008).
  12. Souleymane B. Diagne. "Religion and the Public Sphere in Senegal: The Evolution of a Project of Modernity", *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa* (ISITA) Working Paper Series, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 2009), 9
  13. Odimegwu. *Integrative Personhood*.

dialogic method and communication and is sustained by it.<sup>14</sup> But the dialogic is not exclusive to communalism or then to African communalism. The dialogic has developed through many turns and bends, applied to a multiplicity of needs, situations and purposes. Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>15</sup> used it primarily to describe the use and meaning of language. He sees all human language as dialogical in the sense that no speech occurs in a vacuum. Every speech is a response to previous speeches and anticipates future speeches. Language is therefore dynamic and relational. This implies that communication requires at least two speakers. Difference is presupposed in the dialogic process. Thus, meaning in the dialogic process is reducible neither to the intention of the speaker nor the understanding of the addressee but must be sought in the interaction of the two. Understandably therefore, the world of meaning is essentially dialogic. Thus, meaning cannot be grounded upon any fixed identities but is always the product of difference, the interaction of difference.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Sidorkin sees the basis of being human not in self-identity but in the opening of dialogue.<sup>17</sup>

The dialogic is usually contrasted with the dialectic in the search for understanding. In this strain, Bakhtin writes: “Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics.”<sup>18</sup> A salient point of Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic is that since difference, and not identity creates meaning, there is no need for the overcoming of

14. Linda Layne. *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities* (Princeton University Press, 1994)
15. Mikhail Bakhtin. “Discourse in the Novel” (M. Holquist, & C. Emerson, Trans.). In M. Holquist (Ed.). *The Dialogic Imagination*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422.
16. R. Wegerif. “Dialogic or Dialectic? The Significance of Ontological Assumptions in Research on Educational Dialogue.” *British Educational Research Journal*, 34, (2008): 350.
17. Alexander Sidorkin. “Razvitie vospitatel'noi sistemy shkoly kak zakonomernyi protses.” Kand. diss., (Moscow: Research Institute for Theory and History of Education, 1990).
18. Mikhail Bakhtin. *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986), 146

difference(s) in the search for meaning in an overarching synthesis. The existence of difference is not a problem to be overcome but an asset to be harnessed through dialogue. Richard Sennett<sup>19</sup> projects this position further. Holding that the “distinction between dialogic and dialectic is fundamental to understanding human communication, Sennett views dialectic with its attention on the explicit meaning of statements as tending to closure and resolution whereas dialogic processes involve “a type of listening that attends to the implicit intentions behind the speaker's actual words.” And unlike the dialectics, dialogics does not usually lead to closure. They may remain unresolved as the dialogue is a continuing process. And, the not being resolved is not seen as problem but a prospect of further dialogue. Christine Gichure approached the dialogic from the perspective of human nature arguing that humans have a dialogic nature that springs from the uniqueness of the essence of human nature. A first step towards reaching out to others is dialogue. “Dialogue makes it possible to communicate what is personal to someone else.”<sup>20</sup>

Odimegwu conceptualized the dialogic as an art of dialogue that recognizes the positions of the speakers, a method of knowing that grows by acceptance and mutual recognition, a mode of existence founded on relatedness or communality. The dialogic method operationalizes the phenomenon of gaining by giving meaning and being.<sup>21</sup>

This method employs three principal tools or instruments in its operation namely: 1) Dialogic Attenuation: Using this instrument the dialogic process seeks the reduction and diminution of the areas and levels of disagreement within the community 2) Dialogic Augmentation: Through this means the dialogic process increases and

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19. Richard Sennett. *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (London: Penguin, 2012).

20. Christine Wanjiru Gichure. “Human Nature/Identity: The Ubutu Worldview and Beyond”. In John P. Hogan (ed.), *Human Nature: Stable and/or Changing?* Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series VII, Seminars: Culture and Values, Volume 30, (2013): 121

21 Odimegwu. *Integrative Personhood*

amplifies the areas and levels of agreement, and uses one step to reinforce another.

