

# Mission as Interfaith Dialogue: Reflections from Northern Nigeria

## *“The growing need to replace conflict with peace”*

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### 1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, many of us here may be very interested in all that is going on in Nigeria either because we hold this country close to our heart having worked there or because of all we hear on the news about religiously framed terrorism, ethnic and religious riots, insecurity, corruption and what not, all bad news! There is a lot of good news that could be told about Nigeria, a country with a population of about 160 million with Christianity and Islam being the major religions, neither religion predominating at national level. Nigeria is divided into 36 states, nineteen of these forming what we call Northern Nigeria, where the majority tribe is Hausa Fulani of whom at least 98% are Muslim. In the north there are numerous other minority indigenous tribes as well as many members of non-indigenous tribes who are Christian. This religious and ethnic configuration is an important detail since it is in fact the focus for the contestations, claims and counterclaims that are at the root of much of the conflict there.

Like most Africans, Nigerians are deeply religious people. In their daily lives, most Nigerian Muslims and Christians live together in peace most of the time, many are friends, some are intermarried, most work, study and play together on a daily basis, sharing life as human beings in a multi-religious society must do. However, taken together with other forms of inter-communal violence among various groups and ideologues in Nigeria, tension between Christians and Muslims has cost the country tens of thousands of innocent lives<sup>1</sup>. In recent times, the very real insecurity threat caused by the growing presence and terrorist tactics of the so-called Boko haram, which is an umbrella term for a franchise of political, religious and economically motivated interests, and the concurrent government response of excessive military force to supposedly counter this insurgency, add an even more preoccupying dimension to mission in Nigeria today.

However, the aim of this presentation is not to explain Nigeria's problems, but rather to reflect, with Nigeria as a case study, on why and how the Church must give priority in its missionary endeavours to situations of conflict so as to be an agent of peace, to 'replace conflict with peace' as the title given to me for this presentation states. I discuss briefly the

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<sup>1</sup> Toyin Falola: *Violence In Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (University of Rochester Press. 1998); *Nigeria: Violence Fuelled By Impunity* (Human Rights Watch Report. London. May 22, 2005).

relationship between four issues: mission, development, conflict and peace, and without going into any great details about it, I believe the logical link between these is and must be dialogue as a necessary path of mission. I give a brief overview of the causes of conflict in Nigeria and then go on to highlight some challenges involved in peacebuilding today. Most of what I say is a result of my reflections as I work in dialogue, particularly with women, in the very complex conflict situation in northern Nigeria. I conclude with some recommendations for us as Irish missionaries as we look back at our past and move forward within our new reality as Church. It is my privilege to have with me as my co-presenter at this Conference, my colleague in dialogue, Amina Kazaure, who is the Muslim Coordinator of our Women's Interfaith Council in Kaduna.

## **2. Relationship between Mission, Development, Conflict & Peace**

Let me say that conflict cannot be replaced; it can be managed. Conflict is an inevitable part of life and it can be managed negatively (through violence in one form or another) or positively, transformed into something life giving, that is, it can be transformed into peace. Peace is not the absence of conflict or of war. By and large it is 'that situation of justice and rightly ordered social relations that is marked by respect for the rights of others, that provides favourable conditions for integral human growth, and that allows citizens to live out their lives to the full in calm and joyful development'<sup>2</sup>. Since conflict in Nigeria, as in so many other parts of the world, takes on a religious colour, or religion is a strong factor in much of the conflict experienced, then religion must be part of the transformation process.

Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* tells us that mission, which is the responsibility of every baptised person, "is to further the progress of poorer nations and international social justice, as well as help less developed nations to contribute to their own development" (n.5). Obviously our mission as Church cannot be reduced to development, as though the two were synonymous, but our mission, to be a sign and an instrument of Communion, obliges us to be concerned for the joys, hopes, griefs and anxieties of all people (*Gaudium et Spes* 1), especially the poor and those in underdeveloped countries, and to be actively involved in changing this situation. Similarly, working for peace is an inherent part of mission and of this we are very much reminded this year as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*.

