

The Dialogue with Christianity in Africa: Beyond Proselytism

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“And what is more, Chukwu Himself in all His power and majesty, did not make the Igbo by fiat. He held conversations with mankind. He talked with those archetypal men of Ndri (Ndi Eri) and Adama, and even enlisted their cooperation and good offices.” – Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, – cited in Elochukwu E. Uzukwu’s *God, Spirit, and Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*”).

The above relational structure of approaching reality and encountering divine is a fair interpretation, not only of Igbo worldview, but also of much of traditional African societies. It is a worldview anchored on what the renowned Nigerian African theologian, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, has described as “principles of duality and relationality in African culture and thought pattern.” It is a principle of dialogue for promoting mutuality in human co-existence that Africa needs today more than ever.

This is the background for appreciating the path of dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), as well as within the postcolonial African states themselves, which a good number of African theologians are proposing today. In the African path of dialogue with Christianity, one sees immediately what distinguishes Christian encounter with African reality from those of other major world religions operative in Africa today. Uzukwu in his new book, entitled, *God, Spirit, and Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, uses the Igbo wisdom saying, “Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it”, to drive home this point.

The African principle of relationality as a way of dialogue shows that the meeting of Christianity with African religious and cultural tradition (or with any of the other world religious traditions), should not be anchored on proselytism. It should also not be about fatal elimination or passing of death-sentence on the religious and cultural traditions of the Africans. Otherwise, it is no longer a dialogue but religious and cultural imperialism.

The meeting of two religious and cultural traditions, Christianity and ATR, should anchor on mutual respect and exchange. Such a meeting of two religious traditions should be guided by mutual enrichment and transcendence of prejudices and suspicion by each of the two parties in dialogue. Any attempt by one of the parties in dialogue to intimidate or impose its ideas or religious principles on the other, is antithetical not only to the principles of dialogue, but especially, to the African philosophy of relationality: “Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it.”

The aim of our present article is to highlight the path of dialogue in the African context, shaped by the African philosophy of relationality in the meeting of Christianity and ATR, which in turn, has consequences for promoting healthy human co-existence in a pluralistic society. Here, to buttress our point, we shall employ the Igbo wisdom saying, “Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it.”

There is a direct link between the failure of political leadership in modern African states with the religious and cultural identity crisis the continent suffers today. The crisis of political leadership

in postcolonial Africa (like the one we are having presently in Nigeria), is not unconnected with Africa's present-day religious and cultural identity crisis.

Societies are built on the people's cultural and religious principles or philosophy. If postcolonial African states are cracking today, it is principally, because of the failed political and religious leadership of African ruling class, their failure to build modern African states, based on our cultural and religious heritage and philosophy of life in dialogue with the changing African reality.

The continued neglect of African cultural and religious heritage in the founding of modern African nation states is the bane of the continent! It is one of the major problems dragging Africa behind in the dialogue with modernity as well as in social development in various spheres of human endeavours, and in the community of nations.

Until the neglected socio-cultural and religious heritage of Africa is taken seriously, recognized as a bedrock in the rebuilding of the shattered postcolonial African states, the continent will continue to wallow in darkness. Not until there is a concerted efforts to rebuild Africa based on its cultural matrix of relationality and palaver, and the changing African reality, it will be difficult for postcolonial African modern states to respond democratically and equitably to the needs of their numerous citizens, politically, economically, culturally and religiously.

The African Dialogue and Principle of Relationality

According to Chinua Achebe, the Igbo wisdom saying, "*Ife kwulu ife akwudebe ya*" (Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it), is the Igbo way of interpreting the African philosophy of relationality. On its own, it means, 'vigilant memory.' When interpreted in modern African reality, it means "taking a second look at everything" in today's Africa. This includes the historical or changing patterns of African cultures and civilizations as well as the African memory of its cultural and religious heritage.

As the African theologian, Elochukwu Uzukwu explains, "vigilant memory envisages a living cultural tradition which responds to contemporary needs, and a retrieving of dimensions of our heritage that carry the gain for reinventing the African society." In other words, the Igbo wisdom saying, "Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it", consecrates the African philosophy of relationality and maintains a clear distance from the old categories of absolutism in inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-human relations.

