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‘COMMONALITY’ IN POLYCULTURAL CUM POLYRELIGIOUS AFRICA Inputs From Old Testament Religious Pluralism

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that culture midwives religion. If, as some also say, “religion is the soul of culture”, then it follows that each culture has its religion(s). In Africa, as in Nigeria, there are diverse cultures and consequently many religions. Today, efforts by any one religion to dominate others have generated disharmony, strife and killings. The African attitude to religious pluralism and its consequent discord has remained a cultural problem that yearns for solution. In search of harmony in poly-cultural/poly-religious Africa, this paper attempts a re-appraisal of Old Testament Religious Pluralism by examining its perspective of ‘commonality’. The aim is to identify, interpret, define and project this Old Testament perspective as an efficacious religious approach to poly-cultural identity in Africa. The findings constitute a tremendous contribution to scholarship and the conclusions and recommendations promise a lasting solution to religious terrorism in Africa and beyond.

Key Words: Commonality; Culture; Old Testament; Religion; Religious Pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Culture, as a way of life, includes the beliefs, actions and expressions of a people. This is why Religion is an inseparable part of culture. It follows, then that any people with multiple cultures, are most likely to profess multiple religions. Africa is one big continent that, surely, holds a witness of diverse cultures and hence different religions. Religion being what it is: ‘the belief in God; and profession of godliness’,¹ one would have expected poly-religiosity to signal fruits of godliness - responsibility, peace, harmony and mutual respect. But the case is different in Africa and the sub-Saharan. The prevalent mono-religious approach to poly-cultural Africa, as evidenced in the Nigerian situation, has paradoxically generated a real religious terrorism that should not be allowed to worsen. Many individuals and schools of thought have, in the past, proffered different solutions to this but the desired effect is still far off. In search of a better, lasting and more efficacious approach to this situation, this work, drawing conceptual inspiration from Old Testament Religious Pluralism, seeks to project ‘Commonality’ as a religious attitude that could serve the needs of poly-cultural and poly-religious Africa. In furtherance of this concept, this work is further motivated by a theoretical framework based on the religious pluralism theory of M. Legenhausen which states that “...all religions of some kind are the same in some valuable respects.”²

The aim of this work, therefore, is to provide a lasting model of peace and harmony for poly-cultural and poly-religious Africa with specific objectives of assessing the current trend of inter-religious collaboration in Africa;

¹ Cf. C. HAROLD, and G. S. SMITH. *Religion and Peacebuilding*. (Albany, NY 12202: State University Press, 2004) 7.

² M. LEGENHAUSEN, “On the Plurality of Religious Pluralisms.” *International Journal of Hekmat* 1 (2009): 6-42.

Examining the nature and import of Old Testament religious pluralism; identifying and proposing the perspective of ‘commonality’ as an efficacious approach to religious identity in a poly-culture; and projecting, recommending and applying the merits of ‘commonality’ for the benefit of poly-cultural and poly-religious Africa. This work will be analytical and exegetical in method whereby the fruits of exegesis would be hermeneutically applied to benefit the inadequacies resulting from the analyses. While this work focuses on Africa, for better treatment, a delimitation of scope to the Nigerian situation will only be meaningful and therefore, examples from Nigeria or any sub-Saharan region will serve to accommodate the interest of the entire continent of Africa. The relevance of this work would not only lie in its incontestable contribution to scholarship but also in its promise to address the current need for peace in a poly-cultural region already heated up by religious conflict.

EXPLICATION OF TERMS

There is need to explain the contextual usage of some key words in this work in order to aid objective interpretation. They include: Commonality, Culture, Old Testament, Religion and Religious Pluralism.

Commonality

In common parlance, ‘commonality’, among other connotations, would define an arrangement where features and attributes are shared in a particular situation. But in the context of this work, commonality is employed to emphasize ‘commonness’ and the appreciation of common grounds³ and the import of considering them as a basis of ethical unity in religious diversity. Commonality in this context, therefore, is seen as a new attitudinal model of relationship in religious pluralism where peace and harmony flow from a responsible appreciation of the common aspects of any poly-religious culture.

Culture

The term ‘culture’ is used in this work in a very loose and broad sense to imply a way of life consistent with a particular people living in a particular place. Rather than emphasizing any social stratification,⁴ culture is used here to refer more to the customs, patterns, attitudes, values, moral goals and arts of the people as lived out and expressed in their day-to-day lives.

Old Testament

By Old Testament here, is meant more of content than concept.⁵ This is a reference to the entire first part of the Christian Bible. It’s a random reference not just to, or about a particular book of the Old Testament, but to, and about the general witness of this corpus to religious pluralism. Old Testament in this work will also accommodate the cultural and religious background of the writing and compilation of the entire corpus as it relates to the consideration or appreciation of religious pluralism.

Religion

Just as culture is used in this work in a very loose and broad sense, ‘Religion’ is also used here in a very loose and broad sense to refer to any and all sect of religious belief especially as distinguished by their worship of a supreme being whether in a traditional setting or as a borrowed influence.⁶ Emphasis here is not only on the established main-stream religions but even and also on the emerging belief systems prevalent in our area of study – Africa, nay, Nigeria.⁷

³ The phrase, ‘common ground’ best defines the basis of commonality. It is a perspective where a consideration of the common attributes of religion (in this context) is expected to engineer responsible connectedness.

⁴ See the general understanding of culture in G. E. UMOREN, “Harnessing and Application of Religious-Culture for sustainable Development in Nigeria” *Journal of University Scholars in Religion* (JUSREL) 8/1, (2018) 47.

⁵ For more on the understanding of “Old Testament, see G. E. UMOREN “Old Testament Exegesis: An Imperative for a Private Appreciation of Christianity by Africans” *Africa Journal of Biblical Research*, Volume 3, (2016) 109

⁶ Cf. J. O. AWOLALU “What is African Traditional Religion” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 10/2 (1978) available online from www.studiesincomparativereligion.com accessed on 12th July 2019.

