

**RELIGION AND INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY: AN IMPETUS FOR PEACE
IN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract: The intricacy of misconceptions on the roles and subject matter of religion in line with diversity in human culture is one of the greatest struggles bedeviling development in our multicultural society. There is no doubt saying that religion, which is supposed to harmonise humans, has mired them in this present society; this thus calls for philosophical reflection as an attempt towards peace development. Given cognizance of various arguments raised by different philosophers for the justification of humans as religious beings, it is obvious that humans have not truly seen the purpose of religion, most especially in our intercultural society. Based on the premise that the average African by nature is religious, it consequently implies that the role of religion in human development cannot be underestimated for societal development. Upon this basis, the paper attempts a philosophical evaluation using the knowledge of intercultural philosophy for the necessity of religion in African development. Through expository and critical analysis, the paper attempts to interrogate religion with intercultural philosophy as a necessary impetus for African development. The paper therefore defends the position that religion brings man together in society and serves as an impetus for peace building in the sense that it preaches peace and harmonious relations with each other.

Keywords: Religion, Intercultural, Peace-building, Development, Africa.

Introduction

In this increasingly diverse cultural and multi-religious society of ours, the topic of intercultural tolerance has come to the forefront of the agitation of many people in the society as a resolution to diverse challenges bedeviling the entire world and most especially our African modern society. Right from the inception of this millennium, there is no given geopolitical zone in Nigeria, for instance, that is not battling with either an inter- or intra-ethnic crisis or the other. Recently in our country, Nigeria, diverse cultural crises are giving the country and the government an unstable society, which is invariably contributing to its problem of development: Fulani versus farmers in Oyo State and the entire south-west, herdsmen versus people of Benue State, indigenous people of Biafra versus the federal government, and many other internal crises, to mention but a few. This has however gotten to the point that man is no longer secure and thus begins to live a suspicious life with his fellow being once it is noted that such is from a different ancestral group. This presupposition deters the notion of development from the citizen-

ry. This concept of religion and intercultural philosophy filters through the notion of hope for harmony and hence projects the utopian livelihood views that humans, despite their cultural differences, can live together in peace knowing that freedom to live and tolerance irrespective of race, gender, or ethnic group are basic values in attendance of every country, but this act of discrimination based on cultural difference has not disappeared in the society yet. It is on these premises that the paper considers religion, intercultural philosophy, and development adequate, with the view that if considered, they will promote peace-building in African development. In attempting reasonable justification for this position, the paper will be divided into various sections. While the first section discusses the notion of intercultural philosophy, followed by religious interpretation and some philosophical issues, it will further take into consideration the interface between philosophy and religion; these and many more shall be the focus of the work.

Idea of Intercultural Philosophy

Culture, in its generic meaning, is the total way of life of the people in a given society. In this view, culture is not seen in terms of symbolic aspects such as dance, music, or attitude that shape people's thoughts and actions, but rather the totality of their way of life. Humans cannot successfully live a solitary life: every single individual is a member of a particular cultural group. The group life that humans live in is epitomized by the following: the nuclear family, the extended family, the clan, the town, the city, the state, and indeed the global village from where human cultural value comes forth. Culture is basically meant to perform four basic functions in our society, among which are: It is a means of creating order in society. It provides the basis for the development of common reactions, common interests, common actions, common attitudes, and common values. It makes events in the human experience intelligible and significant. It serves as a regulator of change. We can deduce from the above that the idea of culture has been redefined from the general view's conception, which is defined as the total way of life of a group of people from the same clan, to "the process of refinement of people." This implies that a refined person is someone who is intellectually upright and does things in line with an ideal way of life. In a significant way, Oladipo maintains that culture is an instrument for the achievement of social integration. It is also the framework for interpreting events and determining what is significant in people's lives. The intellectuality of humans, according to Landis & Brislin (Landis & Brislin 2013, 3), has made them discover themselves as an intelligent and cultural being because they are unique members of the animal kingdom who understand their environment; they have, more so, been able to find some explanation through religious beliefs, myths, and legends and thought to see themselves as a cultured being with a distinct culture. This punctual is their opportunity to answer the question "What is human?" We ask who we are, where we come from, and where we are going because the answers have become murky and unclear. Our answers therefore have been tied to our culture, to belonging in some place with some group of people. With reference to this particular life, people posed their questions and made their answers.

