



**RUMO A UMA ABORDAGEM CRISTÃ DA RELIGIÃO
TRADICIONAL AFRICANA:
o desafio do diálogo inter-religioso**

**TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO AFRICA TRADITIONAL RELIGION:
the challenge of inter-religious dialogue**

**HACIA UN ACERCAMIENTO CRISTIANO DE LA RELIGIÓN
TRADICIONAL AFRICANA:
el desafío del diálogo interreligioso**

Nadi Maria de Almeida*

RESUMO

O diálogo inter-religioso é uma demanda para a missão. Com base na investigação teológica de estudiosos que exploram e escreve sobre o assunto, o artigo analisa o desafio teológico do diálogo inter-religioso, especialmente ao abordar as Religiões Tradicionais Africanas. A discussão diz respeito à teologia cristã do pluralismo religioso com a religião local na África, buscando o progresso teológico, não apenas do mundo abstrato dos livros, mas também de se conectar com a vida do povo, apreciando e conectando pontos de convergência com o mundo, cultura e religiões locais. Ainda há um longo caminho a percorrer na reflexão e é preciso abrir mais a nossa visão em relação à ação do Espírito que sempre esteve presente na África.

Palavras-chave: Missão. Diálogo. Religião Tradicional. Teologia Cristã.

ABSTRACT

Inter-Religious dialogue is a demand for the mission. Based on the theological investigation of scholars who explore and write on the subject, the article analyses the theological challenge of Inter-Religious dialogue especially in approaching African Traditional Religions. The discussion concerns the Christian theology of religious pluralism with the local religion in Africa looking at the theological progress, not just from the abstract world of books, but also, from connecting with the life of the people, appreciating and connecting points of convergences with the local culture and religions. Still, a long way to go on the reflection and there needs to open wider our vision concerning the action of the Spirit that has been always present in Africa.

Keywords: Mission. Dialogue. Traditional Religion. Christian Theology.

RESUMEN

El diálogo interreligioso es una exigencia de la misión. Basado en la investigación teológica de académicos que trabajan y escriben sobre el tema, el artículo analiza el desafío teológico del diálogo interreligioso, particularmente de las religiones tradicionales africanas. La discusión se refiere a la teología cristiana del pluralismo religioso con relación la religión local en África, buscando contribuir teológicamente, no en el ámbito abstracto de los libros, sino por conectarse

* Mestra em Teologia com foco em missão, pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná – PUCPR, doutoranda em teologia pela mesma universidade. Brasil. Bolsista Capes. ORCID: 0000-0002-5344-6378. E-mail: nadinadimaria@gmail.com.

con la vida de las personas, apreciando y estableciendo puntos de convergencia con el mundo, la cultura y las religiones locales. Todavía queda un largo camino por recorrer en la reflexión y es necesario abrir más nuestra visión en relación a la acción del Espíritu, que siempre ha estado presente en África.

Palabras Clave: Misión. Diálogo. Religión tradicional. Teología Cristiana.

1 INTRODUCTION

Religion is part of the cultural system. It is composed of the different beliefs of society including spiritual (invisible) elements, which express in some ways (rituals) within the community. Cultures, religions, and world-views provide some sense of belonging, while simultaneously provide a system of meaning and guidelines for behavior. In order to appreciate and respect differences, we need to learn to dialogue. Genuine dialogue is an attitude of listening attentively with interest, respect, and appreciation. This is the way to approach others with their differences. Thus, the dialogue is the tool and the point of departure in approaching any religion. It is a call to “widen the space of our tent”, to extend the curtains of our home (Is 54,2).

There are three different attitudes towards other religions: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism. First, Exclusivism is the belief that outside one’s system of beliefs there is no possibility of salvation. For instance, Christianity implies that without explicit faith in Jesus Christ and belonging to the Church, which is founded and lead by Him, there is no possibility of salvation. Thus, an exclusive perception of faith will not accept differences and most probably will not engage in dialogue (MAGESA, 1998, p. 12).

Second, Inclusivism states that God is present at least partially, with His will and His salvation also outside the Church, but the fullness of His presence is only to be found in His explicit revelation in Jesus Christ (LUMEN GENTIUM, n. 13). In all other religions, the presence of Christ is veiled and hidden because only God mysteriously known it (GAUDIUM ET SPES, n. 22).