⁷ So much of what will be said in this work about religion will center on Religion as is evidenced in Africa. For more on this, read J. K. OLUPONA *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford Press, 2014) 1-176; Also check J. S. MBITI *Introduction to African Religion* 2nd Edition (IL 60047, Waveland Press, 2015) 1-215.

Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism as used in this work refers both to the fact of having many religions (poly-religion) and also to the practice of mutual acceptance of the tenets of those religions as being true, genuine and efficacious of salvation. In this case, Religious pluralism goes further than mere tolerance to emphasize adoption and mutual acceptance among many religions in a particular place and time in such a way that it can only lead to peaceful co-existence. It accommodates inclusivism and does not admit of exclusivism.⁸

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work is a research on if and how the Bible, witnessing to religious pluralism can benefit the political and social unrest experienced in Africa as a result of religious intolerance. It is a response to the prevalent problem of near terrorism caused by religious exclusivism and attitudinal disharmony. There are many Literatures which have tried to either address the issue as a creation of awareness or have delved into finding solutions to this ravaging problem especially in the African continent. This work has benefitted from many of these literatures either as foundational sources or as directional sources. Among the scholarly sources addressing religious pluralism include the works of P. C. PHAN⁹; H. NETLAND¹⁰, R. E. WENTZ¹¹, A. MONG¹², B. LACKOVICOVA¹³, AND M. G. LEGENHAUSEN¹⁴. Phan gives a very pragmatic treatment of religious pluralism. He first traces the inherent hostility in some religions as the greatest challenge to religious pluralism.¹⁵ His treatment has the strength of addressing both theoretical and concrete challenges to religious pluralism but also falls short of projecting any concrete way out of the dilemma. Netland, on the other hand, gives a somewhat philosophical analysis of religious pluralism by tracing first the emergence of what he calls 'pluralistic ethos' and how it has affected Christian tradition.¹⁶ His treatment of 'religious truth' as a major aspect of religious pluralism, though very insightful, is nevertheless drifting into philosophy of religion thereby lacking the treatment of the concrete reality of today's exclusivism. Wentz is another great scholar of religion. He notes that plurality of peoples and cultures breeds the challenges of religious plurality. He examines the possible challenges that plurality can present in such a situation but again, his attempt at proffering a solution is too implicit to be appreciated as impactful. Mong is another significant reference resource in religious pluralism. His exposition and appraisal of Joseph Ratzinger's thoughts on religious pluralism is very insightful. The examination of secularism and relativism as 'evil twins' of religious pluralism has confirmed them as a real threat to Christianity¹⁷ but surprisingly, Mong has not, either as Ratzinger's opinion or his (Mong's) analysis, supplied a conclusive alternative or remedy to the despicable effects of this threat. There is also this important Article by Legenhausen. He looks at the aspect of plurality even in religious pluralism¹⁸. From the point of view of the challenges of religious pluralism, Legenhausen's work seems to end at the level of exposition and lacks the desired definite direction or alternative on the way forward. There is also this research work by Lackovicova which focuses on the African continent.

⁸ Cf. R. E. WENTZ *The Culture of Religious Pluralism* (Boulder, CO 80301, Westview Press, 1998) 1-144.

⁹ P. C. PHAN & J. S. RAY eds. , *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology*, (NJ 08540: Pickwick Publications 2014) 1-336

¹⁰ H. NETLAND, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith* , (IL 60515: IVP Academic, 2001)1-368

¹¹ R. E. WENTZ *The Culture of Religious Pluralism* (Boulder, CO 80301, Westview Press, 1998) 1-144.

¹² A. MONG, *Are Non Christians Saved?: Joseph Ratzinger's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism* (London, Oneworld Publications, 2015) 1-384

¹³ E. LACKOVICOVA, *Religious Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Political Implications* (Master's Dissertation, University of Economics, Prague, 2015) 1-72

¹⁴ M. LEGENHAUSEN, "On the Plurality of Religious Pluralisms." *International Journal of Hekmat* 1 (2009): 6-42.

¹⁵ P. C. PHAN & J. S. RAY eds. , *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology*, (NJ 08540: Pickwick Publications 2014) 1-336

¹⁶ H. NETLAND, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith*, (IL 60515: IVP Academic, 2001)18.

¹⁷ See A. MONG, *Are Non Christians Saved?: Joseph Ratzinger's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism* (London, Oneworld Publications, 2015) 85ff

¹⁸ M. LEGENHAUSEN, "On the Plurality of Religious Pluralisms." *International Journal of Hekmat* 1 (2009): 6-42.

This is a very objective treatment of the topic of religious plurality in Africa bringing out the impact of Africa's pluralistic religion on politics¹⁹ but, apart from the fact that it lacks the indigenous touch of Africa – being written by a non-African, it pays more attention to the political implications and seems to ignore the religious import of pluralism.

From the point of view of the Bible which is a major concern in this work, religious pluralism has received only a little attention. This paucity of materials may be because the Bible is seen more as a Scripture rather than as a 'community.' But the few works on this topic reveal that the Bible has a position on religious pluralism. This is why most references to it are on the level of information to guide behavior and conduct. O'Leary and Oxenberg agree that the main idea of Christian truth revolves around the Biblical God who has little or no place for pluralism.²⁰ But while one may not see the basis of religious pluralism in the Bible, Rui De Menezes, in his book, *The Cultural Context of the Old Testament*, observes significantly that the issues of violence and near terrorism associated with today's exclusivism are absent from the Bible.²¹ But even Menezes stops short of recommending any Biblical principle or perspective that can aid religious harmony today. The position of the International Theological Commission confirms that the Christian Bible witnessed and still witnesses to a culture that encounters many other religions.²² All of these sources argue for the exclusive truth of Christianity as evidenced in the Bible. The above books are not exhaustive but they represent the trend of treatment followed by virtually all the other authors on this issue.

