TEACHING INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS PART OF THE SYLLABI OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A COURSE DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Inter-religious dialogue is one topical issue that is promoted in the modern time. It is an issue which dominated the minds of Muslim thinkers and theologians. The recent call to dialogue between religions and adherents of diverse faiths is mostly promoted by world Christian bodies (the Vatican and World Council of Churches) in a peculiar context which is perceived by many as a new method of Christian evangelism, thus it was marred with suspicion and rejection by many Muslim scholars. However, dialogue is not new to Islam, as the Qur’an, the Sunnah and Islamic history make reference to dialogue with peoples of other faiths as well as prescribe it modalities. In addition, dialogue is an inevitable phenomenon due to migration, globalization and missionary nature of many religions which has led to religious pluralism in societies. In Nigeria, as it is elsewhere in the world, Christians are the protagonists of inter-religious dialogue; they train their clergies on its techniques, modalities and principles. While on the other hand, Muslims, who are the targets of the Christian dialogue, are less concerned about teaching inter-religious dialogue in their institutions. This paper proposes the inclusion of a course on inter-religious dialogue from Islamic perspective as part of the syllabus of Islamic Studies in Nigerian Universities to equip students with the reality of dialogue, the Qur’anic teaching concerning it, to study the Christian conception of inter-religious dialogue in the modern time and how Muslims should respond. This paper highlights briefly on the issues.

Field of Research: Islamic Studies, Inter-religious dialogue, Teaching Syllabus

1. Introduction

Pluralism of tribe and religion is the major factor that often polarizes the Nigerian polity. Division along these lines has been a major bane on its development. This is due to the fact that every developmental step taken by the government is perceived with prejudice to religion and tribal affiliation. However, the country’s National Policy of Education has the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity as part of its four aims and objectives. This implies that any educational endeavor that is to be pursued in Nigeria must foster unity and nationalism among its peoples of diverse tribes and religions.

Though the teachings and spirit of Islam promote unity and peaceful co-existence with peoples of different faiths, the syllabus of Islamic Studies in Nigerian universities has less concern for spelling out dialogue, its techniques, history and the perspective of Islam on it as an individual subject in the programme. This is without prejudice to the fact that the general programme consists of hints about religious dialogue in Islam, especially the history of Islam. In addition, the syllabus also consists of two subjects that have direct bearing on dialogue from Islamic perspective as a subject. The subjects are Comparative Study of Religions and the Relationship between Islam and the West and the Impact on the Modern Muslim World. These are however, devoid of Islamic teaching on dialogue, its principles and modalities.
On the other hand, since interaction and sometimes countering Islam was a major aim of Christianity in Nigeria from its introduction, the eyes of its early missionaries was on Islam since it has been establishment in the area for many centuries before their coming. Ayandele, one of Nigeria’s most prominent Church historians, wrote in his work, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, that “the missionaries fixed their eyes on Sokoto caliphate as the real battle ground where they should enlist against the Muslims”. The Christian Missionaries therefore came to Nigeria with the preparation to face Islam. The founder of Sudan United Mission (SUM), Karl Kumm, in a message to encourage some missionaries going to Nigeria, stated that:

The principal thing (was) to show no fear for Islam, and attack it, where it reigns exclusively, meet it without fear at the frontiers and prevent it from going beyond these frontiers to gain territory for Christianity. Muslims in many parts of Nigeria resisted the rugged evangelism of the Christian missionaries and this has led to confrontations among the adherents of the two religions. In the South west of Nigeria for instance, in the 1880s Rev. A. F. Foster attended many Muslim communal gatherings, including Tafsir in the month of Ramadan to persuade Muslims to Christianity. Rev. J.S Oyebode engaged in public debates with Muslims and others who equally followed suit were I. A. Braithwaite, James Okunseinde and A. W Smith. This strategy was adopted after the failure of earlier evangelistic efforts which led to the resolution at the 1875 Edinburg conference of missionaries to have “a special mission of Mohammedans”. Rev. James Johnson spearheaded missionary activities in Muslim areas of Yoruba land; he sought training in Arabic and Islamic Studies along with other missionaries such as Rev. T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, M. S. Cole and M. T. Euler Ajayi. This was due to their conviction that a Yoruba Muslim cannot be converted without knowing the content of his books. Similar efforts were as well made in Northern Nigeria where missionaries of CMS known as the Sudan Party went further than learning Arabic and Hausa to wearing Muslim cloths including the turban.