Moving further, the term 'intercultural' can give us a range of meanings. While some schools of thought view the term intercultural simply as things "relating to, involving, representing, or integrating different cultures A slightly more robust sense is that it is described as what is taking place between cultures. In other words, one can generally say that intercultural implies the integration, involvement, or amalgamation of two or more distinct cultures within a given territory. It implies the integration of intercultural values in diverse cultures, aiming toward synthesising a unique society. Going by the current globalization era, it is impossible for human to live a solitary life; if one is to be relevant in the global world, the world experiences unprecedented migration. People move, and their destination is unclear. They move for work, for study, for lovers or family out of passion, hope, or desperation. But things come up and plans change. Along the way, people meet different ethnic and religious groups and beliefs, discuss, and discover one another. They exchange ideas, beliefs, and understandings. That is one of the reasons we most often discuss things like global culture. But this culture is different from the cultures we know from the past; it involves the interconnectivity of multiple cultures. While it is becoming more and more real on a global scale in some of its aspects, it lacks completeness in certain aspects based on the multiplicity of cultures. Such as in "intercultural communication," intercultural religion, or derived from different dimensions of cultures. It can further be insisted that genuine inter-culturality goes further

than still and designates contact among cultures that exemplifies, or leads to, “comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality.

Intercultural philosophy, like any other philosophical endeavour for better understanding, must start with a definition of what it is, knowing that setting goals is the same as defining oneself. As a result, the concerns of goal and self-definition overlap. The question of intercultural philosophy, practice, and idea is a concept putting questions front and center in particular. While the responses provided by Mall, Wimmer, and Kimmerle are strikingly similar, they also appear to go in distinct directions and reflect various philosophical stances. According to Kimmerle (Kimmerle, 2002,1), intercultural philosophy is discourse philosophy’s goal of conversing between various philosophical schools. He defines the environment in which ideologies from all civilizations genuinely engage in this kind of discourse as the prerequisite for its realization. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his discourse on the history of philosophy, makes a case for the universality of philosophy, given the concession in the dialectical history that, although many are of the view that only Western philosophy is the real philosophy. Hegel agrees that while Greek philosophy is the birthplace of philosophy, other philosophical traditions, such as the Chinese or Indian and African, constitute only teachings of wisdom (Wimmer, 2004). Others claim that philosophy has more than one birthplace and also recognize the Asian traditions of philosophy (Mall 1989).

However, according to the United Church of Canada (2011), intercultural philosophy is an attempt to have philosophers from different cultures or traditions actively engage one another and do so in a way that shows not only mutual respect but also the recognition that one’s own philosophical views are not complete, that there are other, legitimate philosophical views, and that one’s own views may need a rearticulating or even revision.

For some, intercultural philosophy is associated with ‘comparative philosophy, the bringing “together of philosophical traditions that have developed in relative isolation from one another and that are defined quite broadly along cultural and regional lines.”

Presuppositions and rationale of intercultural philosophy

Africa is a continent known for its rich cultural diversity and religious heritage, yet it faces ongoing issues such as conflict, social inequality, and underdevelopment (Gyekye, 1997,12). The intricate relationship between religious and cultural differences often intensifies these problems, making it difficult to achieve sustainable peace and development. Understanding the diversity and complexities of human nature is essential, as it allows for the acknowledgment of socio-religious differences and the integration of the values of others for the collective good. Philosophy as a discipline thus studies many questions religions hope to answer, such as what the nature of human existence is, why humans are here, and what values are most important to have. In line with this assertion, intercultural philosophy serves as a bridge, connecting individual religions, cultures, and beliefs across religions and facilitating a deeper understanding of shared values by acknowledging the commonalities that exist among religions, so as to build trust and overcome misconceptions that often fuel conflicts in the society.

African Traditional Religions (ATRs) emphasize the rights of individuals to their own religious beliefs, focusing on community, harmony, and a balanced relationship with nature (Mbiti, 1969, 15). The idea of Ubuntu, which signifies interconnectedness, is fundamental in many African cultures, fostering empathy, cooperation, and mutual support (Tutu, 1999, 31). Thus, Intercultural philosophy focuses on communal relationships and the interconnectedness of humanity. For example, the Yoruba notion of “Omode” (child) underscores the significance of community and social responsibility (Abimbola, 2006, 56). Likewise, the Igbo idea of “Umunna” (kinship) highlights the importance of extended family and communal bonds (Idowu, 1973, 102). These concepts demonstrate how intercultural philosophy can draw inspiration from African cultural and religious traditions.

Philosophically, Intercultural philosophy challenges the Parmenidean thesis that ‘all is one’ and that becoming is impossible. The principle of ‘being is and non-being is not’ lies at the heart of many religious conflicts in Africa. It is clear that the numerous religious conflicts on the continent are unnecessary and contradict the African understanding of reality, as well as the teachings of major religions.

Christianity and Islam, two of the world's largest religions, have intricate relationships with intercultural philosophy. While both have been linked to conflicts and divisions, they also encompass teachings that promote peace and understanding.