Evaluating all these resources, one sees a great deal of strength in the ability to address the topic of religious pluralism in the Bible and in Africa. However, the gap that still remains is primarily in the following areas. Most of the examination of religious pluralism is from the point of view of philosophy, sociology, politics and culture. There is little or no treatment of the topic from a pragmatically religious point of view. The most evident gap is in the fact that very few, if any, of these authors have tried to proffer solutions to the challenges of religious pluralism which, in most cases, result from unnecessary exclusivism and secularism. Even if anybody came close to proffering a solution, not many people from Africa have written about the experience in Africa and not many authors have seen the Bible as a safe reference point for religious pluralism. These gaps are what this research promises to fill. Building on the topic: "Commonality' in poly-cultural cum poly-religious Africa: Inputs from Old Testament Religious Pluralism", A new model, 'commonality', is projected by from the Bible by an African as a solution to the African challenges associated with religious plurality. This relevance makes this work important and significant in scholarship.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN AFRICA

An examination of religious pluralism in Africa reveals many issues which are worthy of note and evaluation if a relevant solution has to be proffered. The focus on Africa will be seen through the lens of focus on Nigeria.²³ But before this work particularizes focus on Nigeria. It is important to define the entire region of Africa and the sub-Saharan and ensure that one appreciates the problematic associated with the 'whole' (Africa) before getting down to the 'part' (Nigeria). In this line, this research agrees with the submission of Lackvicova thus:

Usually, when talking about regional division of the world in other than geographic sense, Africa is divided into North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. There are five countries which belong to the North Africa – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

¹⁹ E. LACKOVICOVA, *Religious Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Political Implications* (Master's Dissertation, University of Economics, Prague, 2015) 58

²⁰ See J. S. O'LEARY, T. C. MUCK, "Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth", *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 19/1 (1999) 239-241; and R. OXENBERG, "My Understanding of the Biblical God: A brief 'Transreligious' Reflection", *Interreligious Insight* 25/1 (2015) 112-132

²¹ Menezes makes this submission noting that monotheism was the major concern of Old Testament Israel even though polytheism was the order of the day with their neighbours. See R. DE MENEZES, *The Cultural Context of the Old Testament*, (Bangalore, India, Theological Publications, 2009) 79-80

²² Cf. COMMISSIONE TEOLOGICA INTERNAZIONALE, "Il Cristianesimo e le Religioni", *Civiltà Cattolica* 148/1 (1997) 146-183

²³ Nigeria is chosen as a good example of an African situation because the issue of religious pluralism and its attendant challenges in Africa are all evident in the Nigerian experience. Apart from being a narrower and more manageable scope, the researcher is domiciled in Nigeria and this facilitates the research as he has first hand information and experience of the Nigerian experience.

The rest of the continent with its islands belongs to the Sub-Saharan Africa. This division is important, as it also marks the line between two world cultural and/or civilizational groups. The Arabic and Islamic culture is spread through the northern part of the continent while the rest of the continent belongs to the African cultural group, culture of Sub-Saharan Africa²⁴

Invoking the working definition of religious pluralism as both plurality of religious presence and inclusivity resulting from the sincere acceptability of the religious credibility of other sects, it is interesting to see how much Africa connects with this scenario. On the one hand, Africa is a conglomeration of diversity.²⁵ Culturally, one can hardly exhaust the fullness of its diversity. With cultural diversity comes also religious diversity, which, at a point, got more complicated with the advent of westernization. Today, Africa is religiously diverse as it is culturally pluralistic. The poly-culture of Africa is surely evident in its poly-religious identity.

Interestingly, Nigeria, one of the most thickly populated countries in the region, reflects enough diversity in culture and religion that it qualifies as a good case study of the religious plurality experiment. Ethnicity, which is a reflector of cultural diversity, plays a prominent role in the religious diversity that we see in Nigeria. In order to understand the Religious pluralism in Africa, nay, Nigeria, there is need to examine the situation, approaches and effects of such approaches to religious plurality. The approaches to the poly-cultural and poly-religious identity have had far reaching consequences ranging from disharmony to near terrorism in Africa, nay, Nigeria.

Poly-Cultural Identity in Africa, Nay, Nigeria

There is so much poly-cultural identity in Africa, nay Nigeria. The original stratification of Nigeria into Regions before Independence captured so much of the ethnic identity.²⁶ Even after Independence, the consciousness of ethnic identity has generated so much exclusivity in many areas. Initially the stratification centered basically among three major ethnic groups and a conglomeration of a few minority ethnic groups. As far back as the immediate post independence era, Okpu, who could count over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria then, actually submitted that most of them were minority groups, like the Efiks, Ibibios and the Annangs of the South-Southern part of Nigeria, with little or no political voice but who, in trying to be heard, sometimes generate friction and disharmony. The Hausa Fulanis in North Nigeria, The Igbos in the South-East and the Yorubas in the South-West were really the major ethnic groups.²⁷

Today, the stratification has grown deeper and while the major ethnic groups have grown stronger, the minor ethnic groups have also grown more focused and conscious of their self worth and more determined to take their destiny in their hands.²⁸ This has shown itself in the proliferation of languages and the celebration of peculiar cultural values among the different ethnic groups concerned. The emphasis has been on poly-culturalization as a vehicle to emphasize and project ethnicity. The fueling power of this poly-culturalization is language. Virtually all hitherto insignificant dialects have metamorphosed into a language and sometimes with the insistence that they not only be studied in schools but be used as a medium of teaching in their schools.

²⁴ E. LACKOVICOVA, *Religious Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Political Implications* (Master's Dissertation, University of Economics, Prague, 2015) 7.

²⁵ Lackovicova gives a detailed examination of the cultural and historical analysis of sub-Africa. See E. LACKOVICOVA, *Religious Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Political Implications* (Master's Dissertation, University of Economics, Prague, 2015) 7ff.

²⁶ Though difficult to define with a consensus, many scholars including this research agree to see ethnicity as a type of exclusivity motivated by common language and cultural values. See U. OKPU, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Nigerian Politics: 1960-1965*. (Stockholm: LiberTryck AB, 1977) 10.

²⁷ U. OKPU, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Nigerian Politics: 1960-1965*. (Stockholm: LiberTryck AB, 1977) 19.