Western education was also used by missionaries to convert young Muslims to Christianity. This led then to the abhorrence of western education among Muslims. Apart from that, Muslims also became suspicious of relation with Christian missionaries. The Christian missionaries in Nigeria therefore, became the protagonists of interfaith dialogue, thus according to Theresa Adamu “...Muslims see dialogue as a form of missionary enterprise...” This writer analyzed this perspective by Muslims in other works. More so that the Christian proponents of dialogue themselves affirm evangelism as the interior motive for inviting Muslims to dialogue. From the independence of Nigeria in 1960 to date there have been many invitations to dialogue as well as encounters which were mostly initiated by the Christian. One important issue that is of importance to this paper is that most institutions offering Christians Studies in Nigeria offer inter-religious dialogue as a course at diploma, degree and postgraduate levels. Some institutions in their Christian Studies departments have specializations on inter-religious dialogue at postgraduate levels. The Department of Religious Studies of the University of Ibadan has had such programme since 1980, apart from the undergraduate courses.

The University of Jos, from where this writer obtained his Bachelor and Master degrees in Islamic studies, opened his eye on the study of dialogue as a course. The Department of Religious Studies which houses Islamic Studies, Christian Religious Studies, Arabic and Africa Traditional Religion has a course with the title “Dialogue in a Pluralistic Society” (Rel. 314) as a compulsory course for students of Christian Religious Studies, and as elective course for students of Islamic Studies and Africa
Traditional Religion. This writer was fortunate to study the course taught by, a professor sociology of religion, Cyril Imo. The course content includes conceptualizing dialogue, pluralistic society and religious pluralism. It also consists of the importance of the course to contemporary society, responses to religious pluralism, purpose and need for dialogue, forms of dialogue, impediments to dialogue, principles and rules for dialogue and Muslims and Christian relations in Nigeria.\(^\text{17}\)

At postgraduate level, the department also has an M.A programme in interaction of religions which is basically taught by teachers of Christian religious studies with compulsory courses from Islamic studies.\(^\text{18}\)

This paper intends to look at the importance of dialogue as a course of study for students of Islamic studies in Nigeria and among Muslims in general with an aim of suggesting a possible design for the course at degree level in Nigerian universities.

2. A Brief Survey of the Syllabi of Islamic Studies in Nigeria

Islamic scholarship in Nigeria goes back to its advent. The first contact between Islam and some parts of Nigeria was in the 7\(^\text{th}\) century and by the 11\(^\text{th}\) century it has become a state religion in the Kanem Borno Empire.\(^\text{19}\)

The first university to offer a degree in Islamic Studies in Nigeria was the University of Ibadan, which started a programme of Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1961 and established an autonomous department in 1962 after being in the Department of History for a year.\(^\text{20}\) Ahmad Bello University Zaria under its Abdullahi Bayero College Kano (later Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies) accepted its first set of students in 1963/64 session. Other universities equally followed suit when they were established.\(^\text{21}\) Nigeria now has more than 20 institutions awarding degree in Islamic Studies. The syllabus of the programme has been centred on general knowledge of Islamic Studies without any specific area of specialization, as it is in most Arab countries and elsewhere. The lack of areas of specialization options in Islamic studies in Nigeria affects the quality of graduates in Nigeria if the multifaceted nature of Islamic Studies is to be taken into cognizance. Doi summarized the contents of the syllabus in five points:

- a) The social, political and religious institutions of the Muslim peoples, with special reference to Arab, the Mediterranean area and West Africa.
- b) The process of Islamization inside and outside Muslim domain with special reference to North and West Africa
- c) Muslim law, its growth, development and its position in present day society.
- d) Qur’anic and Hadith studies, including the development of exegesis and the role of Hadith in legal, social and theological thinking.
- e) Muslim theology, philosophy and religious movements including the Sufi-orders and modern Islamic political movements.\(^\text{22}\)

Had it been Nigeria has the same arrangement of option of specialization, as it is in Arab and other countries, this writer would have suggested dialogue to be placed under the Department of Da’wah, where it will be given a depth studies and it would as well be taught as a general studies for other students in other branches of Islamic Studies. Yet it will not be out of place in the present arrangement if inter-religious dialogue should be introduced as 3 credits course for students. Another subject which is equally lacking in the syllabus of Islamic Studies is Da’wah, its principle and modern methods.
3. Concept and Forms of Inter-religious Dialogue