Third, Pluralism bases on the experience of different religious traditions and raise many questions such as Is our religion the only true religion? Did God initiate religious pluralism and is He present in the same way everywhere? One possible answer is Pluralism. God has made man/woman as a social being and the religious and cultural diversity and plurality in the world is part of his creation and part of His will. Since God is an all-loving Father, He made salvation possible for all humankind. Therefore, aspects of salvation can be found in every religion and God must be present in every religion in various ways. This

implies that religions need to be respected because they have the same goal, God.

One of the aims of Inter-Religious Dialogue is to enrich mutually the respective partners with valuable insights, values believed and practiced. It should present an open attitude towards other religions and have a pluralistic vision. This paper will present African Traditional Religion in the context of a pluralistic perspective, the theological challenges of Inter-Religious Dialogue, and a Christian perspective of African Traditional Religion based on the writings of some Africans theologians. Finally, we will investigate the pluralistic vision and attitude presented by some Biblical and post- Vatican II Church Documents, and by remarks of African theologians of our time.

2 THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

When we meet people of other religions, we are challenged in our attitudes and reactions. We cannot go to people of other religions as if we have everything and they have nothing (FITZGERALD, 2003, p. 402). Therefore, to engage in Inter-Religious Dialogue means that first, we have to listen. To be able to listen we have to be silent, with deep respect, leaving aside all our prejudices. After listening, we can share our own views and thoughts in a humble way, making sure to present it not as a better view, but as a different view. Hence, we can enrich and learn from each other.

The challenge in Inter-Religious Dialogue is learning how to listen since other religious traditions can enrich our own lives and help us to move towards God. Anyone, who wants to participate in Inter-Religious Dialogue, possesses his/her own spiritual experiences to share. In the dialogue of theological exchange, specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their own religious heritage and that of others in order to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

Moreover, Inter-Religious Dialogue is not an easy task since often when people meet they do not share anything about their religion. Many people do not want to know anything about other religions and even know very little about their own. Inter-Religious Dialogue challenges us as Christians to cross our borders of ignorance to get more information about others and to be able to take the first step for dialogue. It challenges us to grow in our knowledge and understanding of our own religion, and to become aware of the richness and depths of other religions; we cannot love and appreciate what we do not know. Pope John Paul II states: "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way"

(*REDEMPTORIS MISSIO*, n. 57). Thus, dialogue should not be considered optional, since in society there are always people who belong to different religions.

The knowledge of other religions and respect for them are the first aims of Inter-Religious Dialogue. Conversion is welcome, but it should not condition the dialogue. It is necessary to remain open to the Spirit that blows everywhere. The Spirit is not limited to Christianity but works through different religions and cultures. The technological development in communication and in transportation in our modern times has the advantage of bringing people closer. Consequently, it becomes impossible for individuals to remain ignorant and indifferent to other religions, traditions, and cultures. Hence, the challenge of religious pluralism for Christian theology is to deepen the understanding of salvation offered to all. Furthermore, for a fruitful dialogue, it is necessary to learn well the language of the people, and this is another challenge since “foreign languages are always a serious drawback in the discussion of Africa Religion and other African realities” (MAGESA, 1998, p. 39).

Even though we are shaped by our own culture, it is possible to be relatively objective about other cultures and to understand and appreciate fairly well a specific cultural system by analogies from what we know already. Moreover, since nobody likes to be judged and condemned, when we approach other cultures and religions we should “take off our shoes because the ground we step in is holy” (Ex 3,5).

3 CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF AFRICA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

African Traditional Religion is a way of life that pervades every aspect of existence from conception to the grave. It is a way of living, eating, working, dancing, praying, offering sacrifices, etc. Thus, African Traditional Religion is not a religion that can be understood easily by analyzing its system of beliefs. A theology based in Africa's traditional religion has a diversity of meaning. “African Christian theology is a science or discipline that is responsible for understanding the Christian message in an Africa social context. The purpose of it is to see that the message of Christ is expressed in African categories and thought patterns” (SHORTER, 1998, p.64). Because Africa has a diversity of traditional religions, cultures, and languages there is a need for great theological development on the continent.

The transcendental element in ethics is evident in African Traditional Religion, where there is a realization of the presence of God (or the sacred) in the human being. Mbiti (1991, p. 71) says that it is impossible to understand ethics apart from religion in an Africa

Traditional context. Vice-versa he also holds the view that religion has dominated the thinking of African people to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, social life, political organizations and economic activities.

According to Arinze (1997, p. 12-13) the most common themes of studies and for dialogue between African Traditional Religion and Christianity are the God the Creator, the fundamental rights, priesthood, prayers, life after death and moral life. As well as, the sense of the sacred, respect and spiritual vision of life, the sense of community, the family spirit and symbolism in religious worship (ARINZE, 1997, p. 12-13). We shall explore a few of them.