²⁸ For details on Nigerian History in general and the aspect of poly-culturalization as projected in this work, see V. ANAZONWU, *What Everybody Should know About Nigerian History, Politics & Government* (Lagos: Independent Publishers, 2017) 1-121; and T. FALOLA & M. HEATON, *History of Nigeria* (London, Cambridge University press, 2008) 1-370

Today, in Nigeria, as is also evident in the rest of Africa especially in sub-Saharan Africa, there are a lot of cultures.²⁹ There is a poly-cultural identity that is polarizing Nigeria.³⁰ This has played into politics and commerce and is seen to be even the beginning of the plurality of religious beliefs today. The greatest challenge today is that there are camps of social status fanatics who try to emphasize so much of these cultural diversity to the extent that it generates more heat than just warmth.

Poly-Religious Identity in Africa, nay Nigeria

Inherent in the poly-cultural identity of Africa, nay, Nigeria, is its poly-religious reality. Of course one would expect that with well over 300 ethnic groups, there would also be many religious inclinations. Basically, apart from the African traditional religion, in Nigeria, the major religions that people profess include: Christianity and Islam. In some cases, there are representations of other less dominant religions. We have Hindus, Buddhists, Chrislam, Grail Message, Reformed Ogboni, and people who believe they are Atheists and non-religious. In some cases, it might even be better to talk of religious beliefs than to talk of religions.³¹ Apart from the efforts by different religions to win more converts for their religions,³² the plurality of religious identity can also be seen in Nigeria along ethnic and cultural lines. While the Hausa-Fulani of the North are predominantly Muslims, the Yorubas are religiously divided almost on equal numerical percentage between Christianity and Islam. The Igbos are still predominantly Christians and most of the minor ethnic groups are predominantly Christians. Given that the Hausa-Fulanis are basically a nomadic people, they have moved with their culture and religion into many other parts of Nigeria other than their territorial North. With their migration, there has also been a sharing and an introduction of their Islam religion into areas and regions that were hitherto not Muslim. The same thing has happened with the Igbos. The Igbos are a successful commercial people. In furtherance of commerce, they have migrated with their culture and predominantly Christian religion to other parts of the country and by so doing have introduced and shared these Christian religious tendencies in places that were hitherto not Christian strongholds. One can only imagine the poly-religious identity in Nigeria.³³ The religious plurality in Nigeria is further polarized by the fact that both Christianity and Islam have different sects which seem to be mutually antagonistic. The Muslims have the Shiites and the Sunnis while Christians are divided between Catholics and Protestants. It is therefore important to note that the background of religious pluralism in Nigeria is seriously polarized by an unhealthy poly-religious culture.

The Effect of Mono-Religious Approaches to Poly-Cultural Identity in Africa

As it has been discovered from the analysis above, Nigeria witnesses to a poly-cultural and poly-religious identity. Studies have also shown that in the examination of religious pluralism in Nigeria, there are certain approaches in use and each of them is bound to produce some peculiar effects and results. One of such approaches is when, in the midst of the diversity of cultures, one religion seeks to dominate and impose its religion or religious tendencies and beliefs on another. This mono-religious approach to poly-cultural identity has had far reaching adverse effects and impact on the efforts geared towards religious pluralism.

One of the effects of this mono-religious approach is resistance by the other religions. When unnecessary superiority complex is created, there is room for envy, jealousy, rejection and disharmony, which can only be the beginning of the absence of religious pluralism.³⁴

²⁹ By cultures here we mean the loose understanding of it as a portrayal of peculiarities in people's way of life.

³⁰ T. FALOLA & M. HEATON, *History of Nigeria* (London, Cambridge University press, 2008) 112

³¹ Even though we may not have many religion in Africa, nay, Nigeria, there are so may religious beliefs whose impact has created a scenario equivalent to having as many religions themselves.

³² For the spread of the Christian faith amidst the growing plurality of religions in Nigeria, read A. OBODUNDE, *A Heritage of Faith: A History of Christianity in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Pierce, Watershed, 2017)1-824

³³ For more on Religious pluralism in Nigeria, see: S. O. ILESANMI, *Religious Pluralism in Nigeria* (OH 45701, Ohio University Press 1996) 1-332; and C. O ELE, "Religious Pluralism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" *African Research Review* 13/1 (2019) accessed online on 19th July 2019 from www.ajol.info

³⁴ Cf. C. O ELE, "Religious Pluralism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" *African Research Review* 13/1 (2019) accessed online on 19th July 2019 from www.ajol.info

This polarity becomes heightened when a particular religion like Islam, in Nigeria, considers conversion as a do or die affair creating tensions that constitute near terrorism. The recent political challenge in Nigeria is, to a large extent, caused by the activities of Boko Haram and some Hausa Fulani Herdsmen all believed to be fanatical Muslims.³⁵

Religious extremism and intolerance, referred to as Islamic fundamentalism, has gained momentum in Northern Nigeria since the start of the century among some followers of the Islamic faith. These fundamentalists distort the teachings of Islam. They represent themselves as anti-imperialists opposing western cultural influences while seeking to institute Islamic law, including strict codes of behavior.³⁶

It is difficult to think of Nigeria as a mono-religious country. Experience has shown that it is even worse to enforce this in the presence of the poly-culture which identifies Nigeria. Even though this approach is more on the part of the Muslims, the Christians have also come to identify with it either in self-defense or out of over zealous conviction or fanaticism. The effects of such approaches also include kidnapping for sexual slavery and terrorism. Approaching a poly-cultural Nigeria with a mono-religious tendency can only aggravate the already tensed situation with regard to religious pluralism.

The Effect of Mono-Cultural Approaches to Poly-Religious Identity in Africa

On the other hand, there is also the approach of judging all the religions of the land by one culture. A mono-cultural approach to poly-religious identity in Africa has also proven to be a failed attempt in religious pluralism. There is need to respect the fact that we have diverse cultures in the land. Since these ways of life are tied to their language and world-view, religion is bound to be a part of it and with such diversity in religion, an approach that seeks to impose one culture on others is bound to fail as it has failed in many parts of Africa including Nigeria. This has cost Nigeria not only religious and economic growth, but also political stability and sustainable development.