This implies that Africans approach reality in a flexible, malleable and relational way. Such a flexible, malleable and relational worldview invites a new kind of interpreting reality, of our relating with one another in the ever-increasingly pluralistic world. It means that intimidation or rather imposition of one's worldview, be it political, economic, religious, cultural or philosophical, is not acceptable, not only in an African context, but in anywhere in the modern world.

The principle or rather philosophy of relationality also means that in the complex African universe, humans are not a pawn in the hands of fate or deities. The myth of pre-existence and having a predestined course in life involving conversation with God and/or deity bearing destiny, are common among various African societies. The individual destiny is packaged, received or democratically chosen at the ancestral location of pre-existence.

In fact, not only Igbo people follow this worldview of relationality in human and divine relations. It is a principle that is common among the Africans. For instance, Wole Soyinka, in his acknowledgment lecture of the Nobel Prize in literature, took issue with the exclusivist principles

that guide the West in its relation and dealings with Africa. In that lecture, the Nobel laureate, implicitly, tells us that the principle of relationality permeates also the Yoruba worldview and philosophy.

Soyinka refuted Hegel's claims (made in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*) that only the European Law of Metaphysics on God is the symbol of civilization. However, without succumbing to the temptation of Soyinka's uniform reduction of all religions to the same level, which is not exact, what is of interest to us here is his emphasis on *tolerance*.

Soyinka condemned the intolerance in those world religions and cultures that have exclusivist tendencies. This is because in their exclusivism they do not promote the freedom and dignity of all humans. Thus, Soyinka aligned himself with the "social vision" transmitted in African religion that he claims to be characterized by tolerance:

"The spirituality of the black continent, as attested, for instance, in the religion of the *orisa*, abhors such principles of coercion or exclusion, and recognizes all manifestations of spiritual urgings as attributes of the complex disposition of *godhead*. Tolerance is synonymous with the spirituality of the black continent, *intolerance* anathema!" – Taken from Wole Soyinka's "*Burden of Memory*."

Here, Soyinka is not simply idealizing African culture and traditional religion. Rather he sees *orisa* (Yoruba traditional) religion as that which embodies flexibility and malleability and something that is profoundly humanist. As he puts it, "It is the profound humanism of the *orisa* that recommends it to a world in need of the elimination of conflict, since the main source of conflict between nations and among peoples is to be found as much in the struggle for economic resources as in the tendency toward the domination of ideas, be these secular or theological."

What all this means in concrete terms, is that dialogue in an African context, structured in the pattern of relationality and palaver (community discourse with the participation in words and deeds of all, without discrimination), is the way of life, and means of promoting harmony and co-existence in the society. It means above all, that traditional African society abhors exclusion of persons or groups from the scheme of things in the maintenance of law and order and in the running affairs of the society itself.

The argument of many African scholars here is that African society so structured and anchored in the principle and philosophy of relationality and palaver discourse could pose enormous problems not only to a totalitarian and tyrannical regimes, but more especially, in the encounter with other worldviews and religious traditions that carry universalist, absolutist and exclusivist tendencies. On this lies the universal value of African philosophy of relationality and palaver.

Therefore, as we marveled at the failure of modern African leaders (secular and religious) to anchor the postcolonial African states and leadership structural pattern on the African principle and philosophy of relationality and palaver, let's pause a while and see how the meeting of Christianity and ATR are embroiled in the same problem.

Paths of Dialogue in the African Context

Let us begin with the question, "what is dialogue?"

From what we have said so far, the overriding issue of dialogue in the African context is that of encounter between Christianity and the values of civilization and of the African religious and cultural heritage.

Inevitably and everywhere, dialogue is constituted by two pillars (or more): the interlocutors and the content of the dialogue, which assume the specificity of the context of reference. In Africa however, it is precisely these elements that constitute a problem given that:

- a) It is the same content in its historical missionary-transmission that call into question the theological concept which drove and still guide the encounter between Christianity and the African culture;
- b) Although the meeting between Christians and non-Christians interlocutors hold apparently in peaceful relationship, the first have difficulty in identifying with content which were expressed and handed down in Western categories which today call for a new approach to the same and a new theological language to overcome all the negative implications with which it designated non-Christians.

In other words, the only possible way for dialogue in the African context implies that Christianity and the cultural heritage of Africa must now overcome the phase of confrontation and exclusion to retrieve a fundamental mutual respect.