Magesa (1998) writes that:

because African Religion has no written scriptures, even some liberal Western scholars of religion have been reluctant to consider it as any more than a 'tribal' religion. 'World' religions such as Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism all have their own written sources. Western scholars thus could neither conceive nor allow that a religion dependent on oral traditions. They could neither conceive nor allow that a religion dependent on oral tradition such as African Traditional Religion is, could be regarded as an equal (MAGESA, 1998, p. 22).

The concern of Africa Christian theology is to make Christian doctrine relevant in an Africa context. So, African Christian theology must be understood as having a foundation in an understanding of African Traditional Religion. The possibility of a correlation between Christianity and African Traditional Religion is presented clearly by Nyamiti (2005). He states that the "African theology is neither a new religious doctrine, nor a sort of syncretism between Christian teaching and African religious beliefs, but the very self-same authentic Christian doctrine expressed and presented in accordance with African mentality and needs" (NYAMITI, 2005, p. 3). He adds that African Theology does not add or subtract anything to the Catholic deposit of faith, but simply elaborates and presents it in an African way. It just gives a new interpretation, an African interpretation. Therefore, in the attempted dialogue of Christian theology with African Traditional Religion, some common themes can be taken for a possible correlation (NYAMITI, 2005, p. 3-4).

Africans believe in God the Creator. Their view of the universe is profoundly religious. Generally, they believe that God created the universe, and He is the only explanation of the origin of both visible and invisible realities and He sustains, keeps and upholds the universe. This creation does not stop but is in a continuous ongoing process. Human beings are placed at the center of the universe (MBITI, 1991, p. 43).

Africans look upon God as their Father who created them and as a provider of good things. In some places, he is called the *Great Ancestor*, *The Elder*, *The Grandfather*,

meaning that from Him all people and things have their origin. He is good, merciful, kind and can do everything. They believe he exists of his own, that He is spirit invisible and everlasting, but people can feel and know the effect of God in the universe. Moreover, God's nature remains a great mystery and a great marvel (MBITI, 1991, p. 49-59).

The purpose of worship is to renew contact and friendship between the visible and invisible. Worship is used to create harmony in the world and among humankind, and it is the main way for an African to approach God. Their prayers always accompany offerings and sacrifices, because people feel that they should not approach God with empty hands (MBITI, 1991, p. 145-146).

The view of the African community is that an individual exists only because other individuals exist. Therefore, Christianity and African Traditional Religion have many features, which do not conflict. "African religion and Christianity have become allies of each other" (MBITI, 1991, p. 189). Besides "the community includes not only the living but also the not-yet-born and the dead, who live in the village of the ancestor" (BUJO; MUYA, 2008, p. 131). The human being is understood from the viewpoint of the community. The individual becomes human insofar as he/she shares in the life of the community, in solidarity with others. Mbiti (1998) says that without such presupposition it is impossible to do Christian theology in Africa. Thus, Jesus has to be presented as the "Ancestor par excellence", communicating to human beings God's life and salvation.

According to Bujo; Muya (2008, p. 132) "becoming conscious of the centrality of the concept of life and of community in the African world View and of its ethical consequences, it becomes much easier to understand the sense and value of the ancestor in African life". Moreover, the Church as a Christian family has parallels with African Traditional Religion. Mbiti (1991, p. 190) states: "The Church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The Church also includes those who have died and those who are still alive. This is similar to the African view of the family which includes both the living and the departed".

Fr. Nyamiti (1984) elaborates a concrete theme about African theology in his book entitled "*Christ as our Ancestor*". He gives the definition of the scope of African theology in treating the problem of Christology by comparing the African brother-Ancestor relationship to Christ's relationship with man/woman, presenting similarities and differences, he states:

There are enough similarities between Christ's brother-relationship to men and that of the African brother-ancestor to show us that the two types of relationship have the same fundamental structure. The divergences, on the other hand, indicates the essential

differences of the levels on which this structure is situated and the way according to which it is found in both types of relationship. Thanks to these diversities Christ's brotherhood is revealed as the divine exemplar of its African counterpart (NYAMITI, 1984, p. 23).

