



## Features: RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AMONG YOUTHS

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### ABUJA, NIGERIA -

God created human beings in love and command that human beings should love one another. God did not command human beings to tolerate one another. You only tolerate what is ordinarily unacceptable. I guess that some people use the expression “tolerance” in the context of peaceful co-existence because we now live in a world where the value and dignity of the human person has been sacrificed on the altar of religious fanaticism and intolerance. Moreover, religion has been hijacked by mischief makers to enrich themselves. Millions of people have lost their lives in various religious riots in Nigeria. One wonders for how long we may go on like this killing and maiming human beings. The youths who were born and have lived in this situation where human beings have become wolves to their fellows would think that this is normal and therefore need to learn the art of tolerance to promote peaceful co-existence. Given that the state of anarchy we today find ourselves is not the design of God, we shall begin this conversation by establishing the value and dignity of the human person to debrief any youth who may be living under

religious and ethnic indoctrination to be aware of the abnormality of the life they have been conditioned to live.

The Catholic Catechism gives the mission and vision of life first by establishing the fact that we are created by God. The reason God created the human person defines his mission. God made us to know him, love him and serve him. The goal and ultimate vision for creation is that the human person should be happy with God on the last day. In the narrative of Adam (humanity) in the Holy Bible and Quran, Man has a higher dignity than the angels whom God commanded to bow to Adam. For the youths to promote peaceful co-existence, the knowledge that our common factor is humanity is imperative. Many of us belong to a particular religion not by choice. Some of us who are Christians today could have been Muslims if we were born to Muslims parents and some Muslims could have been Christians if they were born to Christian parents. We did not choose our parents, tribe, state and country. This is why the most stupid venture of the human person is religious and ethnic violence. The sky is wide enough for every bird to fly. Both Christianity and Islam profess that there is no compulsion in religion. This is why the Christian and Muslim youths must quest for justice in every aspect of life. Equal rights cannot lead to anarchy.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council made a declaration on religious liberty

because the root to interreligious conflict is religious intolerance that robs free citizens of religious freedom. The document on the dignity of the human person is a call to bring the human person back to the consciousness and awareness of the right of the person and communities to social and civil liberty in religious matters. The Second Vatican Council, in the light of revelation states the general principles of religious freedom that “All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it” (Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7 December, 1965. No 1). “The human person has a right to religious freedom. All men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others” “Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered by legislation or administrative action on the part of the civil authority in the selection, training, appointment and transfer of their own ministers, in communicating with religious authorities and communities in other parts of the world, in erecting buildings for religious purposes, and in the acquisition and use of the property they need ((Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7 December, 1965. No 4).

If the youths are conscious of these human rights, they may be able to resist those who employ them to fight unjustly for the selfish benefits of those who finance and promote

violence. They would know that peace is a virtue that is deeply entrenched in Christianity and Islam. Justice is a very powerful ingredient for peaceful co-existence hence the Christian and Muslim Youths must demand justice at all levels especially freedom of religion and promotion of human dignity. For the youths to promote the dignity of life, they need Dialogue at all levels and in all ramification. The youths need intra-personal dialogue whereby a person encounter himself or herself interiorly. Through intra-personal dialogue, you ask yourself, who am I? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? What does God want me to do in life to be happy? The next level is inter-personal dialogue. Here you ask yourself, "what do I owe my neighbour? What must I do to make him happy? This is dialogue with the other person. It is a "conversation" between two or more persons. Inter-personal dialogue helps people to resolve long-standing conflicts and to build deeper understanding of contentious issues .Dialogue is one sure way to heal wounded memories.

Other types of dialogue are Intra-community, Inter-community, Intra-ethnic, Inter-ethnic, Intra-cultural, Inter-cultural, Intra-religious and Inter-religious. In dialogue, *understanding* is the key word. Nigerians have gone through many faces of violence, slavery and colonialism. The value of trust has been replaced with prejudice, preconception and mutual suspicions. These, call for education, debriefing, healing of memory, mental reconstruction, reconciliation and compassion. No one should really

claim the *right* to reject another person or attempt to kill a person for holding a different opinion. There are different types of dialogue. Dialogue of Life is what we do in ordinary events of life. Muslims, Christians and traditional worshippers in Nigeria live in the same family, attend the same school and work together in the same office and other places of work. These are avenues and occasion for people to share life together in love and peaceful coexistence.

In the Dialogue of Social Engagements, People of different religions meet in different life situations, like ceremonies, trade and even join together to fight injustice and diseases. This collaboration between Christians and people of other religions promote the integral development and liberation of people. In Nigeria some Muslims and Christians have issued joint statements to condemn terrorism and other forms of social ills. In the Dialogue of Theological Exchange, scholars of different religions organize seminars and workshops to discuss theological issues. This has led some scholars to go beyond the study of their theology to the study of the theology of other religious. In the Dialogue of religious experience, people of different religions in Nigeria sometimes use any given opportunity to share their religious experiences and dreams. This sharing of testimonies and narration of what God has done in their individual life has led others to be converted interiorly. If there is an existing friendship and mutual relationship, conflict management, resolution and transformation are easy. I visit the national Mosque regularly. In the

process, I establish a dialogue relationship between some Christian and Muslim Youths who have expressed the need for religious re-education in Nigeria. This means that there are so many Christians and Muslims today who bear true witness to the scriptures. When the youths from different religions collaborate in peace projects, all will be convinced that that there is nothing wrong with religion? It is those who practise the different religions that need proper education and awareness. Let us begin to think of how to redeem our God given religions by living in peace!

*By Rev. Fr. Cornelius Afebu Omonokhua*

*Fr. Cornelius Omonokhua is the Director of the Department of Mission and Dialogue of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria ([omonokhuac@gmail.com](mailto:omonokhuac@gmail.com); [www.omonokhua.blogspot.com](http://www.omonokhua.blogspot.com))*