Religious pluralism has inherent integrative powers to transform the society positively. However, historical experiences reveal that societies which tie political battle for supremacy, socio-economic dominance and cultural superiority complex to their religions breed developmental crises. One example of such a specimen is Nigeria. The interactions between the three dominant religions in Nigeria, namely: Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam have been largely governed by divisiveness, hatred, bigotry and violence. The consequence is developmental deficits.³⁷

When the entire people are made to worship from the point of view of one culture, apart from the loss of cultural heritage by those subdued, it can, and also does generate resistance, inter-tribal and inter-ethnic wars, kidnapping, stealing, looting and even killing. There are instances where the Igbo Christians who find themselves in the North are forced by circumstances to subdue their cultural practices in respect of the religious convictions of their new-found quasi-domicile. An example could be the cultural difference in the traditional days of worship. While the Muslims observe Fridays, the Christians observe Sundays. The question is: Should the Igbo Christians, finding themselves in a Muslim territory, suppress their Sundays or vice versa? Any direct or indirect attempt at such mono-cultural approach to poly-religious identity can only bring strife. The heated inter cultural envy soon escalates into religious intolerance and the resulting effect is as bad as what happens when a mono-religious approach is used in a poly-cultural setting.

The above examination has shown that even though religious pluralism is supposed to be to the advantage and benefit of the people, the plurality of religion in Nigeria and above all the wrong approaches to religious pluralism have, paradoxically, brought woes which need to be addressed with urgency. The search for that model of inter-religious collaboration and harmony continues...

³⁵ H. CAMPBELL, "The Menace of Boko Haram and Fundamentalism in Nigeria" *Counter Punch* (30th May 2014) Accessed on line from www.counterpunch.org

³⁶ H. CAMPBELL, "The Menace of Boko Haram and Fundamentalism in Nigeria" *Counter Punch* (30th May 2014) Accessed on line from www.counterpunch.org

³⁷ C. O ELE, "Religious Pluralism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" *African Research Review* 13/1 (2019) accessed online on 19th July 2019 from www.ajol.info

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE BIBLE: THE OLD TESTAMENT WITNESS

It is always necessary to invoke our contextual understanding of ‘religious pluralism’ as not just the consciousness but also the acceptance of other religions as credible especially to engineer and facilitate harmonious interrelation among a plurality of religions. The big question, then, is: Does the Bible, nay, the Old Testament witness to religious pluralism? Is there any lesson or model that can be drawn from such witness towards addressing the prevalent challenges of religious pluralism today? This part of the work will explore the cultural and religious background of the Old Testament in order to locate its possible witness to religious pluralism. An exegesis of some random passages of the Old Testament promises to reveal a viable position in this direction

The Cultural and Religious Background of the Old Testament

The Old Testament must first of all be seen as a community before it is seen as a scripture. It is the community that brought about the scripture. With a community, there is need to talk about its culture and consequently, its religion.³⁸ The Old Testament is the theological history of Israel. It accounts for the way of life of Israel but presented in a theological manner. It is the presentation of its history in the form of a ‘testimony of faith.’³⁹ But this community pre-existed the Old Testament as a Christian Scripture. The nature and way of life of this community did not just influence but had also shaped the eventual community of believing Israel. Culturally, this community was a religious people. There are implicit and explicit evidences that the ancestors of Israel were a polytheistic people.⁴⁰ Even, the explicit struggle of Israel to keep her monotheism, implied a prevalent threat by polytheism. This cultural situation confirms that there was a plurality of religion, beliefs and/or gods in the community that produced the Bible. This plurality continued to characterize the Old Testament people even after their formation. This is why it is possible to see some of the foreign gods mentioned on the pages of the Old Testament – Adrammelech (2 Kings 17: 31; Amon in Jeremiah 46: 25; Anammelech in 2 Kings 17: 31; Asherah in Judges 6: 25, 26, 28, 30; Ashimah in 2 Kings 17: 13; Ashtoreth in 1 Kings 11: 5; Baal in 2 Kings 10: 18-23; Chemosh in 1 Kings 11: 7, 33; Dagon in 1 Sam 5: 2-5; Gad in Isaiah 65: 11; Marduk in Jeremiah 50: 2; Milcom in 1 Kings 11: 5, 33; and many Egyptian gods. In other instances, references are just made to the gods of the foreign land like the gods of the Canaanites – Anat, Asherah and Astarte (cf. Deut 12: 3).

From every indication, the Old Testament people lived among a culture that witnessed tribal groups with different traditions, shrines and gods. While some saw Abraham as their major ancestor, others took Jacob and some even regarded Joseph as their ancestor. There was certainly a plurality of beliefs which one could loosely call religions in the early Old Testament community. E. C. Hobbs rightly captured the analysis thus:

The gods who were worshipped in this early phase, and whose names are carried on in the traditions, were several: the family gods or clan deities (the Shield of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac or the Kinsman of Isaac, the Mighty One of Jacob [Gen. 15:1; 31:42; 49:24]), the various forms of El, such as El Olam (Gen. 21:33), El Shaddai (Gen. 17:1; 49:25), El Elyon (Gen. 14:18), El Bethel (Gen. 31:13), sometimes with El apparently a proper name (as in El Elohe Israel [Gen. 33:20] and El Elohe Abhika [Gen. 46:3])⁴¹

This poly-cultural situation of the Old Testament community also witnessed a poly-religious presence and the believing Israel of the Old Testament found themselves in this situation struggling to preserve their monotheism. It would be important, then, to analyze their appreciation of religious pluralism in this context.

³⁸ For more on Old Testament as a community and for its cultural background, see R. DE MENEZES, *The Cultural Context of the Old Testament*, (Bangalore, India, Theological Publications, 2009) 79-80; V. ONWUKEME, *The Old Testament: A Background Study*, (Cork, Ireland, Waterman Printers, 2016) 1-190

³⁹ W. H. SCHMIDT, *Old Testament Introduction*, translated by M. J. O’Connell, (Mumbai, St. Paul press, 2015) 9.