The English term of the word “dialogue” comprises of a word and a prefix before it. The word is *logos* which means conversation or discussion, while the prefix *dia*- means “through”, “across” or “apart”. Thus, from its literal meaning it means discussion or conversation across. *Oxford Advance Learners’ Dictionary* describes dialogue as a formal discussion between two groups or countries, especially when they are trying to solve a problem or end a dispute. The English literary meaning hints about the Arabic terms that denote dialogue; they are *al-Hiwr* “discussion and speaking” which is explained as “*mujwabah wa muraja’t al-mantiq wa al-kalam fi al-mukhātaba*” i.e. giving answers and repeating an issue in a discussion. This was why sometimes the term *Mujدادل* which means ‘argument’ and ‘debate’ is used to signify dialogue. This is not far from the fact that the Qur’an used the terms synonymously in Qur’an 58:1:

Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to Allah: and Allah (always) hears the argument between both sides among you: for Allah hears and sees (all things).

However, the term *Mujدادل* (*jidāl*) may also mean dispute and argument in which the person involves is characterized with mental stubbornness in an effort to defend the truth or negate a fallacy. In giving a verdict regarding to People of the Book, the Qur’an used the term thus “and do not dispute with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation)” (29:46).

Ismā’il Ibrāhīm gave different definitions of dialogue which include: a sort of discussion between two persons or groups, in which there would be exchange of conversations between the two parties on the level of equality, and that one party, will not seek to use it to influence or overpower the other. Such conversation is often characterized by calmness and is far from conflicts and prejudice. He further describes dialogue as an exchange of ideas between two parties in an intellectual way with the aim of attaining the truth.

Chukwulozie describes it as a form of meeting and communication between individual groups, and communities to bring about a greater gaps of the truth and to achieve better human relations in a spirit of sincerity, respect for persons, and mutual trust.

This brings us to inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue. According to Wikipedia, the World Council of Churches (WCC) distinguishes between these two terms, to the Council, inter-Religious dialogue amongst Christian denominations, whereas inter-faith dialogue means Christian interaction between Christians and different faith groups such as Muslims and Jews. This is due to the fact that in the modern usage, Christians especially the Vatican popularized its usage and that was why a contemporary Muslim scholar Yahya Hashim Hasan Fargal rejects inter-religious dialogue in the modern context as un-Islamic because it aims at undermining Islam and subduing the Muslims politically and religiously. He notes that it was popularized in the modern context by the Frenchman Count Alexanre de Marenches in the early 1970s. Marenches initially called it Islam-Christian dialogue which later metamorphosed into inter-religious dialogue (*al-Hiwr al-Dini*). Fargal further criticized the usage of inter-religious dialogue as a means of Christian evangelism since it was designed and carried out by the Vatican. He as well cited documents showing the objective of dialogue with Muslims as a means of evangelism. Fargal holds that the only accepted dialogue in Islam is religious debates aimed at defeating falsehood.

Nevertheless, inter-religious dialogue in the modern usage is, according to Wikipedia, the cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and beliefs at both individual and institutional levels, with the aim of deriving a common ground in belief through...
concentration on similarities between faiths and the understanding of values and commitment to the world. It involves promotion between different religions to increase acceptance of others.\(^{33}\) Gwamma quoted Ilori who describes inter-religious dialogue as “the international engagement with persons of other faiths for mutual understanding, co-operation and learning”.\(^{34}\) According to Solihin et al, in \(al\)-\(Hiwār\) \(al\)-\(Dini\) “contains certain things to seek an understanding between religious believes...” and its purposes is to achieve peaceful life among all religious adherents”.\(^{35}\) This writer elsewhere, after examining the different definitions simply puts inter-religious dialogue as:

> A process of discussion or conversation between people of different and diverse faiths with the aim of ending mutual mistrust and prejudice and promoting a mutual respect. It may also be a contact established to talk through on religious questions, to ascertain their truth from the perspective of people of diverse faith and achieve full and better understanding concerning them. A discussion to grasps areas of similarities in the doctrine of the people of diverse religious traditions in order to create a mutual ground of collaboration as humans is also called dialogue.\(^{36}\)

It is worth noting here that dialogue is not a subtle form of proclamation, and it is not an exercise in syncretism.\(^{37}\) I. M. Maishanu added another dimension to the conception of dialogue by Muslims and Christians. According to him, Christian conception of dialogue means learning from each other, communication, inter-religious relations, mutual understanding and enrichment which is hoped to lead to common goal in finding more of the meaning of life.\(^{38}\) On the other hand, in Islam, “the purpose of dialogue is arriving at, through mutual efforts, the truth, which every religion claims to possess”.\(^{39}\) Maishanu cited Ismail al-Faruqi’s definition of dialogue as: “the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder claim to the truth win”.\(^{40}\)