3) Dialogic Accumulation: By this tool, the dialogic process collects and adds up the areas and levels of agreement that have been achieved. This instrument involves the bringing together of the instruments as well as the gains of the instruments of dialogical attenuation and dialogical augmentation in order to record the progress made and to employ this record as a further instrument for motivating more dialogical progress.<sup>22</sup>

How is dialogics the method of relation and communication in the communalist society? The relation may be studied from the basic requirements for dialogue and the principles of communalism. Dialogue requires the existence of individuals who have positions, are oriented to openness, mutual recognition and respect for the difference between them. It further requires the disposition for the possibility of agreement or non-agreement between the dialogists. It ultimately involves the empathetic disposition to see meaning in the multiple positions of myself, my co-dialogists and the points of agreement and disagreement in-between. The Dialogical Self-Theory (DST) developed by Hubert Hermas and Hermans-Konopka<sup>23</sup> throws some light in this direction. With the infusion of the external to the internal and the introduction of the internal into the external, the dichotomy between the self and the other is significantly moderated in social relations and communication. The DST reduces the sharp separation between the individual and the society or between individuals or groups in the society and helps in achieving gradual transitions in the multiple networks of social relations that constitute the human community. In the

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22. I. Odimegwu. "Dialogics of Integrative Identity" in John P. Hogan (ed.), *Human Nature: Stable and/or Changing?* Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series VII, Seminars: Culture and Values, 30, (2013): 156; José Casanova. "Secularization, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship", In: Wolfram Weisse, Katajun Amirpur, Anna Körs, and Doerthe Vieregge (eds), *Religions and Dialogue: International Approaches* (Münster: Waxmann. 2014), 21-32.

23. Hubert Hermans and Hermans-Konopka. *A Dialogical Self Theory. Positioning And Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

relation of integrative persons in an integrative community, the dialogic mode of communication arises as normal and natural. Indeed, it appears as another form of inter-presencing; the unfolding and enfolding of the internal and external realities and other persons in community who actually come across as belonging to me even as I belong to them. Dialogue that recognizes the existence of difference and respects the meaning therein is not in any difficulty operating in this matrix because that which is different has something that is not just familiar but is in a significant sense mine. The dialogic method of communication is at home in the communalist context. It is the method of communication consistent with the communalist society because the communalist environment is a continuous opening of windows of dialogue. Consensus, which is inevitable in any functional communalist society, may not be realistically pursued in the absence of the mutual recognition of difference and relation as constitutive of meaning. It is actually arguable that the communalist society constituted by the inter-presencing of persons is an integratively dialogical community and so that such a community cannot exist better on any other mode of relations and communication than the dialogic. It is also arguable that the dialogic mode of relation and communication belongs most effectively and productively to such a communalist community for the community of voices, full with their emotions and intonations expressed by individuals-in-relations belongs most integrally to such a community.

### **Addressing the Conflicts through the Dialogics**

Inter-religions conflicts and the conflicts of religion and secularism have caused us to wonder and seek possible new ways of achieving harmonious co-existence in our world characterized by pluralism and multiculturalism, post-secularism and rising religious fundamentalism, democracy and resurgence of authoritarianism and a trending reversal of the open society.

Global developments present scenarios of resurging religious consciousness even in the countries that hitherto claimed secularist advancement. It seems then that the

removal of religion from the public sphere has not been successful. And in many parts of Africa, religion is so meshed with politics that its potential for violence and division is harnessed so often to foreclose its potentials for peace and mutual co-existence.<sup>24</sup> And what is worse, even the idea of religion as a platform for journeying to the hereafter is lost in the heat of this-worldly tussles in the name of God.<sup>25</sup>

The questions therefore persist: Has the separation of state and religion proved not functional? Was the separation necessary and feasible *ab initio*? And if in the face of the resurgence of religious fervor and even fundamentalist aggression we are emboldened to rethink secularism, what options are available for our consideration?<sup>26</sup> Herman Paul draws attention to the need for diverse and global search that the varied insights of peoples and cultures in different times and places may be appropriated beyond their immediate contexts.<sup>27</sup> A number of options have been proposed in this regard: Habermas proposed the translation of religious language into the language of secular reason for discussion in the public sphere where all religions and non-religious are equal citizens.<sup>28</sup> He also proposed a