⁴⁰ G. E. MENDENHALL, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

⁴¹ E. C. HOBBS, “Theological and Religious Pluralism: Pluralism in the Biblical Context”, (Unpublished paper prepared for a Theological Meeting at the Graduate Theological Union, 16-17 November 1973) accessed on line on 20th July 2019 from www.pcts.org

The Witness of the Old Testament to Religious Pluralism

The starting point of the Old Testament witness to religious pluralism must be the Old Testament's understanding, appreciation and preservation of monotheism in the face of the plurality of beliefs and the polytheism of the ancestors and neighbours of Israel. Now, if religious pluralism has to do with accepting other religions as true and good enough to be followed, and if the Old Testament projects the exclusive sovereignty of God Almighty, can it be said that the Old Testament witnessed to religious pluralism? This is the crux of the matter in this work.

Technically speaking, on a face value and in the strict sense, it is difficult to see the Old Testament witnessing to religious pluralism as that would amount to a denial of monotheism but there is need to do some in-depth analysis of some Old Testament passages which uphold monotheism by detesting other beliefs and other gods and from the results of such analysis draw more objective conclusions regarding the witness of the Old Testament to religious pluralism.

Exegesis of Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament

There are many texts of the Old Testament which point, not only to the existence of other beliefs in Israel, but also to the way the typical Israelite believer is to relate with adherents of such religion. Given the importance and centrality of Deuteronomy as a major legal provision in the Old Testament, and the fact that it holds one of the highest references to conduct in the face of religious plurality, this work proposes to begin with a study of one of those religious pluralism-implied passages from Deuteronomy – Deut 12: 29-31; and end with a comparative analysis of two other passages: another pre-exilic passage in Deuteronomy – Deut 23: 7 and a post-exilic passage of Trito-Isaiah – Is 56: 1-9.

TEXT A

Deut. 12: 29-31 (HEBREW)

כִּי־יִכְרִיתׁ הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּ אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵיךָ וַיִּרְשָׁתָּ אֹתָם וַיִּשְׁכַּתְּ בְּאַרְצָם׃²⁹
 הַשֹּׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן־תִּשְׁמַשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְאַעֲשֶׂה־כֵּן גַּם־אַנִּי׃³⁰
 לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כֹן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי־כָל־תּוֹעֵבֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂנֵא עָשׂוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי גַם אַתְּ־בִנְיָהֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיהֶם יִשְׂרְפוּ בְּאֵשׁ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם׃³¹

Deut. 12: 29-31 (ENGLISH)

When the LORD your God has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, take care that you are not snared into imitating them, after they have been destroyed before you: do not inquire concerning their gods, saying, "How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same." You must not do the same for the LORD your God, because every abhorrent thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

B TXET

Deut 23: 8 (Hebrew)⁴²

לֹא־תִתְעַב אֲדָמִי כִּי אֶחָיִד הוּא ס לֹא־תִתְעַב מִצְרַיִ כִּי־גֵר הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ־וּ׃⁸

Deut 23: 7 (English)

You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land

TEXT C

Isaiah 56: 1-9 (Hebrew)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שֹׁמְרֵי מִשְׁפַּט וְעֹשֵׂי צְדָקָה כִּי־קְרוּבָה יִשְׁוּעֵתִי לְבוֹא וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לְהַגִּילוֹת׃²
 אֲשֶׁר־יִאֱנוּשׁ יַעֲשֶׂה־זֹאת וּבְנוֹ־אָדָם יִחְזִיק בָּהּ שֹׁמֵר שְׁבֹת מִחֲלָלוֹ וְשֹׁמֵר יְדוֹ מִעֲשׂוֹת פְּלִיָרֶע׃ ס

⁴² Note that while the English text of Deut 23 is numbered from 1-25, the Hebrew text is numbered from 2-26

וּבְנֵי הַגֵּר הַנִּלְוִים עַל־יְהוָה לְשָׂרְתוּ וְלִאֲהַבְהוּ אֶת־יְשֻׁם יְהוָה לְהִנּוּחַ לֹא לַעֲבָדִים כְּל־שָׁמֵר שְׂבֵת מִחֻלּוֹ וּמִחֻזְקִים בְּבְרִיתִי׃⁶
וְהִבִּיאֹתִים אֶל־הָר קֹדֶשׁי וְשִׁמְחֵתִים בְּבֵית תְּפִלָּתִי עוֹלְתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי כִּי בֵיתִי בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים׃⁷

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7 (English)

Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant -- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

The above passages need to be analysed, appreciated and understood against the background of the demands of religious pluralism – acceptability and inclusivism. Text A – Deut 12: 28-31 talks generally about nations and people’s whom, on account of their beliefs in other gods, the Israelites are not to associate with. The key words here are שמר (be careful); נקש (entrapped); תועבה (abhorrent). The Israelites were to be careful not to be entrapped to imitate the abhorrent and abominable ways of their hosts and neighbours. Some conclusions could be drawn from there. First of all, it means they found themselves in a religiously pluralistic environment where their host did something abominable. Secondly, an attitude was recommended for them. They were to be careful lest they would be contaminated to imitate the abominable ways of these foreigners. It is good to note the action recommended: A non-violent attentiveness lest they compromise their monotheism

Text B – Deut 23: 7 belongs to the same setting. If one considers the entire passage from verse 1 to 9. Ordinarily, this passage talks about those to be excluded from the community, obviously, on account of their belief in and worship of other gods. Surprisingly, in the midst of exclusion, verse 7 introduces a curious inclusivism. While verse 7a talks understandably of the need to include the Edomites, it is curious to see here that Egypt is also to be included. The key word here is תעב (abhor) which is of the same root תעב with the word תועבה (abhorrent) – describing the attitude of the foreigners to the monotheistic religion of Israel. This correlation is significant here.⁴³ It is good to note that Egypt was a pagan territory. As Zavada also confirms, “Ancient Egypt had more than 40 false gods, although none are mentioned by name in the Bible. They included Re, creator sun god; Isis, goddess of magic; Osiris, lord of the afterlife; Thoth, god of wisdom and the moon; and Horus, god of the sun.”⁴⁴ That the attitude of inclusivism is applied to this same Egypt is a significant pointer to the nature of religious pluralism attested to in the Old Testament. Israel is told not to abhor (לא־תִתְעַב) Egypt.⁴⁵