Does peace come from development or development come from peace is a question I often ask myself. In Northern Nigeria, where we work for peace and the promotion of women, we continuously remind citizens that we must live in peace if we want social security and development and we tell our government that there will be no peace unless there is justice and transparent accountable leadership. We seem to be contradicting ourselves: telling the

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Cardinal Arinze, *Religions for Peace: A Call for Solidarity to the Religions of the World*, Darton-Longman-Todd, London 2002, 1.

people to live in peace and simultaneously telling the government that people will not live in peace unless there are the basic indices of development. The result of violence is that lives are lost, homes and businesses are destroyed, industries are closed down, money meant for development of social infrastructure is poured into security measures, possible investors are turned off, and among the people unemployment increases, the cycle of poverty continues, grievances increase and again violence erupts. As they say, violence begets violence and this is so true. Much rhetoric surrounds the term 'development' in government discourse with respect to both international and national funds but little visible development results and certainly there is no real strategy to key in citizen participation in production and improving their own lives by means of infrastructure. Instead, corruption is a part of daily life, politics is an economic affair, there is impunity in leadership, elections are tampered with, public funds are swindled, public educational and health facilities barely function, roads are treacherous, there are little or no employment opportunities, the vast youth population is left idle and hopeless, and violence erupts. And so the cycle continues, and religion is very much a part of it, either because the poor have nowhere else to find hope or because the easiest way to gain political favour, or to heighten insecurity and make money out of security, is to play the religious or ethnic card. Development and peace are Siamese twins and which of the two comes first and is more dependent on the other is a hypothetical question. As Paul VI said in *Populorum Progressio*, "Development is another name for Peace" (n.27) and equally we might say underdevelopment or poverty is another name for conflict. In all of this, religion is embroiled, as a factor that is close to people's hearts and thus, while it has the potential to be a moral authority, a prophetic voice, a conscientious and organized instrument of positive change, it can be and is so easily manipulated for evil.

As a missionary it would make little logical sense for me, in a situation such as Nigeria, to plan or work for development without considering the damages and setbacks brought about by conflict and violence. It would equally make little sense for me to think that I can call peace from the sky unless I am concerned for the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and injustice that are at the basis of the conflicts which are too often expressed violently and along religious lines. Conflict and underdevelopment go hand in hand. Hence, to be engaged in development and not challenge the issues of injustice which are at the heart of the grievances which sometimes are expressed in violence, is rather irrational.

Furthermore, as a missionary I am automatically identified with a religious community and thus I cannot be impartial to the conflict: whether I like it or not, I am involved. The issues causing the conflict may not be religious in themselves but they so often result in a polarization along religious lines; hence, as a 'religious' person I am involved. I can continue in my teaching or nursing or running my parish, but one way or the other I must either promote prejudices against other religious groups, be passive and say nothing either for or against (however silence is often the greatest violence), or I can promote openness

and forgiveness. Whatever I do, I am doing something. It is simply not possible to do nothing – impartiality is not possible. Personally, I see this as an obligation to do something positive: to be involved as one promoting reconciliation, dialogue and peace.

### **3. Causes of Conflict in Nigeria**

Many Nigerians are very critical of the colonial enterprise and see that so much of the suffering endured today is a legacy inherited from that phase of history. The well known Scramble for Africa resulted in the formation of many colonial states and the eventual post-independent African nations which we have today. The struggles most African countries are going through today of interethnic wars, broken democracies, poverty, are not at all unrelated to that sad history of slavery and colonialism. Today's neo-colonialism by way of loans, trade agreements, and so on, continues to enslave the continent. While I believe a lot of the pain in Nigeria, and other African countries, is due to internal corruption and greed especially among the elite and the leadership, itself a legacy inherited from the colonial system of country formation and the system of rule used while there, much is to be blamed on international intervention. One might say this is the real root cause and that today's conflicts are the outcome of that troubled past and today's neo-colonialism.

In terms of more immediate causes of the conflict and the serious security challenges in the Northern States of Nigeria today are a variety of factors that tend to differ in emphasis, from one state to another. These generally include economic issues and narrowing opportunities, resource-related conflicts (involving for instance land, territory, and water bodies), unequal access to political power and position among ethnic groups, the feeling of marginalization, issues around appointments into traditional leadership positions, all of which affect relationships between individuals and groups resulting in ever growing deep-seated suspicion and the inability to develop cooperative relationships. Due to overlap of ethnic identities with religion it often, unfortunately, finds expression in religion. There is growing polarization along religious fault lines in the northern states today. Many issues, including even the choice of leaders, tend to be viewed from the prism of a perceived religious divide. Religion often becomes the instrument of offence and defence; and a tool in the hands of people who utilise it to manipulate the consciousness of the people in the northern states. Furthermore, the weak adherence to the rule of law promotes impunity as well as a strong feeling of perceived injustice and helplessness from among the populace. The large pool of unskilled, unemployed and indeed unemployable youths, all of whom are ready tools for violence, drug abuse, criminality and insurgency is a major area of concern.