The religious practices of pre-Christian Africa should be respected and accepted as a reflection of past experiences, which have been inherited. The Supreme Being is observed in nature and in its activities such as rain, harvest, childbirth, and so on; but there is no written scripture. However, there are varieties of stories in African Traditional Religion about God and creation. Hence, African Traditional Religion forms the largest fountain from which African theology should draw. Nonetheless, since it is a religion without any written codes or special revelations, all of its teaching about God and creation draws largely from observing nature and mediating people, from participating in their prayer and rituals, and from studying their religious symbols and proverbs.

4 TOWARD A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM WITH AFRICA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

People of all cultures see religion as a necessary part of their life. Generally, people of any culture ask questions about their existence and the existence of the world. Religion often answers questions, which cannot know elsewhere, not even in science. For instance, the question of suffering and pain in the world, what happens after death and the destiny of the soul, the purpose of human life, and so forth. Furthermore, religion tells us what is right and what is wrong, good and evil, just and unjust, what is a virtue and what is a vice (MBITI, 1991, p. 198). Besides, it is only religion, which nourishes the spiritual part of the human being. These apply in different ways and manners to all religions in the world. Here we meet the question about religious pluralism. Is it the will of God that we have a pluralism of religions? Religious pluralism has only one explanation, which is that all human beings seek, search, and long for God in different ways. Nevertheless, all people have the same goal: God, the creator, the One who answers all human longings. Hence, the pluralism of religions is the creative way to meet the same God in different ways.

In this way, we should not say that one religion is right, and another is wrong, that one is saving and that another is not. Everyone should know that every religion has things to purify and values to share that can enrich others. Therefore, in approaching African Traditional Religion, we must have a pluralistic outlook and attitude in as much as our concerns are religious. "In directing people to put their trust in God, religion is doing the

best it can for men, by showing them both their origin and their destination. This is what in its own limited ways African Religion has done for African people throughout their history” (MBITI, 1991, p. 201).

Religious pluralism has given a positive recognition in the post-Vatican II Church. For instance, African Traditional Religion is considered as a genuine religious experience of African people in their encounter with the divine. In *Africae Terrarum*, Pope Paul VI calls for an exchange of meaning between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. He recognizes that African people have a religious expression properly and uniquely African. He writes:

Many customs and rites, once considered to be strange are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect. In this regard, we think it profitable to dwell on some general ideas which typify ancient African religious cultures because we think their moral and religious values deserving of attentive consideration (AFRICAЕ TERRARUM, 1967, n. 7).

Pope John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “*Ecclesia in Africa*” states, “Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the creator and of a spiritual world” (*ECCLESIA IN AFRICA*, n. 42). A letter of Cardinal Arinze (1997) addressed to the bishops of Africa and Madagascar urges them to give serious pastoral attention to African Traditional Religion. It recommends dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, for their enrichment and for empowering the Church to respect peoples’ cultures to preserve all that is noble, true and good. The letter looks at the African Traditional Religion beliefs particularly in what matches with Christianity with a spirit of love and respect.

The characteristic point in African Theology is the fact of pluralism in theology. Pope Paul VI made this point clear in his address to the bishops in Kampala in 1969, addressing at the closing of the African bishop’s Symposium that “certain pluralism is not only legitimated but desirable” (PAUL VI, 1969, p. 405). Thus, African Theology will necessarily include unity and an enriching variety of cultural expressions and this implies that it will involve a plurality of theologies.

Africa has numerous tribes, and thus different cultures, customs, languages, beliefs, and patterns. As a result, theology must be from concrete life experience and contextualized. Theology must be “faithful to the tradition of the Church and respectful to our traditions and languages, that is our philosophies (...). Only an African theology authentic to the fundamental aspirations of the African people shall effectively make Christianity incarnate

in the life of the people of Africa” (RICHARD, 1975, p. 135). Therefore, in approaching the plurality of African cultures and religions we are challenged to have a cosmic vision and attitude towards these creative and diverse ways of approaching God.

For instance, Fr. Nyamiti (1984, p. 69) sees “God as Ancestor” found implicitly in the sources of Christian theology writers. Drawing upon and developing parallels between the African ancestor relationship and the complex relationship among the three persons of the Trinity, he presents an analogous form of ancestral relationship that exists in God himself. He is convinced that we can connect with African values and make the Trinity relevant to Africa.

Thus, taking into account that God and religion always were relevant in Africa, we cannot approach African Traditional Religion with suspicious eyes, because the “ground where we step in is holy”. One of the greatest values the missionaries found in Africa is monotheism. The reality is that everybody knows God, but He is an Unknown God; thus, he is a mystery. In the revelation of a loving Father, who has a Son and gave the Holy Spirit, God remains a mystery. The fact is that people find different ways to approach God.