24. Andrew Ubaka Iwobi. "Tiptoeing through a Constitutional Minefield: The Great Sharia Controversy in Nigeria". *Journal of African Law*, 48, no. 2 (2004); Joseph Kenny. Sharia and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and a 'Secular'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26, (2006); Hakeem Onapajo and Uzodike Ufo Okeke. "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria, Man, the state, and the International System". *Review*, 21, no. 3 (2012); Hakeem Onapajo. "Has Nigeria Defeated Boko Haram? An Appraisal of the Counter-Terrorism Approach under the Buhari Administration". *Strategic Analysis* 41(2017a); Hakeem Onapajo. State Repression and Religious Conflict: The Peril of State Clampdown on the Shia Minority in Nigeria. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, (2017b).
25. Benno Van Den Toren. "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches". *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2003).
26. Cheik Yerim Seck, "Quand la religion se mele de politique". In *Juene Afrique* (2010); Casanova. "Secularization, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship"
27. Paul Herman. "Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum," *Cairo Journal of Theology*, 2 (2015a): 67-75.
28. Jürgen Habermas. "Faith and Knowledge: Acceptance Speech for Peace Prize for the German Book Trade, 2001". In *Freidenspreis deus Deutschens Buchhandel*. (2001): 1-7; Jürgen Habermas. *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002)

complementary learning process where both religion and the secular should reexamine themselves and their postures of absolute knowing authority in order to come into the dialogue necessary for harmonious co-existence in a pluralist society.<sup>29</sup> The proposal for complementary learning also addresses the need for openness between the secular society and religion.<sup>30</sup> However, the prescription of the language of secular reason as the language of the public sphere introduces inequality in the dialoguing community in making the secular a superior participant in the discussion and the ultimate judge of what is rational and reasonable. Again, the dichotomy of the secular-public and religious-private spheres has been called to question by a number of scholars leading to further distinction of the public sphere into what may be termed the social public sphere to which all have access and the civic public sphere which must operate on the basis of secular reason.<sup>31</sup>

Charles Taylor<sup>32</sup> recognizes the situation of plurality in modern society. While arguing that a secular state does not have to be anti-religious or completely separated from the world of religion, Taylor insists that “the secular state is necessary in ensuring equal participation, dignified co-existence, and maximum well-being of all religious, non-religious, or anti-religious people in the modern world.” Taylor accepts the language of secular reason proposed by Habermas<sup>33</sup> for communication in the public sphere and thereby inherits the problem of ensuring equality of the participants in the communication. Cognizant of this burden, he emphasizes the freedom and equality of all citizens regardless of religious,

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29. Jürgen Habermas. “Religion in the Public Sphere.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006); Jürgen Habermas *Between Naturalism and Religion*, C. Cronin (trans.). (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

30. Fatou Camara K. and Abdourahmane Seck. “Secularity and Freedom of Religion in Senegal: Between a Constitutional Rock and a Hard Reality”. *Law Review* 9, no. 3 (2010): <https://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol2010/iss3/9>

31. Leo Igwe. “The Untold Story of Africa's Secular Tradition”. *Conscience*, 35, no.1 (2014).

32. Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2007)

33. Habermas. “Religion in the Public Sphere.”

antireligious or non-religious persuasion. However, the emphasis may only serve to accentuate rather than attenuate the inequality of the parties. And further, while the three goals (Maximum freedom of conscience regardless of religion, ideology, culture and so on; Equality of all persons and peoples regardless of religious or non-religious persuasion; Freedom of exercise of conscience.) proposed by Taylor may be individually laudable, the application of the goals is likely to result in more conflict than harmony in the society. The practice, in Africa for instance, where many religious groups oppress their neighbours with mega sound projection of their religious worship, prayers and messages creates the scenario that Abbink aptly describes as the “sound wars” of religion.<sup>34</sup> While each will claim to be exercising the freedom of religious conscience, it is clear that many of such religious observances do not take cognizance of the negative freedom of the other citizens to be spared from such oppressions.

Talal Asad critiques the prevailing concepts of religion and secularism. He criticizes the dominant definitions of religion such as given by Durkheim and Clifford Geertz of proffering essentialist definitions that create the possibilities for the dichotomous relations between religion and secularism. He further criticizes the Durkheimian “binary opposition of the sacred and the profane arguing that neither of these two concepts can be separated rigidly because they are “scrambled together” and mutually interchangeable”.<sup>35</sup> Asad concludes that secularism does not refer to the separation of religion and the secular but a “new form of relationship between the private and public spheres of society.” In this new form, the secular state dictates the place of religion in the society. His contributions may be summarized in his refutation of the essentialist universal definition of religion; his critique of the

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- 34. Jon Abbink, “Religion and Politics in Africa: The Future of the Secular”. *African Spectrum*, 49, no.3 (2014): 102
  - 35. Talal Asad. “Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions”. *Stanford Humanities Review*, 5, no. 1 (1996): Retrieved on February 2011 (<http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/asad.html>).

opposition of religion and the secular; and his reconceptualization of the separation of religion and the secular as a new form of relationship.