Therefore, the end of dialogue is to assert the truth. Thus dialogue as conceived by Muslims may be another word for \(Da\’wah\).\(^{41}\) Nevertheless, Christians as well see dialogue as a means of promoting their religion since most of the Church’s documents on dialogue described it as a means of Christian witness.\(^{42}\)

In accordance with Church manuals, Dialogue and Proclamation\(^{43}\) of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies by the World Council of Churches, scholars have classified dialogue into four, namely:\(^{44}\)

1. Dialogue of Life: This happens in a pluralistic society where people of different religious persuasions interact in different spheres of life be it economic, political or social. Cardinal Onaiyekan calls this “dialogue in spite of faith”,\(^{45}\) because in spite of their difference in religion, they work, live and share things together.

2. Dialogue of Action: Onaiyekan calls this “dialogue in faith”, and it is a dialogue on common issues whereby people of different religions would come together to struggle for a common course of concern to the society. The joint action may be geared towards struggle for justice, peace, human rights, alleviation of suffering, provision of social welfare facilities etc. Opeloye wrote on this that “it is quite possible since those values are well entrenched in all revealed religions”.\(^{46}\)

3. Dialogue of Religious Experience: It is also called dialogue of spirituality. Whereby a member of a particular religious persuasion shares in the religious experience of the people of other faiths. Examples of this include the attendance of midnight mass at the Church of Nativity Bethlehem by the late Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat.\(^{47}\) This form has been criticized as compromising ones religious integrity and a form of syncretism.\(^{48}\)

4. Dialogue of Theological Exchange: it is also called dialogue of discourse. Onaiyekan calls it “dialogue of faith”. In this form of dialogue, specialists discuss theological doctrines and
practices, the aim is to appreciate each others’ spiritual values, amplify areas of convergence, correct misconception and explain one another’s view points.

These are forms of dialogue that conform to the Christian and Western conception of inter-religious dialogue. Maishanu suggested that we add another type which is the dialogue of truth” and he described it thus:

Where people of different faiths strive to reach to and grasp the truth through exchange of different conceptions of that Truth, with the aim of succumbing to the soundest and strongest of truths and accepting it. Because Truth is irrefutably one, it is exclusivist. It is only through dialogue that various conflicting claims to the truth can be resolved or at least pondered over... 49

This now brings us to the position of Islam on inter-religious dialogue.

4. The Position of Islam on Inter-religious Dialogue and its Significance as a Course of Study

Some Muslim scholars see the Christian calls for dialogue with Muslims in the modern notion as something that should be rejected. The points of contention are basically the sense of mistrust towards the West and the use of dialogue as a means of promoting their religions. It is aimed at strengthening the Christian beliefs in individual Christians through studying other religion to prevent them from conversion, to soften the general awakening among Muslims in parts of globe, and to find the secret behind the failure of missionaries in Muslim societies. 50

In addition, the Church documents calling for dialogue do not hide the evangelistic purpose of the dialogue. Ali ‘Abdul Qadir 51 quoted the afore mentioned Dialogue and Proclamation of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, which states thus: “while entering with an open mind into dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, Christians may have also to challenge them in a peaceful spirit with regard to the content of their belief”. 52 In another place, the document says:

Proclamation and dialogue are both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the church. They are both oriented towards the communication of the salvic truth. 53

Abdul Qadir Ali also rejects, as Maishanu did, the notion that inter-religious dialogue should not be between systems of belief or religion but on humanistic grounds. They both argue that it should not then be called inter-religious from the onset. 54 The only dialogue accepted by Abdul Qadir Ali and his likes is only the Dialogue of Truth, whereas Maishanu holds that dialogue should start from this type before the others. Another issue touched by Ali is the issue of syncretism which is apparent in the dialogue of spirituality.

To state the position of Islam on inter-religious dialogue in the modern notion, it is pertinent to examine each type stated above in accordance with the teaching of Islam. It is yet important to state that Islam is a religion that maintains an inclusivist position towards other Abrahamic religions. Islam teaches what was preached by Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other Prophets of Allah and the difference arose only through distortions by followers of the Prophets before Muhammad, particularly the Jews and Christians. Allah says:

Say (O Muslims), “we believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Ismā’il (Ishmael), Ishāq (Isaac), Ya’qūb (Jacob), and Al-Asbāt (the offspring of the twelve sons of Ya’qub (Jacob), and that which has been given to Mūsā (Moses) and Isā (Jesus), and that which has been given to Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam) (2:136).
The Qur’an also rejects the exclusivist claim of the Judeo-Christians when it states:

And they say none shall enter paradise except he who is a Jew or a Christian, these are their vain desires. Say bring your proof if you are truthful. Nay whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is a doer of good (to others), he has his reward from his Lord and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve (2:111-112).