African ancestral relationship includes the idea of kinship as an indispensable factor. Consanguinity is an important element in African traditional life starting from the conception of ancestral kinship. They believe that the ancestors are close to God. To attain ancestral status the person must have lived a good moral and exemplary life in the community. It is the model of an ancestor in African Traditional Religion that Nyamiti uses to relate analogically to God as Trinity. The Father is for the Son who is a perfect image, just as the African ancestors are the exemplary or model for their sons and daughters (NYAMITI, 1984, p. 71).

The mutual love of the Father and Son is perfect; it involves the giving of each other, so the Holy Spirit is the fruit and expression of their reciprocal love. Charles Nyamiti (1984, p. 73) concludes that all the elements are essential to the African conception of the ancestor and are applied to the Father in his relationship to the Son, although, of course, in an infinitely higher and radically different manner. The Holy Spirit is the reciprocal Gift and oblation of the Father and Son and the expression of their mutual ancestral love, homage, and gratitude. Nyamiti writes:

In the Trinity, the Father and the Son the Ancestor and Descendant cannot be understood except in terms of their intrinsic relation to their mutual communication in the divine Spirit seen as their mutual Oblation. We are lead to this conclusion by examining the relationship between the Father and the Son in the light of African understanding of ancestors’ relationship (NYAMITI, 1984, p. 77).

However, these are only analogies that help us to approach the religious pluralism of African Traditional Religion, in a positive way, though seeing the presence of the Trinity already imprinted in them.

Furthermore, African Traditional Religion is described as notoriously tolerant, accommodating and inclusive of other religious traditions, because they are open, “ready to incorporate into their system other deities and ideas” (FALOLA, 1988, p. 5). In the question of Pluralism, African Traditional Religion gives a lesson in respect and acceptance, since it is open to dialogue.

With Vatican II there was a positive attitude towards world religions in Catholic theology. There is more space for a more positive orientation, on which contemporary theology has attempted to build, promote and justify Inter-religious Dialogue. The idea of a “cosmic covenant between God and humanity originating with the act of creation itself; the religious tradition of humanity are the chosen testimonials of his covenant with the nations” (DUPUIS, 1997, p. 33). Gentiles have been called righteous outside the Israelite covenant; they also have been justified as witnesses to the goodness and holiness found in other religious traditions.

The historical theology debate on the Inter-religious Dialogue from the Fathers of the Church until Vatican II has been summed up in the statement of the Magisterium: “Outside the Church, no salvation. [Extra ecclesiam nulla salus]’. This axiom gradually received an increasingly rigid interpretation” (DUPUIS, 1997, p. 89).

However, along history when missionaries reached new territories, this theology came into question. Because “salvation comes from Christ the head through the Church which is his body, (...) the affirmation is not aimed at those who through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church” (THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 846-847). Moreover, the texts of Vatican II state clearly that God offers himself to all:

Those who do not yet receive the Gospel are related to the people of God (...). The plan of Salvation includes those who acknowledge the creator (...), nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God. Nor shall divine providence denies the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life (*LUMEN GENTIUM*, n. 16).

Recognizing the goodness, grace, and truth of different religions does not mean to accept blindly everything they have or to conceal our faith in Christ, because all religions

tradition needs to be purified of something.

Today Inter-religious Dialogue is an issue considerably debated in theological circles. In the case of “African Traditional Religion, they can be seen as a preparation for the Gospel, because they contain precious *semina Verbi*” (*ECCLESIA IN AFRICA*, n. 67). However, a number of theologians are dissatisfied with this theory since it does not, according to them, guarantee due respect for non-Christian religious traditions. When Christians claim that other religions reach their fulfillment in Christianity, then they appear disrespectful, arrogant and presumptuous to adherents of other religions.

The conclusion is that a theology of Religious Pluralism vis-à-vis African Traditional Religion should result in a broadened vision and an appreciation of reality for the individual and for the community in dialogue. We know that dialogue is an attitude of listening, of welcoming, with respect and flexibility. Thus, we are called as Isaiah says to “Widen the space of our tent’, to ‘extend the curtains of our home and lengthen our ropes”, (Isiah, 54:2) to transform mental categories and prejudices towards a Christian theology of Religious Pluralism in relation to African Traditional Religion.