Asad's critique of essentialist definition of religion provides an enchanting framework for the resolution of the conflicts of secularism and religion. One would wish that the matter were so readily settled. He refrains however from offering non-essentialist definition of religion. The argument that religion cannot be understood in isolation from its material expression emphasizes the importance of context in meaning but also invariably implies the importance of recognition of that which is expressed in context. And more, the entire content and components of religion cannot be reduced to either context or expression. Even if the conflict between religion and secularism is settled by the reconceptualization of the definition and their relations, how this affects the conflicts between the various religious organizations is yet another matter, especially in the light of the history of the emergence of the secular society and structural differentiation between church and state in Europe, and in the light of the prevailing situation in many parts of the world today.<sup>36</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Summing up, we recall that our concerns have been to seek understanding and possible solutions to the disharmonious relations between different religious organizations co-existing in the society; and the relations of religious and secular orientations in the same society. These are relations that touch on the social, moral, religious, and political aspects of the lives of people living in society. Most contemporary societies are plural and multi-religious. In a number of societies, relations among the various religious organizations have not been particularly harmonious thereby giving rise to the secular development which involves a)

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<sup>36</sup>. M.G.N. Mozumder. "Interrogating Post-Secularism: Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Talal Asad". A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of School of Arts and Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2011.

declining religious belonging of individuals, consequent rise of the non-religious and anti-religious groups in society, and the reduction in social influence of religion; b) the acrimonious confrontations of the different religious groups that gave rise to structural differentiation of religion and the state thereby creating the dichotomization of the secular public and religious private spheres of society.

In the hay days of secularism, writers like Peter Berger would in a 1986 interview in *New York Times* declare: “21<sup>st</sup> century Christians would be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.”<sup>37</sup> Even church leaders had been so taken in that they “internalized both secularization thesis and its eschatology of decline, thereby creating an ecclesiology of fatalism”.<sup>38</sup> Thirty years after, even in the West and for the West, Rodney Stark<sup>39</sup> could echo the prevailing sentiment “Secularism, *Requiescat in Pace*. ” So now, when secularization has had its day and religious resurgence has begun to question the major theses of the secularist paradigm, the question has returned with greater force: How shall we live in the plural religious, non-religious and anti-religious society?<sup>40</sup>

Having examined the prevailing situations of the relations of religion and secularism; having briefly looked at some proposals presented by different scholars; and having presented some concepts of African communalism and the dialogic method especially the operation of the dialogic method within the African communalist context, it is proposed that the dialogic method of relation and communication may have some salutary contribution to the understanding of these relations and prevailing situations.

The dialogic method presupposes the existence of at least two participants in a

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- 37. Cited in Stephen Dawson, “The Religious Resurgence: Problems and Opportunities for International Relations Theory”, *E-International Relation*, (2015): 1.
  - 38. David Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain, 1980 to the Present Day*, (Farn-ham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012): 19.
  - 39. Stark Rodney. “Secularization R.I.P.” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (199): 249–273.
  - 40. Paul Herman. *Key Issues in Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2015b)

relation or communication. It therefore recognizes the existence of difference as an essential aspect of communication or relation. This difference is appreciated as contributing to the making of meaning. While the dialogic method is oriented towards the search for consensus, it is taken for granted that the consensus may only be achieved through the mutual concession of grounds; and what is more, it is also noted that there are no absolute positions as the dialogue involves a continuous process of presentation and representation of semantic and existential positions. Operating in the communalist context, the dialogic assumes the nature and function of the thread that binds the members of a community together, the springboard for harmonious relations and the bridge for cross-positional communications. The communalist context conceptualizes the matrix of social relations in an environment of prevailing sense of bonding, an integrative process that develops by unfolding and enfolding the various loci of presence that constitute the persons and groups in the community. The principle of openness of this communalism attunes it to the plurality of the prevailing situation whereby the religious, non-religious and anti-religious members will find their spaces and niches in the dialogical spectrum. Its integrative potential equips it for taking on the emerging dimensions of the relations of the various religious groups in the community. The inter-presencing of loci of presence which constitutes the definitive constituent of this communalist concept attends to the not so friendly dimensions and dispositions of the various groups in the dialogue while the tools of dialogic attenuation, augmentation and accumulation provide for progressive reduction of antagonism and increasing growth of understanding.

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