On this path, the first step to take is especially, the rereading and re-understanding of the recent history of Africa, to which we must ask specific honest and critical questions regarding the continuing of religion and of traditional culture in the continent.

In fact, despite the impact of Islam and Christianity, the vitality and dynamism of culture and of traditional African religion are not in decline in the African society. It underlies and still influences the philosophy of life not only of non-Christians but also of a large part of the African Christians, since "it is the religious and cultural setting that the majority of Christians come from and in the midst of which many of them still live."

The forgoing underscores the specificity of African dialogue. Often times, today when we talk of dialogue, we think immediately of inter-religious dialogue or of intercultural dialogue, etc. This way of dealing with dialogue in theological reflection is still valid, especially because of the difficulty of coexistence between the followers of the various religions in the various geographical areas of modern society.

In Africa, there is still the need to build this traditional form of dialogue, because in the continent, the three major religions co-exist side by side: the African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. Furthermore, in the search for the rule of law, one cannot ignore the parameter of ethnic divisions, even though tribalism is not only an African phenomenon; the phenomenon is also known to exist even among the other peoples of the world.

The only difference with respect to Africans is that majority of the other people have already found a *modus vivendi* and seek to use the rule of law to resolve their conflicts, and thus, avoid the shedding of blood. On the contrary, in some Africa states, people still resort to the use of weapons in resolving conflicts of this nature.

Therefore, we must not confuse the phenomena of ethnic tensions with those of regional and religious conflicts in the continent. History shows us that the reasons of interethnic conflict are traceable mostly to policies of exclusion or marginalization, especially following the colonial history of modern African nation states. These policies and colonial history tend to use or instrumentalize religious or ethnic sentiments for political power and economic ambitions of individuals or that of powerful groups and ethnic nationalities.

Moreover, the reasons of the existing conflicts in the continent today are often found in politics; for example, violence breaks out when religious and ethnic emotions are manipulated to promote economic and political objectives to favour the interests of certain groups, ethnic, religious, clan, or politically influential groups. Religion, tribe or the weaknesses of others then become an ideology. They are used through a cold-blooded calculation, in a rational manner in order to achieve their selfish objectives.

The Problem:

Looking underneath all these, what does dialogue mean in the African context? What are the problems associated with the process of dialogue as lived in some African locality in recent times? In other words, what are the problems that emerge in discussing about dialogue in the African context?

In the search for the way of dialogue in the African context, there emerges above all the problem of the encounter between Christianity and the African culture, on which have developed in recent years some theological and pastoral reflection. At the very beginning, even before the Second Vatican Council, efforts were made to find in the African tradition such elements to be considered as *praeparatio evangelica* (or the *stepping-stone*), which could form the foundation of the Christian message in the soul of the African recipients.

However, it was during the Synod of Bishops of 1974 in Rome, that African participants felt the need to abandon this perspective with consequent terminology since it does not grasp the depth of the problem. According to the bishops, theological dialogue in the African context would have had to speak rather of incarnation of the Gospel in the cultures of peoples in the likeness of the Son of God who became man to present to the Father a new creature.

To progressively express the strength of this idea, the terms: adaptation, indigenization, localization, Africanization, contextualization, etc. were always used with the intention of indicating that Christianity had to incarnate in African culture. From the necessity of the incarnation of the message in African culture, there followed immediately that of profound dialogue between the Gospel and the cultures and traditions of the continent.

There is then an orientation toward a new terminology, i.e., that of, "inculturation", which seemed to express better the role that the Christian faith had to play in the culture and in the local traditions. This word was already in use in a latent way although nobody seemed to know precisely the origin as such. It was during the conference of pan-African Third World Theologians EATWOT (II) held in Accra, Ghana in December 1977, that the African theologians appropriated the term "inculturation" as a new theological concept for dialogue in the African context.

Gradually, the expression "inculturation" became a new language of dialogue between Christianity and African religious and cultural traditions. This does not necessarily imply following a path with a single direction, but to establish a real dialogue between Christianity and the African tradition in a new way, that is both two-dimensional – two-way traffic and multi-dimensional at the same time.

Christianity cannot become truly African if there is no "interpretation" between the Gospel message and the African culture. This is the path of theological dialogue in Africa today.