1. Dialogue of life: this is a form of dialogue which Islam not only encouraged, but was also practiced by the Prophet (S.A.W). The Prophet never isolated the Muslim community from others, he interacted with people of other faiths, even at Makkah when he was persecuted by polytheist, and he was also given properties for safekeeping by those who persecuted him. In addition, Madinah, the place where the Prophet migrated to, was more pluralistic than Makkah, the Prophet traded with non-Muslims and was fond of visiting their sick ones.

2. Dialogue of Action: this was also practiced by the Prophet (S.A.W). The best example for this is that the prophet sent Muslims persecuted in Makkah to seek asylum, justice and right to worship God unhindered at the hands of Christian King Negus of Abyssinia. When the Prophet (S.A.W) reached al-Madinah, the Prophet established a commonwealth of Islam, justice, fairness rule of law, and equal right for all citizens was promoted for all citizens. The Jews and other non-Muslims were part of the charter signed with the Prophet (S.A.W) that they will all unite against common enemies.

3. Dialogue of Spirituality of Religious Experience: Islam does not support this type of dialogue as it is syncretism. Furthermore, Islam encourages a form of dialogue which is opposite to this. In classifying dialogue, Muslin Tayo Yahya called one form, dialogue of “live and let live”. It is an inter-faith dialogue which emphasizes that everyone should stick to his own religious practice. This principle is contained in Qur’an 109:1-6:

Say: o you that reject faith! I do not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which you have been wont to worship, Nor will you worship that which I worship. To you be your Way and to me mine.

This chapter was revealed after the polytheists of Makkah made attempts to lure the Prophet into worshipping idols with them on the basis of dialogue of spirituality. They proposed to the Prophet to join them to worship their deities for a year and they would join him in worshiping Allah the next year.

4. Dialogue of Theological Exchange: Muslims scholars who opposed this form of dialogue hold that its procedure negates the irrefutability of oneness of the truth. This is so because often times, proponents of this form of dialogues hold that no religion possesses absolute truth. Dialogue of theological exchange often intends to avoid areas of differences and the conversion to the truth is also not intended. Opponents of this form of dialogue see it as of no value, and believe it may sometimes lead to syncretism and rejection of the Truth.

Despite the above arguments which cannot be totally dispelled, this form of dialogue can still be useful for a good Muslim Da’i, to explain Islam to non-Muslims who hitherto held misrepresentation about it. The Qur’an mentioned some People of the Book at the time of the Prophet who had knowledge about Islam but conceal it:“Those to whom we gave the scripture recognize him (Muhammad, S.A W) as they recognize their sons. But verily, a party of them conceals the truth while they know it” (2:146).
It was also in the prophetic traditions that early Muslims used to ask the non-Muslims about the description of the Prophet in their scriptures. Many times they conceal it due to envy. But as for the Jews and Christians of today, “long centuries of human interference, intervention and interpretation have made those traits and pictures blurred and not recognizable except by few scholars and true seekers of truth through the ages.” This form of dialogue gives opportunity to Muslims to present the true teaching of Islam. It is important to mention that in most cases, Christians who engage in dialogue with Muslims engage in a form of Study of Islam which is full of misinterpretations and misrepresentations. The participation in dialogue avails Muslims the opportunity to present the truth.

Furthermore, this form of dialogue cannot be dispelled as not having precedent in Islam. In his classification of inter-religious dialogue, M.T. Yahya, called one form a dialogue of “let the sleeping dog lie”. The purpose of this form is solely knowledge. This can be understood in comparison with Qur’anic verses where Allah affirms the falsehood of deities worshiped by the polytheists, e.g. 13:14; 22:62, yet in a spirit of letting the sleeping dog lie, Allah gives behaviours and the guidelines on how to relate with the polytheists in Qur’an 6:106-108. It states:

You do not revile whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus have We made alluring to each people its own dongs. In the end will they return to their Lord and We shall tell them the truth of all that they did.