Text C – Isaiah 56: 1-9 is equally very significant. It is post-exilic.⁴⁶ In fact it is a confirmation of the type of inclusiveness that characterizes the Old Testament. The word רצון (something acceptable and pleasing) summarises the attitude that is recommended for the Old Testament religious pluralism. The final word is inclusivism without compromising orthodoxy. God’s house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

A Re-Appraisal of Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament: Commonality As Ethical Unity in Cultural Diversity

A cursory look at these three sampled passages reveals a lot about religious pluralism in the Old Testament. The three passages attest to the fact of a plurality of religions and beliefs among the Old Testament community.

⁴³ The same attitude of abhorrence which was condemned for the foreigners and which disqualified them from the Assembly of God, is the same attitude that Israel is warned from exhibiting in their relationship with Egypt – a pagan territory.

⁴⁴ J. ZAVADA, “False gods of the Old Testament” *Learn Religions* updated May 9, 2019 and accessed on 23rd July 2019 from www.learnreligions.com

⁴⁵ It is like the Israelites were not tempted by the false gods of Egypt during their many years of captivity in Egypt. Some even hold that [the Ten Plagues](#) of God against Egypt were humiliations of ten specific Egyptian gods. For more, see J. ZAVADA, “False gods of the Old Testament” *Learn Religions* updated May 9, 2019 and accessed on 23rd July 2019 from www.learnreligions.com

⁴⁶ Cf. W. H. SCHMIDT, *Old Testament Introduction*, translated by M. J. O’Connell, (Mumbai, St. Paul press, 2015)

The three passages do not only suggest the right attitude to exhibit in the face of the plurality, but they all mention the reasons for the recommended attitude. A combination of these three factors: the confirmation of religious plurality; the communication of the right attitude towards them; and the justification of such attitude, provides the context for the adoption of a perspective which promises to represent the Old Testament religious pluralism. Both Deuteronomy and Isaiah make explicit reference to ‘foreigners’, meaning worshippers of other gods. Both books recommend an attitude that is accommodating (רצון), just (משפט) and right (ישר). The attitude recommended does not, no doubt, compromise orthodoxy (cf. Deut 12: 29). But, for the avoidance of doubt, reasons are given for the exclusivism or inclusivism. The reason for any exclusivism as seen in Deut 12: 29-31 is because the foreigners “do what is abhorrent to the Lord God.” The reference admits the possibility that it was more of the practices that were abhorrent but not the subject of belief. It is good to note that the warning is for them not to imitate the foreigners. The reason given for inclusivity is more interesting. They share a lot of good and responsible things and characters that could unite more than divide. Both the Israelites and the foreigners shared a belief in some divine being but the practices differed and the Israelites were warned not to copy the abhorrent behaviours. But the introduction of justice and righteousness here in Isaiah, makes the desired Old Testament attitude clear. In this post-exilic Isaianic passage, there is this picture of acceptability, justice, fairness, righteousness and sharing based on the common acquittal by and the common recourse to God. This ethical unity in the face of the cultural diversity of the Old Testament is what this work projects as commonality.

The perspective of ‘commonality’ in the old Testament religious plurality, is therefore a model that is seen in considering more, the common denominators that characterize a plurality of religions especially based on the fact that they are living together and professing a belief in some being. Commonality insists that what unites people in a religiously pluralistic community is more than what could divide. Commonality is a conclusion from the Old Testament situation where, in the final analysis, the Isaianic oracle, signals a harmonious homecoming and peaceful living among many ‘foreigners and landlords’ so that God’s house would be a true house of prayer. Commonality is a perspective of attitude which follows from this understanding of the Old Testament community as an eventual community of God.

TOWARDS A RELEVANT MODEL OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN AFRICA

As has already been noted earlier in this research, religious pluralism has been a challenge in Africa, nay, Nigeria and has consequently impeded many positive advancements – social, cultural, religious and even developmental. In the past, as we also noted, the approaches that were in place were either not viable enough or led to near crises. A mono-religious approach to a poly-cultural Africa is amounting to terrorism and calls for review. The analysis of the position of the Old Testament and the findings that this research has come up with promise to move us closer to a relevant model of religious pluralism in Africa.

Projecting the Old Testament Perspective of ‘Commonality’

The findings of the analysis of the Old Testament have made this research to believe-in and project a principle it prefers to call ‘commonality.’ This name ‘commonality’ is projected because the Old Testament perspective is all about an attitude that sees an ethical unity in the cultural and religious diversity of the Old Testament people. The analysis of the texts confirms the theoretical framework of this research, that every religion has a common aspect which it shares with other religions. There is a common ground. The common ground in the Old Testament religious community included: the belief in a supreme being; the mutual knowledge of the practices of each religion; past or present sharing of land of settlement; similarity in certain aspects and values of religious life; individual conviction that one’s religion holds the entire truth; agreement in some level of regard to the monotheistic convictions of the Old Testament, etc. These have been seen as common grounds for which reasons the initial near total exclusivism of the Old Testament was suppressed for a more desired inclusiveness even though without compromising orthodoxy. The term ‘Commonality’ therefore connotes a perspective where the common grounds among a plurality of religions is sought and adopted as a motivating factor and a viable attitude to facilitate the desired acceptability and inclusivism characteristic of religious pluralism.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ This understanding of ‘commonality’ stands to emphasize more the factors that unite different religions and so much less, the factors that divide them.