Intercultural Philosophy in Practice

The intersection of religion and intercultural philosophy presents a valuable opportunity to enhance peace and understanding in various cultural settings. By exploring African cultural and religious traditions alongside Christianity, Islam, and other faiths, intercultural philosophy can promote empathy, tolerance, and collaboration. As Gyekye emphasizes, "The future of humanity depends on our ability to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation across cultural boundaries" (Gyekye, 1997, 150). This field, shaped by the richness of religious and cultural diversity, has the potential to contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful world. Intercultural philosophy aims to encourage understanding and dialogue among different philosophical traditions (Gyekye, 12). This approach acknowledges the constraints of a Western-centric philosophical narrative and strives to include non-Western viewpoints, thereby nurturing a more inclusive and global philosophical community (Hallen, 2000, 125).

Intercultural Philosophy and Peace

Intercultural philosophy emphasizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect, providing a framework for conflict resolution and peace promotion (Gyekye, 1997). By engaging with various cultural and religious viewpoints, it nurtures empathy, tolerance, and cooperation (Hallen, 2000). Notable African philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere have championed intercultural understanding as a pathway to peace and development (Nkrumah 1964; Nyerere 1968). The intersection of religion and intercultural philosophy presents a valuable opportunity for fostering peace and development in Africa, the understanding of the intricate factors that contribute to conflicts on the continent by engaging with diverse cultural and religious perspectives.

Heinz (2002) provides a thorough framework for intercultural philosophy, highlighting the significance of dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect among various cultural and philosophical traditions (Kimmerle, 2002, 12). Kimmerle acknowledges the complexities inherent in cultural differences and aims to foster global understanding through philosophical exploration. He advocates for dialogue as the central method of intercultural philosophy, emphasizing its capacity to bridge cultural and philosophical divides (Kimmerle, 15). Kimmerle posits that dialogue allows participants to engage in mutual interpretation and reciprocal understanding. This methodology encourages a deeper appreciation of cultural differences and aids in the development of shared values and ethics.

Kimmerle's work on intercultural philosophy is crucial for advancing global understanding focusing on dialogue, cultural hermeneutics, and intercultural ethics. His approach acknowledges the intricacies of cultural differences while promoting mutual respect and understanding. As Kimmerle asserts, "The future of humanity depends on our ability to engage in meaningful dialogue."

Philosophical Interpretation of Religion

Religion as a concept and practice has been so prostituted that its major significance become undermined and chartered in certain crucial and social situations. There is no doubt that while some people know the essence, some are bamboozled into it but are ignorant of its essence. Others perpetually demand the practical relevance of religion in the individual, society, and communal development, whether religion has any goal for society and man's well-being. The primary goal of religion, as asserted by Oladipo (Oladipo, 1995, 5), is to provide an orientation to life both for individuals and communities that are invariably centered on two core values, namely self-realisation and social harmony, which will eventually pave ways for the condition of existence guided by longing for the discovery of the ideal possibilities of human life. In spite of this conception, it is heartbreaking that people hide under the guise of this same religion to perpetuate social vices, especially when one sees the startling revelation that accompanies a catalogue of vices perpetrated in the name of religion in our country since the inception of democratic administration is still present. Hence, it becomes a philosophical imperative to examine and possibly absolve religion as a major instrument for mutual coexistence and national development. The word "religion" is a controversial concept, from the point of origin to the very scope of meaning. In this regard, there are lots of tendencies and positions that must be thoroughly looked at before a working