Radicalization of the religious space has also been a serious factor and while it is not the only reason for Boko haram, certainly the provocative and inciting preaching by some religious clerics has been instrumental in the rise of today's insurgency in the north.

## **4. Challenges in Working for Peace**

### **4.1 Politicization of Religion**

I think one of the major challenges in working for peace in northern Nigeria, and I believe it holds true for any conflict situation where religion is a major factor, is the whole politicization of religion in the complexities of the issues. When Hans Kung worked on finding a global ethics between the religions he recognized that religions have tremendous socio-political implications. Religion has a negative as well as a positive potential in society. In itself it is a social, historical and hence also political construct. I am not a political analyst but my experience in Nigeria has taught me that while the majority of the population will maintain that the problems are due to religion, and in truth the conflict in many parts does become a matter of Muslims versus Christians, the political manipulations of religion for economic and political gains is so much more intricate.

I recently watched the film *Blood and Oil*, about the conflict in the Niger Delta, another troubled part of Nigeria, and I was struck by the lies and manipulations that the film was able to show that lie at the root of the problems in Niger Delta; instead of being a simple matter of the international oil companies v. the local population, it is an intricate web of Mr A Politician in Nigeria and Mr B Oil dealer in Russia and Mr C Judge in England, with a lot of local oil bunkering and lies and innocent foreign workers and poor indigene citizens in between. A simple but seriously inadequate reflection that the Boko Haram issue in Northern Nigeria, seen on the surface as an attempt to Islamize Nigeria and remove all Christians from the North, and possibly initially founded on such an ideology, is in reality so much more complex. It involves so many factors including a web of lies, manipulations, economic deals, and personal interests, all not unrelated to oil in the Chad basin, the 2015 presidential elections, the money made by security agencies and their partners, and so on.

Surely, religion is a major factor in conflict situations across North Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, but the rise of extremist groups in these places may indeed have much more to do with economic manipulations than with the views of any extremist clerics per se. Hence, a major challenge is, partly to become somewhat more street wise and politically astute, but also to remain above the superficial prejudices and stereotypes, stay firm in the belief in the transforming power of religion, and help others to do the same.

### **4.2 Role of Religions in the Interplay of God and Guns**

The Scramble for Africa and the colonial enterprise were not done in God's name but certainly God's name and the superiority of Christianity were recruited into its service. Hence, I believe we have a moral responsibility to ensure that today we as Church, as missionaries, do not contribute in any way to more abuse or domination. This should not result in our being afraid to speak in God's name. Nor should it result in missionaries abandoning the wider notion of evangelisation in favour of development. Rather, I believe it obliges us to promote dialogue and to do mission in a way that is consistent with respect

for the people within their culture and their religions. Inter-faith and intercultural dialogue is not an option but a necessary part of any missionary endeavour.

This also obliges us to be actively engaged, through lobbying or whatever, in calling for justice in international relations with the underdeveloped countries. Related to this is the responsibility we have to be careful of the way we speak of 'Africa' and mission when we seek financial aid. Only last year I heard my friend tell her eight year old son to eat his lunch and remember the hungry children in Africa! Justice in international relations demands respect much more than it demands compassion.

While we missionaries, carrying the weight of our past sins and the sins of our Western nations, may be conscious of not showing any sense of superiority of religion or otherwise, the local churches have not necessarily imbibed that attitude. Hence, I think it is still very necessary to have western missionaries on the field, in so far as it is possible for us to be there, missionaries who are firm in their faith and missionary commitment but who also have a critical understanding of our past and a humble commitment not to repeat it, so as to help the local church learn from the sins of the past rather than to repeat them.