Commonality as Paradigm in Religious Pluralism

If religious pluralism emphasizes acceptability and inclusivism,⁴⁸ the challenge of plurality as in the poly-religious and poly-cultural identity of contemporary time can only be pursued with a mentality and an attitude of ‘commonality’ where peace and harmony is realized based on the common grounds they all share. In this context and for this reason, commonality qualifies as a paradigm in religious pluralism. It can serve as a standard of relationship in religious pluralism.

Application of the New Model of ‘Commonality’ as a Relevant Attitude for the Benefit of Poly-Cultural Africa

As a promising paradigm of religious pluralism, and against the background of the long-lasting need to change the situation of religious pluralism in Africa for the better, this work believes that there is need to apply this new model of commonality as a relevant attitude for the benefit of poly-cultural Africa.

Since Africa is both poly-cultural and poly-religious, commonality can serve to emphasize the many things constituting a common ground. For example, the three major religions in Africa, nay, Nigeria – African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam share many things in common. They are all monotheistic religions. They typically share a belief in one God whom they call different names. The adherents share the same territorial dwelling in the same continent. They agree on certain values and doctrines, etc. These and many other sub-values and doctrines constitute a unity which is greater than what tends to divide - the manner of expression of this belief. If commonality becomes conscious yardstick for relationship in Africa, nay, Nigeria, fanaticism would give way to reason, religious violence and terrorism would give way to peace, war would give way to harmony and all these can be done without compromising individual religious orthodoxy.

EVALUATION

This research has been a response to the menace of religious disharmony in Africa. Using Nigeria as a case study of religious violence, and, confirming that a plurality of religions and beliefs played a factor here, it was necessary to examine the nature and extent of religious pluralism in Africa. The findings were a thing of concern as things were not functioning normally. Indeed, the approaches to religious plurality only resulted in wars, killings, terrorism and disharmony. Virtually all attempts to find a solution to this situation basically generated more problems. A leap into the Bible and specifically the Old Testament promised to be revealing and actually was viable enough to be projected as a hermeneutical principle. The findings of the exegesis of some Old Testament passages has proven that the Old Testament community experienced a plurality but, even when they insisted on their orthodoxy, they were able to sustain religious harmony worthy of emulation. As a model, ‘commonality’ is the appreciation of the common grounds among many religions with an attempt to ensuring mutual harmony and meaningful religious pluralism. Given the viability of this approach, this research has projected commonality, not only as a general paradigm, but also as relevant model for renewed appreciation of religious pluralism in Africa, nay, Nigeria.

Peace and Harmony as a Value of Religious Commonality in Poly-cultural Identity

The convention is that religion should bring positive impact. It would follow that many more religions should bring many more positive impacts. But this has been lacking in the case of Africa, nay, Nigeria. What we see is violence, killing and disharmony in the name of religion. Given its ability to address and appeal to common grounds among religions, ‘commonality’ promises to be the most effective approach to yield the desired peace and harmony in poly-cultural Africa. Religious commonality would emphasize that different religions look more at what unites them than at what divides them. The common ground of belief in a supreme being; the common ground of finiteness before an infinite God; and the common ground of belonging to the same political and social stalk in Africa, nay, Nigeria, should call the different religions to an ethical unity capable of ensuring peace and harmony.

⁴⁸ The main thing about inclusivism here is that it gives other religions the benefit of doubt and admits that they are true and capable of leading people aright. Whether these religions are eventually able to do that is another thing but ‘inclusiveness’ must admit of their capability.

Recommendation

In order to sustain the hermeneutical principle of commonality in Religious Pluralism, thereby ensuring that peace and harmony is realized in Africa, it has become necessary to make the following recommendations:

1. That Religious pluralism should be pursued first of all as an attitudinal agenda. It is not about abandoning one's faith in favour of another but about appreciating that the other faiths exist legally
2. That the primary focus should be on the dignity of the persons concerned in religious pluralism and not on the differing religious tendencies that abound.
3. That religious freedom be further appreciated as a right and not a privilege that could be taken away or suppressed by any emerging political power
4. That religious conviction should not be allowed to breed exclusivity but that ethical inclusivity be lived out and not only preached
5. That inculturation be emphasized and tolerated even outside one's cultural stronghold. For example, the Hausas should be accommodated to practice their religion or any other religion, even outside their land in a way that reflects their own way of life, and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

At the end of all the exegesis and analyses above, it is possible to confirm that even though the Bible, nay, the Old Testament Scripture, may not have attested ordinarily to religious pluralism in the strict sense, the Old Testament community – taken as a political entity and above all as a faith community - in its religious plurality, truly reflected an attitude of tolerance characteristic of religious pluralism. Such attitude made the Israelites of the Old Testament to live in relative harmony with neighbours while retaining their orthodoxy on monotheism. This attitude also facilitates the appreciation of the universal call to salvation initially prophesied by Isaiah (cf. Is. 56: 8; Is. 66: 1ff) where foreigners would have a share in God's design.⁴⁹ Having also confirmed the unfortunate situation in Africa, nay, Nigeria, where religious plurality has, instead, been a generator of war violence and strife in the polity, it became necessary to adopt from the Old Testament experience, a principle which this work calls 'commonality' and which emphasizes an inclusive attitudinal orientation where each religion considers more the common grounds it shares with other religions and allows that 'commonness' to influence its relationship with other religions. Commonality does not compromise orthodoxy but finds reasons for inclusivity. This work concludes with the thesis that religious pluralism thrives on the commonality and consequently, meaningful religious pluralism can be possible in Africa with its attendant benefits, if and only if, the principle of commonality is appreciated and adopted. With the recommendations proffered above, it is believed that the values of peace and harmony, which eluded Africa on account of religious exclusivity, would have been a thing of the past. This, apart from contributing to scholarship, would be the most important contribution of this work as it would have provided a model for religious pluralism in Africa and beyond.

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⁴⁹ Foreigners here were non-believers and, in a sense, adherents of other religions but because of some common tendencies to religion and worship of God, Isaiah prophesied that they, too, would be admitted to Jerusalem. This showed tolerance and inclusivity which are key to religious pluralism.

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