definition can be put in place. A workable definition may not be reached from a unilateral point of view; however, the subject matter may be defined from different speculative ranges, from objective to subjective religion, but the most fundamental aspect is the fact that religion is essentially a relationship, a link established between two people and a divine person believed to exist. It is something that links or unites man with a transcendent being believed to exist and worshiped by man; thus, religion is a bipolar phenomenon. On the one end is man (the religious man), while on the other end is the transcendent being, the deity, whom he believes to exist and which he worships. This implies that religion is an embracing and complex concept that permeates all spheres of human life. Emile Durkheim (1951) even asserts that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. Odumuyiwa (2001) posits that religion is man's effective desire to be in the right relation with a sacred transcendental order, controlling human destiny and events in life with prescribed systems of rituals and beliefs. This implies that religion is essentially a relationship between man and deity, a transcendent being believed to exist. Invariably behind the concept of religion is man; man is the measure of all things, determining what does and does not exist. That is, man constitutes what is called religion, without which religion does not exist. Going through various notions on the concept of religion, it can be asserted that religion is made for man and not that man is made for religion. It is a voluntary subjection of oneself to the Supreme Being. It must be subsumed that religion answers to a deep-felt need in the heart of a man. Hence religion, in its outward worship, is a social function. Besides, it aims to provide an orientation to human life, both for individuals and the community. Oladipo (1995) consents to the types of orientation he worships. However, religion should be centered on two core values, namely self-realisation and social harmony but it is deplorable at times that religion is used for destructive purposes, especially in this current dispensation. It is clearly evident that religion has a very dynamic role to play in the socio-political integration of humanity. By self-realisation, it does not simply mean a state of economic, social, and cultural well-being, although this is equally important; rather, what it means is a condition of existence or a state of being that is guided by a longing or desire for the discovery of the ideal possibilities of human life. Religion is not only sought to protect and enhance our humanity, but the socio-political conditions for the realisation of their core value are more or less the same. This being the case, the struggle for respect for human rights in any society should also be a struggle for the various religions in that society. There can be no genuine brotherhood in a society of unequal opportunities. Thus, in order to be able to realise the core value of religion, we need a socio-political order that takes liberty, equality, and justice seriously as human ideals. These precisely are the ideals that the Universal Declaration of Human and People's Rights seeks to promote. The rights insist that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood. (culled from Oladipo 1996) Besides, natural law theory also complements this by affirming everybody's rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Considering various functions and values being highlighted about religion, it seems as if it has failed to realise its essence in Nigeria in particular and the continents at large. The more religious Nigerians become the nastier, more brutish, and shorter human life in society becomes.

Religion, Intercultural Philosophy, and Development

Intercultural philosophy and religion is a historical process of deterritorialization or border-crossing, in which human desire, human interconnectedness, and universalizability are to be realized on the planet as a whole, and to be concretized in the present as a global free market. All people of the world are involved in the process of going beyond themselves to many others, to meet them and understand them, either ideally for dialogue in view of mutual enrichment or unfortunately for dealing with conflict in the case of oppositional confrontation. Religion is a given in Africa and, as such, plays a significant role in the interpretations of reality. The African reality is that of unity with nature as opposed to the Western orientation of conquering nature. As such, religion occupies a central position in the order of things in Africa. It must be stated here that religion as a human institution is prone to abuse and therefore subject to criticism, just as every other human institution is also subject to the same. To then call for the relegation of religion is using colonial spectacle on the undeniable reality of African life. There is no doubt saying the world is entering an era of globalization, two interrelated questions concerning the future of

philosophy and religion emerge for our attention: First, how could each philosophical and religious tradition draw the best of its cultural resources for the benefit of other philosophical and religious traditions in the world? Second, how could each philosophical and religious tradition achieve self-understanding by regarding impartially other philosophical and religious traditions and, furthermore, by allowing philosophizing and religiosity to become indispensable for the mutual understanding of all cultural traditions in the world? Facing the challenge of these two questions, we are led to put more and more emphasis on intercultural philosophy/religion.

The position is that religion is instrumental to social cohesion, social control, and social solidarity. Hence, we agree with the functionalist view on religion as represented by Emile Durkheim. Religion creates the collective consciousness necessary for the development of a people through emphasis on the ingredients of social transformation, such as hard work, dedication, and peaceful coexistence. Critics have argued that regions can be dysfunctional, for example, religion may incite violence by a fundamentalist group as witnessed in most parts of Africa with particular reference to the activities of the Boko Haram group. Hence, we make a case for intercultural philosophy, which serves as a 'bridge to combat prejudices with unity and mutual understanding at the foundation. Removing barriers of non-acceptance and developing trust nurture amicable bonds between people of different cultures' (Kujek, 2022). Intercultural philosophy serves as the shepherd of religion, guiding it towards respect for the religious realities of others; this understanding is critical to the developmental aspirations of the people.

Conclusion

The realization of the self is central to religious creeds; this self-realization is critical to the individual's transformation and well-being. However, this goal may be hampered by refusal to appreciate and recognise the religious realities of others, leading to conflict of interest and thereby hindering the developmental desires of the individual, but by recognising these various interpretations and accepting them as a valid form of reality, the individual realizes himself/herself in a peaceful environment where social cohesion is an unwritten creed. Intercultural philosophy therefore "nurtures understanding, empathy, open communication, cultural exchange, and trust between individuals" (Vosooghzadeh, 2024). It must, therefore, be established that the more and more frequent and intimate interactions between different philosophies, religions, and cultural traditions are putting us inevitably in a world of multiculturalism. It is imperative for philosophy and religion to promote others by means of cultural interactions in which we share the best part of our own while being aware of our own limitations in contrast to others. This orientation will help in breaking down metaphysical barriers created by fossilised reality and, as such, prevent conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence and collaboration essential for development in Africa and elsewhere. We can therefore affirm that intercultural philosophy as well as religion is a key to the future of societal development.

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