#### **4.3 Building a Peaceful Identity as Christians**

The weight of our past and the association of the Western world with Christianity, even today, is such that Muslims find it hard to believe that Christianity is a peaceful religion, a religion of morality and of right and just relations. Of course, if we consider it a matter for competition rather than for self-examination, we can say the same about Islam. But, I think it demands self-examination and hence as a missionary Church, we have a responsibility to give evermore authentic witness if we are to redeem our name. In Kaduna as in some other parts of Northern Nigeria, a typical characteristic is that issues tend to be viewed from the prism of a perceived religious divide and religion easily becomes the instrument of offence and defence. When trouble erupts, as for example in the post-election violence of April 2011, it becomes a full blown Muslim v Christian war. Many Christians, even leaders, insist that any harm done by Christians to Muslims is as a result of self-defence, retaliation attacks for offences suffered and thus is considered somehow less deserving of criticism. Self-defence is given a very wide definition: if Christians are killed in one part of the city, to kill Muslims in another part is 'self-defence' since it is only in this way that 'they will stop killing us'. The point I want to draw our attention to is the readiness of Christians to turn to violence, even if in the name of so-called self-defence. To work for Peace in such a situation demands educating people and helping them to find non-violent ways of defending themselves and of 'retaliating'.

#### **4.4 Define the role of religion in a democratic state (what is it to be secular?)**

I believe another challenge in the area of peacebuilding is to find ways of developing an understanding of the role of religion in a democratic state. Nigeria is a democracy but yet government funds are poured in to finance Muslims on pilgrimage to hajj in Mecca,

Christians on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and other Christian sites, state chaplaincies, and so on. The role of government in religious affairs and of religious figures in political affairs is increasing by the day. In Nigeria, with the sharí'a debate in 2000 and with so many of the other conflicts that erupt there, it is obvious that the role and place of religion in society has not been sufficiently clarified. To follow in the footsteps of France or even Ireland, in its attempt to purge all traces of religion from the public space, does not seem the best response in a pluri-religious country such as Nigeria. Similarly, to allow religion have the major role it has in political affairs and in the lives of so many citizens who cling to it as a life saver since all else has failed, is not the response either - and is not practical in a pluri-religious nation. Given that religion is so much a part of everyday life in Africa and Africans are by nature religious people, it is said, I believe much more discussion must be held so as to find the practical and acceptable way in which all religious adherents are given an equal playing field in all parts of the country and the state ensures as 'referee not patron' that the religious freedom of all citizens are respected.

As Church, besides promoting dialogue and freedom of religion, I believe we have a responsibility to help Catholics overcome the dichotomy that seems to exist between religion as cult and everyday life. Maybe that is the form of Catholicism we had in Ireland and thus brought on mission: a sacramental, institutional, self-focused, religion of piety, catechism being the question and answer type. We must somehow form Catholics who allow the values and teachings of their faith to influence their public lives and their choices in their places of work and their homes. In Nigeria, certainly not all good Catholics donate money and not all who donate are crooks, but there is a sense that many 'Good Catholics' are those who donate large sums of money for church institutional structures, with a blind eye turned to their engagements in the field of politics and of business or even in terms of adherence to customary practices which may in fact be inimical to the Gospel message. There is need to encourage greater moral clarity and interrogation of traditional practices among Catholics.

#### **4.5 Peacebuilding has become an industry and a flag**

A major challenge I find in working in the field of dialogue and peacebuilding is that peacebuilding has in fact become an industry. Nigeria is inundated with NGOs, established to bring peace and to promote harmonious coexistence. I imagine it is the same in many other troubled underdeveloped countries. Many NGOs do great work, undoubtedly. However, among the best wage paying institutions with which people dream of finding work are international development partners and aid agencies, and if not with these then with their partner NGOs and CSOs. People love to attend conferences and seminars and workshops on peacebuilding as it allows them the opportunity to sleep in a good hotel and eat sumptuous food and even get transport allowance and maybe per diem or seating allowance for having given of their time to come to receive the training. A favourite engagement of First Ladies and other politicians is to call for peace or to host peacekeeping

events, often being little more than a political flag. Thus, peacebuilding is an industry and it is difficult to break this jinx. Some organizations, including our own Women's Interfaith Council try to awaken a volunteer spirit. For example, our women leaders are not paid for the many hours work they put into organizing and participating in our events, we rent cheap venues and give simple food, with no allowances given for transport or anything else. This approach is still rather unique but it is a method I believe we must continue to use as it is only through sacrifice that peace will eventually reign.