Africa and the stages of dialogue

From the foregoing, three stages of dialogue can be identified: Dialogue *ad intra*, Dialogue *ad extra* and *multilateral* Dialogue. These three steps in the African context, have a characteristic

that must be underlined. In fact, both Christianity and the ATR, have gone through historical events of great importance, such as colonialism and the achievement of independence with a consequent rapid involvement in modernity. These factors have led to a new research of understanding, and new references which are socially and ethically vital to dialoguing parties that often call into question the religious content of Christianity from the part of Africa and, reciprocally, of the religious and cultural heritage of African heritage from the part of Christianity.

A) Dialogue “*ad intra*”

Dialogue *ad intra* is that type of dialogue that is situated in the heart of an African individual, which is still struggling between the Christian vision of the world and that of the African traditional religion. The challenge of this type of dialogue is to question the religious content of Christianity and, reciprocally, call into question the religious content of the African heritage on the part of African. Dialogue *ad intra* is the provocation caused by the encounter of Christianity with the African traditional religion in the heart of an African individual. Therefore, the first stage of dialogue of Christianity with the traditional religion and the African culture cannot be anything else but that one step "criticism", in the original sense of the term, i.e. that induces to discernment of true and authentic part of the identity of each of the two parties in dialogue.

B) Dialogue “*ad extra*”

Dialogue *ad extra* is a dialogue of the encounter of Christianity with the local traditions in Africa. This second stage concerns the specificity of the crisis born out of the first meeting. In the first place, it means the encounter with Christ, that, in a second moment, makes it possible or involves the human reaction to the call of faith in him. But as is often the case, the encounter of Christianity and of non-Christian civilization brings with it, if not always, a certain crisis and chain reaction. Africa is therefore not an exception to this. We must however point out that crises have their specificity and are not mere and simple repetition of one and the same phenomenon. Each environment reacts according to its fundamental structures and according to its socio-cultural legacy. In short, according to a specific personality.

Therefore, dialogue *ad extra* is a profound adherence to the truth in which we recognize ourselves as Christians in the light of the Word of God that interrogates the deep roots of our personality, and at the same time makes our flesh the most noble of integrity. The Gospel is the new man in us through which we forge a new image of disciples of the Lord.

It is from this confession of faith that we can overcome the "crisis" which was mentioned before. That Africa has met Christianity for centuries, is a historical fact. The question that arises today is to know if the history of Christianity in Africa is a success or a deadly confrontation between the two parties as sustained by some authors. Others, like Engelbert Mveng, an African theologian from Cameroun, would refute this Manichean vision. He, alongside with the majority of African Christians believe that Africa, becoming Christian, continues its religious experience toward its fulfilment of history and the overcoming of herself, in the same way that Christianity, becoming African, continues, in turn, on its own religious experience toward its historical fulfilment and towards overcoming of itself.

On this path of dialogue, Africa seems to propose a real model of original template. It is not so much the exchange (*dia-logos*) between two distinct entities but rather the intertwining of both

on the person of Christ, the fulfilment of the Christian religious experience and of the total growth of traditional religion that seeks a model of life historically implemented in the humanity of the Word.

Obviously, the dialogue is made up of people, but aims to reach the peoples and because it takes place at the level of the Christian perspective, there must be an interweaving of the person of Christ and the person of a people or of an individual. When, instead, one of the interlocutors is missing, the dialogue is circumvented.

Therefore, if the identity of Africa is not put in its right place today, the entire continent runs the risk of being ruled out of the possibility of dialogue. For this reason, it is improbable not to dwell on the underlying causes of the absence of one of the parties at the table of dialogue, or at least of the poverty of the current religious and cultural dialogue in our context. It is under this tree that we will find the root causes of the crisis of the personality and of African culture in the contemporary world.

In the first place, we need to reconsider the presence of Christianity in Africa. Since coming from another world, it long appeared as the victory of a culture and the defeat of another. We must instead consider that today Christianity belongs to us as part of our soul, the depth of our identity, the strength of our act, the dream and poetry of our future.

Secondly, it fits well into what we today call 'authentic', i.e. the vocational specific nature of Africa within Christianity. This is, in fact, to emphasize again that Christianity has opened to Africa a new page in its history in which it can compile its renewed genius and write in a new language that at the same time is authentically African!