5 FINAL REMARKS

According to Jesus’ teaching, the neighbor to love can be the one with a different religious belief, i.e., the Samaritan, the Roman Officer, and so on. Hence, the mission is done through friendly contacts with the neighbor. Dialogue is part of Christ’s Mission, and of evangelization because every act of witness and sharing of faith is part of proclamation even if the aim is not to convert the other. Moreover, we must not forget that we are not the only ones who have the light. We are called to be the light for the world, but the source of light is God, and He gives the light to all (Jo, 1,9). The light and the truth are not bound to the Church; they are there but also exist outside the Church’s clear boundaries. Jesus is the light of the world, but the Church doesn’t own this light in an exclusive way. For example, if you have a candle the light will shine for everybody in the room not only for those you want. Likewise, the sun is shining for everyone good or bad, black, white, believers of African Traditional Religion, Muslims, Jews, etc. Likewise, the light of God shines for everyone.

The aim of the mission is to bring people to the possibility of gaining peace with themselves, with God and their neighbor. This peace can be achieved in a good and acceptable way through Inter-religious Dialogue.

Inter-Religious Dialogue is an exchange of shared experiences, ideas and values in a respectful and an open attitude. This is the only way we can know our own values and beliefs by opening ourselves to others. Through such an experience of diversity, we are able to reach a more acute awareness of our own identity, of who we are and what we believe.

Individuals outside Christian revelation have also full access to salvation in Christ, before having heard anything about Him. “Anonymous Christianity is lived by the members of their traditions in the sincere practice of their own tradition” (DUPUIS, 1997, p. 145).

Therefore, the openness to Christ of history would come as a climax and normal consequence in the relationship, since the Spirit of God is already there even before Christ has been explicitly proclaimed. “Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning (...). Christ does not belong to Christianity he belongs to God. It is Christianity and Hinduism as well that belong to Christ, though in different levels” (DUPUIS, 1997, p. 149-150). This understanding encourages respect since it considers the other religion as “sacred ground”, a mark of God to be preserved and protected.

Finally, Inter-religious Dialogue is manifold, the novelty of the task that may cause fear in pastoral and theological fields. To be challenged by other’s ideas, religions and cultures can cause fear. So, one needs a secure religious and psychological basis upon which he/she can build before serenely engaging in Inter-religious Dialogue. The opportunity exists to affirm the good that we find outside our religious system and to enrich ourselves by creating bridges of understanding and unity. However, what we see is that often hostility and hatred grow out of ignorance, prejudices, and fears rather than real issues.

Today, we realize that Inter-Religious Dialogue is an integral part of the mission of the Church. Without forgetting the privileged position held by the Christian revelation, the quest of God is now taking part through God’s precious gifts which He granted abundantly all over the earth within the different cultures and religions.

With this pluralistic vision, African theologians have attempted to design a Christian theology based on the traditional mode of African religion. Some theologians argue that African ancestors have a role in the doctrine of the communion of saints as presented in the Church. Bénézet Bujo believes that Jesus is the first ancestor but transcends all others. For Charles Nyamiti, Christ may be regarded as an Ancestor because just as the human ancestor establishes a link between the spiritual world and that of the living, so Jesus by his crucifixion establishes a mystical link between God and the Christian communities (NSEKA 2013). He goes far with his theological reflection and does an analogy between the African ancestors and the Trinity. Therefore, Africans have not only a link with the cosmos and the

group, but they also experience intensely the vertical dimension of their spiritual life.

Today, as the Spirit of religious intolerance and exclusivism is being replaced slowly by the spirit of interreligious tolerance with dialogue and mutual respect, African Traditional Religion is also slowly finding its place in the orchestra of the world religions. True spiritual and moral values have been recognized as part of the religious and moral patrimony of humankind (ECCLESIA IN AFRICA, n. 36).

African theology should be instilled with authentic African values having an impact on daily life. It should consider traditional sharing as the fundamental spiritual center that characterizes Africa human and religious experiences; it should be an African theological discourse based on the religious experience of the people (BUJO, 2008, p. 102). God used to speak through their religious experiences before the arrival of the Christian missionaries through the voice of their ancestors. Consequently, “Our customs and traditions are not fundamentally evil. They ought to be read and criticized in the light of the Gospel before talking about possible contraction between them and Christian Morals” (BUJO, 2008, p. 113) Bujo stresses the African concept of life as a gift of God as well as the centrality of the ancestors and the community. A Christian Pluralistic Approach to African Traditional Religion is a challenge to open wider our vision in relation to the action of the Spirit that has been always present in Africa. We are challenged to have a cosmic vision of the presence of God in the Plurality of African Traditional Religion in the whole continent of Africa.

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