#### **4.6 Women's involvement in patriarchal culture and religions**

We work with women faith leaders in Kaduna state. This was something I myself initiated in May 2010 and it has grown from strength to strength. The truth is that just as women's poverty and vulnerability in the region is greater than that of men, due in great part to a patriarchal culture, so too women's voices and their concerns are often times excluded from Government programmes of response and of mediation in times of conflict and in efforts at reconciliation and peacebuilding. Similarly, women are excluded from the mainline decision making levels in religious bodies, both Christian and Muslim, as well as prominent interfaith councils and state-sponsored religious bureaus. When interfaith events are organized, especially when it is by government or by influential circles, it is the male religious and community leaders who are invited. For example, in 2012, after the outbreak of violence in June, a State Committee on Reconciliation was established in Kaduna, consisting of sixty men (as in, male). People objected so ten more were added, three of whom were women; the others included youth representatives and some other groups that had felt left out. In August 2012, a Committee was established by the Northern Governors Forum for Reconciliation, Security and Healing. It was initially all male with one woman; she objected so she was asked to get five other women to join her; I happened to be one of them and I admit the experience of working on that Committee was challenging but very enriching. And although the women were few, we ended up contributing far more than our fair share! Last month, in April 2013, the World Muslim League held its annual meeting in Sokoto, Nigeria - I looked at the list of those present, including the Christians who were invited to speak: all men! This is the norm. If women are invited, it is usually as an afterthought and as a symbolic gesture of 'gender awareness'! Thanks to international pressure, it is very important nowadays to be seen to show some sense of gender awareness! However, most often, if a woman is invited to speak, it will be on "women's issues". Hence, in work with women and for women in peacebuilding, serious obstacles due to patriarchy are encountered. However, this makes the work even more urgent and satisfying: bringing women together in a way which would be difficult to do with men, gives a strong witness and helps to make women's voices heard. Gradually I find we are becoming more and more known and we receive more and more invitations, maybe only to ensure the inclusion of women but we use that and thus make women's voice heard, at major events.

#### **4.7 Difficulty of measuring results**

We can put a lot of time, effort, and money into peacebuilding initiatives: meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences, advocacy visits, communiqués, roundtables, Peace Clubs, interfaith prayers, solidarity marches, media chats, and so on. We work through the women faith leaders, and hence when they bring our message back to their faith groups throughout the state, thousands of people may be reached through us. However, it only takes one person to throw a bomb and shout *Allahu Akbar*, or to burn a market, or to start a fight against another and turn it into a religious fight. It is not difficult to ignite violence, and for this violence to take a religious identity, and for this to spread. Hence, it is difficult to measure the outcome of our work and I believe this applies to peacebuilding work in general. Certainly, it is necessary to cure the ills of poverty and illiteracy and injustice that make it so easy for people to resort to violence and for this to ignite interethnic or interreligious tensions. People maintain this kind of development work is more effective than peacebuilding seminars. However, we need both: we need to help people analyse the reasons for the conflict and to grow in mutual understanding across religious lines, to develop friendships and to see that harmonious coexistence is possible. We also need to work on empowerment so as to overcome the poverty and the injustices. One is easier to measure than the other. Both are necessary.

#### **4.8 Specific challenges from a missionary perspective:**

##### **4.8.1 Overcome the bad reputation of religion**

Religion has a bad reputation in relation to war and peace. Yet, as Hans Kung said, and I must totally agree with him, there will be no peace between the nations without dialogue between the religions. This is for many reasons, the most obvious and pragmatic being so much of the strife experienced in the world today, not only in Nigeria, is very much coloured by religion. However, religion has been a positive source of hope, strength and inspiration for people to challenge and non-violently confront situations and structures of injustice; religion is a teacher of positive human values; and religion is for so many people and in many societies a moral authority of peaceful, just and right human relations. As missionaries, we are seen as people who propagate a faith, a religion. Hence, I believe we have a responsibility to believe in our religion and to ensure religion is taught and practiced as a positive and not a negative force.