This means that the dialogue in the African context must aim at making Christianity the spiritual heritage of Africa with which to build the salvation and liberation of the African people. As Africa agrees to become Christian, so also must Christianity accept to become African. If the complete evangelization of a people, as Saint Paul says, what is lacking in the stature of the body of Christ [which is the Church], Africa, becoming Christian, works to the fulfilment of the universal Church that can no longer remain as such as it was before, at the stage where it was before the Africa became a Christian.

The path of dialogue that Africa proposes, with its own ancestral soul, embraces a vast horizon, which does not imagine it as an abstraction, or something generic and inconclusive. It intends to reach out to people in their historical concreteness made of numerous entities and specific human groups. This is not absolutely to reduce Christianity to the dimensions of tribal membership. Christianity is a religion of salvation and liberation for all humanity. Salvation is a gift of God for all and sundry.

But the challenge to which the religious dialogue is called in Africa is that of witnessing to the fact that the people that you meet on earth constitute the universal family of God. It seems to me that our traditional spiritual heritage, implanted on the depth of the Gospel of Jesus is quite substantial in order to give this witness.

Therefore, in our case the dialogue of Christianity with the African culture follows a process which is geared towards the purpose of missionary theology. The aim is to interpret the Christian revelation in a given context through instruments taken from philosophy and the tradition of a well determined people. Consequently, the proclamation of the Gospel, at whose service the dialogue is intended, will not be made in the abstract; but must also be contextual. It is precisely in this perspective that the theological dialogue in the African context has struggled to work from the outset. The African Pioneer authors that tackled this problem have always had before their eyes the problem of how to entrench the Good News of Christ in the African culture. This has

finally led the African Church to make inculturation one of the priorities of its dialogue in the African context.

C) The multilateral dialogue

Dialogue does not only mean an encounter between two interlocutors, but we also have the dialogue that could be called multilateral dialogue (or being together). This type of dialogue points to the challenge of how to build the concept of building relationship in a pluralistic community. Here we note the fact that the nature of the relations existing between Africans from various ethnic environments of the various nations of the continent, at critical moments is still characterized by the use of a primitive ethnicity. Even when the local population undertakes to live in harmony, in the love and respect for their neighbour, the elite, and more often the politicians, always seek to put on the floor elements capable of causing division – such as: Religion, tribe, etc. - to exploit their impact and propagate political interests and ambitions. All this aliment a sense of hatred, giving rise to religious and ethnic conflicts in Africa, a phenomenon that has penetrated even the church.

Therefore, multilateral dialogue means that every human being experiences the fact of being in relation with others from origin, life, culture and celebration. Living in community means to develop sustainable relationships. The relational life is judged on the basis of respect for local traditions and for the tradition of others; the recognition of the humanity which it has in common with others; and on the proper understanding and, indeed, the empathy felt for the meaning that others give beliefs, their values and their needs. The multilateral dialogue means that as soon as we are able to overcome individualism or ethnicity as the basic element of society, we discover that a nation is nothing more than a community of communities, because a nation is not an agglomeration of individuals but is constituted by a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious groups. This reality was quite in-depth, especially as regards cultural-pluralism.

The population of a national (or international) Community does not live in relation only to individuals but also as members of particular groups, each with its own identity. Each group seeks to protect their identity and deserves recognition and respect. Certainly, these groups should not be allowed to undermine the freedom of individuals in the name of an alleged right to preserve and defend the identity of a group. But these groups have the right to be recognized and respected. In other words, the respect for the identity of the community goes hand in hand with respect to the nationality of individuals, otherwise it will fall into sheer unilateral status. Those who live in a community or in a pluralistic nation seek neither to dominate nor to impose but to converse, or dialogue and to reach a consensus. In the African context, the challenge is therefore in the ability to build a community that respects, interacts and transcends the ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism.

Practical Consequences

One of the practical consequences of what we have discussed so far is that the starting point for dialogue in the African context is the question of the African identity for the appointment of dialogue and the issue of coexistence in a pluralistic society. In the first place, to deal with the crisis of cultural identity is very crucial for dialogue in the African context.

The question therefore, is: Can one say that because of Christianity the African must denounce his cultural identity? In other words, to become a Christian the African must renounce (or deny) his cultural identity? Christianity does not mean abolishing the differences in human society. It

does not mean either, a defeat of local culture or of the original identity of a people. But it means a recovery in truth and in the spirit, the beauty of that culture. Christianity brings to every culture that will accept it, its fulfilment – the fullness of the beauty of that culture.