This does not prohibit proselytization, but warns against provocation. This message is contained in Qur’an 16:127 which says “Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching”. Another form of dialogue close to that of theological exchange which as well, conforms with the Shari’ah is what Yahya called dialogue of “conciliation and common course” Allah in the Qur’an ordained the Prophet to call Christians and Jews to a dialogue in the following way:

Say: “O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship non but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than Allah. “If then they turn back say: “Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (blowing to Allah’s Will) (3:64).

The Qur’an therefore encourages the dialogue of finding areas of commonalities between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Qur’an says:

And nearest among them in love to the believers will you find those who say, we are Christians: because among these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: “our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses (5:82:83).

The Qur’an further confirms areas of convergence when it says:

And dispute you not with the people of the book, except with means better (than mere disputations), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, “we believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is one, and it is to Him we bow (in Islam) (29:46).

There is relationship between this form of dialogue and the next to be discussed.
5. **Dialogue of Truth:** The Qur’an in many places called upon the People of the Book to discuss the issue of truth with Muslims with cognitive evidences. Many cases of instance include when Jews and Christians said they would be the only dweller of paradise, the Qur’an charged them to produce evidence if they are saying the truth (Qur’an 2:111).

In another place, Allah commands His Messengers to say to those who reject faith that he demands of them only one thing, to examine his claim to prophethood with the power of reason. The Qur’an puts it:

> Say (to them O Muhammad): “I exhort you to one (thing) only: that you stand up for Allah’s sake in pairs and singly and reflect (within yourselves): there is no madness in your companion (Muhammad). He is only a warner to you in the face of a severe torment (34:46).

This verse obviously calls to the dialogue of Truth. Furthermore, the aforementioned verse of the Qur’an 3:64, also calls People of the Book to the dialogue of Truth, by calling them to the common terms of truth.

In addition, it is important to note that Allah has used this method of dialogue to affirm the truth in many places in the Qur’an. Allah mentioned a dialogue between Him and Satan. He ordered the devil to prostrate before Adam, the devil refused to do so. Allah thus asked him why he refused to obey, he tends to put forward his evidence (7:11ff). Allah also mentioned an incident of dialogue between Him and Prophet Ibrāhīm concerning resurrection after death:

> And (remember) when Ibrāhīm (Abraham) said, “my Lord! Show me how you give life to the dead”. He (Allah) said: “Do you not believe?” he (Ibrāhīm) said: “yes (I believe), but to be stronger in faith”. He said: “take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill and call them they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is Allah-mighty, All-wise (2:260).

Similarly, Allah also mentioned the dialogue between Ibrāhīm and a king about Allah, and with cognitive proofs, Ibrahim was able to defeat him (2:258).

Muslim scholars have written many works on dialogue of truth. Scholars like Jahiz, Qadi Abdul Jabbar, al-Ghazali, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taimiyya and others wrote many works in this regards.

Therefore, Islam being a religion that promotes dialogue makes it pertinent for students of Islamic Studies to acquire genuine knowledge about the teaching of Islam on it, and as it is an international issue of discourse in the modern time, students of Islamic Studies should not be unaware of it from the Islamic and non-Islamic perspectives.

### 5. A Tentative Course Design

This writer suggests the inclusion of a course “Inter-religious Dialogue from Islamic Perspective” in the syllabus that leads to the award of a degree in Islamic Studies in Nigerian universities. The content of course is suggested to be as follows:

1. Meaning and reality of religious pluralism in our society due to globalization, migration etc, and the teaching of Islam on how to respond to it.
2. Concept, meaning and forms of inter-religious dialogue from Islamic sources as well as non-Muslim perspectives.
3. The teaching of Islam on dialogue with peoples of other faiths, with emphasis on the Qur’an, Hadith of the Prophet (S.A.W) and Islamic history.
4. The principles and techniques of dialogue in accordance with the Shari’ah.
5. Elaborative teaching on Dialogue of Truth. It should include early and contemporary debates between Islam and Christianity.
6. Modern trends on inter-religious dialogue since the second Vatican Council on inter-religious tolerance, including the activities of different Christian organizations in Nigeria on dialogue with Muslims.
7. The importance of inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

This paper has so far surveyed the meaning of inter-religious dialogue and the position of Islam on it. It has been noticed that Christians in Nigeria are the protagonist of the call to dialogue with Muslims in Nigeria as it is at the international scene; they thus included it in the Christian Religious Studies syllabus to make their scholars better equipped. On the other hand, despite the inevitability of the dialogue from the Muslim side, there is no such arrangement in the syllabi of Islamic Studies in Nigeria. This study suggests a possible course design.

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