Undoubtedly, religion has an equally bad, if not worse, reputation in relation to patriarchy and to gender equality and this reputation applies across the board to all religions. In what I think is a typical example of Orientalism, in the West Islam tends to be shown as the faith which is most demeaning of women, but I think the fact that women of all faiths are developing strong versions of feminist religious discourse speaks the truth more fully. Although the struggle for gender equality is generally thought of in terms of developments in secular discourse, a matter of legal provisions and so on and so forth, I am convinced that there will be no gender equality in so many parts of the world without the intervention

of religions, simply because religion is such an influential factor in women's recognized roles and rights in most developing societies. Hence, our involvement in women's or gender-focused theological discourse and our support of that within the various religions is, I believe, a necessary engagement in our mission for peace. This is a delicate area; many of the women I work with are not at all critical of their religions as taught or practiced. However, when we look more closely at concrete experiences of women, then we begin also to challenge interpretations and the women add their voice to learning or supporting more gender friendly interpretations.

#### **4.8.2 Working together with people of other faiths on Justice and Development**

Working for peace and working for development is not the responsibility of the Church alone but is one we can only carry out in respect and dialogue with people of other religions. Our definition of justice and of development cannot be understood only within a Christian or a Western framework. Other peoples have their cultural understandings of development and these are shaped and influenced by their religious beliefs and by their faith communities. Hence, to work in mission towards making present those values of God's kingdom, which we may speak of as indicative of development, necessarily implies respectful dialogue with people of other religions and cultures. As we are told in the document *Dialogue and Mission*: "any sense of mission not permeated by [such] a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel" (DM 29). In this context I would advise missionaries to ensure that all their development projects are done in dialogue with the people who are to be its beneficiaries and this must be done with respect for their cultural as well as their religious views.

#### **4.8.3 Being a foreigner: advantage or disadvantage**

Working for Peace as a foreigner has both its pros and cons. On the pro side I would say that my being white, not a Nigerian, contributes in no small way to the success of the Interfaith Council which I initiated and coordinate. Many women admit that it is because of me that they persevere in coming to our meetings and cooperating in the work. (I pray that by the time I leave, they will have imbibed the vision deeply enough not to need me as an excuse.) When there have been serious crises, women have come to me, or I have gone to them, and they have spoken honestly from their heart about their fears and distrust of the other 'group'. Together we have been able to talk it through and muster up the courage and the forgiveness to continue working together with Muslims/Christians, as the case may be. If I was a Nigerian, I would be more easily associated with the other group. The fact that I am a Reverend Sister, as they call us Religious in Nigeria, is also an important factor, since in general the Catholic Church is viewed with greater respect than many other Christian denominations, many people have gone through schools or hospitals run by Sisters and have learnt to respect us, and as a Religious I am seen as a religious leader. In fact, for our large interfaith events, apart from our small meetings as Executive council and so on, I always wear the veil, something that is totally against every feminist principle in my body,

but it is a concession I make because I realise the importance of uniform and of position in Nigeria and the fact that the veil gives me that standing of a religious leader which enables people to respect the Women's Interfaith Council which I am seen to represent.

The other side of the coin is that as a foreigner, it is all too often said that I am not really part of the situation: "if there is trouble, Sr. Kathleen can just go home, we must stay here to pick up the pieces". Hence, that distance from the issue in a sense makes me always different, always an outsider, hence somewhat less credible as a witness of the possibility of forgiveness and openness to one another. In fact, when I speak some truth that people may not want to hear, the usual response is that I don't understand, "Sister, you don't understand the psychology of these people"; Sister, you were not here during the shari'a crisis in 2000 or the Kafanchan crisis in 1989 or the Maitatsine riots in the 80s. Hence - my commitment to dialogue is seen to be a fruit of my naivety, my innocence, my not having experienced the violence. I can do nothing about this, except remain confident and convinced! That said, I would like to add that I have found great acceptance in Nigeria, even in the very high profile Committee on Reconciliation, Healing and Security of the Northern Governor's Forum: my opinion is listened to and taken seriously and in general I am treated as a co-national, something which makes me very proud.