Secondly, Christianity does not mean the negation of the cultural differences in the human family but as Saint Paul teaches us, it means a recognition of what God has done for us in Christ (2Corinthians 5:14-21). It is in our human condition that we are reconciled with God through Christ. On the table of dialogue, everyone participates in their condition and in their identity as a person (or as a people) redeemed in Christ. In this case, on the table of dialogue, every participant has the affirmation of his or her identity as an individual or a people redeemed in Christ.

Christ is therefore the point of reconciliation and dialogue of various peoples redeemed by him. We bring to the table of dialogue our identity. We recognize one another because each one of us has been redeemed in his condition. In this case, the identity or cultural differences is no longer an obstacle in dialogue, but an appreciation of what God has done for each of us in Christ.

This is the basis for better understanding of the teaching of Saint Paul about the abolition of those walls, structures of divisions and hostility in the human family (Galatians 3,28). In Christ, there exists no longer the walls of hostility between peoples of different races, ethnicity, cultures, etc. These elements of divisions are irrelevant to human nature. The biblical teaching shows us that the image of God in man is the reason for which "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2Cor 5:19). To the table of dialogue, we are invited to recognize in each interlocutor this image of God in man redeemed in Christ. The dialogue is a moment of affirmation of what God has done for each of us in Christ.

Therefore, to speak of dialogue in the African context, means to recognize the fact that the African man or woman must become the protagonist of dialogue in this regard and that African culture must be recognized as a *locus theologicus* (theological place) in promoting the work of inculturation in the continent. This applies also to the search for harmonious co-existence among people of different ethnic and religious groups in various African nation states.

All this shows us how important the identity and dignity of human person is in dialogue. The duty to respect and to give each person the same right in the dialogue is already an obligation. The duty to re-incorporate those who live in marginalization, in poverty, injustice in the society, is due to the fact that without them, the society may wither and possibly be destroyed (John Paul II: *Centesimus Annus* (CA) 28).

In other words, the marginalized must be placed at the center of society's interests, at the center of the human family. Thus, a new approach to dialogue in the African context calls for firmness of the elements to ensure that the voices of those who live in marginalization or in a situation of injustice are heard by accepting their ways of seeing their needs and desires.

Under this condition, dialogue becomes a genuine cooperation and a collaboration in which each person contributes to everything the human community needs. It is here that the marginalized or the poor can play a unique role within the society. The poorest playing their role that is essential, particularly because, in truth, they are excluded.

This will trigger a new relationship among the people, the rich and the poor, those who have and those who have not. That is, it will begin to give more and instant credibility to the dialogue between different peoples and cultures, between people of different ethnic-nationalities and religious traditions sharing one nation state, like the struggle we have in Nigeria today.

This will also bring a radical change to the image of Africa in the world of today and to the language, with which the world will be speaking about us and our continent and land.

Conclusion

African dialogue with Christianity is a major challenge to contemporary African scholarship and leadership (secular and religious). It is as important as the African dialogue with neocolonialism in political and economic spheres.

Modern world is strongly under Western sway. This is the naked truth. Christianity, in spite of decrease of church-goes in Europe, is the religious and philosophical foundations upon which modern Western civilization sprang up. Judaism, Greek philosophy and ancient cultures of the Mediterranean region of the Old Roman Empire, were appropriated by the “Christian Europe” to ferment their modern culture and civilization upon which they dominate the rest of the world today.

This is why African dialogue with Christianity should not be confused with proselytism or religious intolerance. It is rather a matter of necessity for Africa’s relevance in the community of nations today as well as in rediscovering its cultural identity. It is necessary equally, in her religious and cultural journey, as well as in her religious experience and self-transcendence.

Therefore, African dialogue with Christianity should be accorded a priority status today more than ever. It is a priority to changing African religious and cultural reality, not in the sense of combatting the West but rather as a challenge for us in Africa to anchor our contemporary African society and states on our own African religious and cultural matrix and terms.

This is the most important challenge of the dialogue in the meeting of Christianity with African religious and cultural traditions today. It is a challenge that needs a priority attention in the continent even as we grapple with the question of the dialogue between Christianity and Islam, which is a point of discussion for another day.

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