## **5. Contribution of Irish Missionaries (yesterday, today, tomorrow)**

### **5.1 A critical look at our methodology of mission**

Firstly, I think this Conference is an opportunity for us to look back critically at the methods of the past, recognise whether and how we may have failed in promoting an attitude of interethnic and interreligious openness and dialogue, whether and how we might have helped establish a Church that is arrogant in its own sense of theological and institutional superiority, whether and how we may have formed Catholics who are not committed to social responsibility, whether and how we may have brought a Catholicism that did not sufficiently dialogue with the local culture and customs many of which were strengthened rather than challenged in their patriarchal and other elements. We might find that the missionary enterprise may actually have been stronger in some of these areas than the local church is today. In so far as this the case, we can, with the benefit of hindsight, ensure that in our various ways of outreach to the local church, whether by the Irish missionaries who still go and will go, or whether through the training we give to those from the young Churches who come here for formation or are members of our congregations, our analysis of these questions is included.

### **5.2 Be prepared to fund faith communities**

Secondly, I should like to request continued support for faith bodies and for the work of the indigenous members of missionary congregations who are inheriting from their Irish predecessors the development of projects that people in their local areas, from their faith

and cultural perspectives, envision together. For example, if we want to educate and empower women I believe there is more chance that this will be done through FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria) or the CWO (*Catholic Women's Organization*) or other faith based organizations in which women participate regularly and which are trusted by their religious and community leaders, than through other conduits.

### 5.3 International lobbying

Undoubtedly, as Irish missionaries we still have great authority through our lobbying efforts in the UN or other international political and legislative arena. I have never been involved in this but I know of the Africa Faith and Justice Network and many others that I believe are to be very much commended and supported in their important work. No doubt, the fruits are so hard to measure but many drops make an ocean and thus the more international pressure that is put, for accountable leadership, for transparent elections, for gender equality, for non-violent options... the more chance there is that things will change.

### 5.4. Formation of personnel from the young Churches

The fragmentation among Christians in Nigeria and in many other African countries is sometimes blamed on the negative relationship that we Catholics from Ireland had with our Protestant counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The negative view of Muslims has no doubt been influenced by the negative view we as Church once held of Islam. I think it is important that in the Kimmage Institute, Mater Dei, Maynooth, the Irish School of Ecumenics, and so on, which are all well recognized Centres of formation for personnel from the young Churches, we give an ecumenical and dialogical missionary formation. I also believe some basic training in political analysis is necessary as we study religions and the challenge of co-existence. It is important that the formation we give encourage a critical study of missionary methods in Africa today. *Africae Munus* somehow alludes to this when it says: "Given the great ferment of peoples, cultures and religions which marks our age, Catholic universities and academic institutions play an essential role in the patient, rigorous and humble search for the light which comes from Truth. Only a truth capable of transcending human standards of measure, conditioned by their own limitations, brings peace to individuals and reconciliation to societies" (135). Peace in Africa, the Pope tells us in *Africae Munus*, is conditioned by interreligious relations. Hence "it is important for the Church to promote dialogue as a spiritual disposition, so that believers may learn to work together, for example in associations for justice and peace, in a spirit of trust and mutual help" (AM 88). Hence, in forming personnel from the young Churches, it is important to form them in a way that teaches them to search for answers in dialogue with the cultures and religions which shape their society and our world at large and to thus be able to bring reconciliation and peace to their lands.

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<sup>3</sup> See E.P.T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, 171.

## 6. Conclusion

The *Lineamenta for the African Synod*, n. 35 stated as follows: “No nation can prosper in an atmosphere of insecurity. No meaningful development is sustainable in a society replete with mutual rancor, bitterness and hate. Mutual prejudices hinder cooperation and exchange, and rob a people of a hope of a great nation.” The post-synodal exhortation, *Africae Munus*, tells us that the difficulties encountered by the countries and particular churches in Africa are not so much insurmountable obstacles, but challenges pushing us to draw upon the best of ourselves: our imagination, our intelligence, our vocation to follow without compromise in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Hence, this challenge remains.

The conversation must continue: How can we as missionaries continue to help overcome the many obstacles encountered in the young churches we have done so much to help establish? How can we do this in a way that promotes a form of evangelization that is not exclusive, not divisive, but that is inclusive of all people of whatever religion, and helps to build a nation where the values of the Kingdom are palpable by all people? “If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism” (AM 94). I pray we can continue to do so and I hope some of the points I have raised in this paper will help us to do this.

Many thanks for your witness as missionaries *ad extra ad vitam*, your support for my own mission, the invitation to speak here today, and for your attention.