

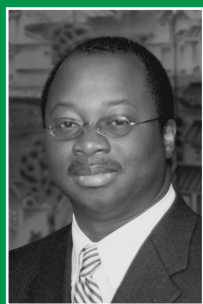
P E T E R L A N G

Fractured Spectrum

PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM
ENCOUNTERS IN NIGERIA

EDITED BY AKINTUNDE E. AKINADE

In the twenty-first century, no one can ignore the complex paradigms connected with the precarious relationship between Christians and Muslims all over the globe. Since the seventh century, Christians and Muslims have interacted with one another in a variety of ways. This relationship is sated with both meaningful engagements and baffling ambiguities, running the gamut of constructive dialogue, lethargic encounters, open conflicts, and internecine violence. Nowhere is the need for interreligious cooperation, dialogue, and understanding more pressing than in the Christian and Muslim communities, which constitute approximately 60 percent of the world's population. *Fractured Spectrum: Perspectives on Christian-Muslim Encounters in Nigeria* deals with an important African dimension in Christian-Muslim relations. Nigeria, with its equal populations of Christians and Muslims, provides an auspicious case study for understanding the cultural, social, theological, economic, and political issues involved in Christian-Muslim encounters. The essays in this book, written by Christian and Muslim scholars who are actively engaged with the Nigerian context, examine some of the issues germane to Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.



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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *Fractured Spectrum*

“Fractured Spectrum: Perspectives on Christian-Muslim Encounters in Nigeria is an intellectually exciting and engaging book that probes interreligious dialogue among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The essays in this book bring new and fascinating perspectives as the researchers reposition interreligious dialogue and tension in the cultural, social, political, gender, and economic atmosphere of Nigeria. These creative and provocative essays offer a new understanding of the Nigerian situation that could establish possibilities for dialogue and peaceful co-existence. Everyone interested in the current dynamics of interreligious dialogue and contestation in Nigeria and Africa must read this book.”

*Elias Kifon Bongmba, Harry and Hazel Chavanne Chair in Christian Theology
and Professor of Religious Studies, Rice University, Houston, Texas*

“The fractures about which some of the contributors to this book write about are real indeed—always potentially imploding toward another clash of civilizations or an apocalyptic doomsday. However, the commitments both Muslims and Christians show in these pages to nurturing interreligious civility across the Nigerian landscape are palpable and commendable for the global Muslim-Christian encounter. Everyone who is concerned about the present and future of Muslim-Christian relations should read this book.”

*Amos Yong, J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology,
Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, Virginia*

“Forceful and nuanced, this book interprets the complexities of the co-existence of Christianity and Islam in contemporary Nigeria. Without being pedantic, the book is a wake-up call to the seriousness of harmonious relationships and mature differentiation of religions, that will not be contaminated by partisan politics. This is an excellent book that takes the Nigerian reality seriously.”

*Caleb O. Oladipo, Duke K. McCall Professor of Mission and
World Christianity, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia*

*“Christian-Muslim dialogue is a trendy topic, but only a very few meet the intellectual and historical standards and many fail the ethical criteria. *Fractured Spectrum*, however, is a highly knowledgeable and critical book with insight and rigour which give us hope and provide signposts toward a path of religious peace and harmony....Given the awful bloodshed and chaos in Northern Nigeria, this book is a sign of great hope and of high paradigmatic value. I recommend this book as being of singular value for those interested in Christian-Muslim relations and who search for a just, pluralistically participatory, and diversely sustainable present with hope for the future.”*

*Charles Amjad-Ali, The Martin Luther King, Jr., Professor of Justice and Christian
Community and Director of Islamic Studies, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota*

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PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

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This book is dedicated to all the victims
of interreligious violence in Nigeria
and around the globe.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Sacred Rumblings: Reflections on Christian-Muslim Encounters in Nigeria <i>Akintunde E. Akinade</i>	1
2. Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Nigeria: Social, Political, and Theological Dimensions <i>Matthew Hassan Kukah and Kathleen McGarvey</i>	12
3. The Cross, the Crescent, and the Media in Nigeria <i>Afis O. Oladosu and Habibah O. Uthman-Oladosu</i>	30
4. Born-Again Muslims: The Ambivalence of Pentecostal Response to Islam in Nigeria <i>Asonzeh Ukah</i>	43
5. Critical Analysis of Christian-Muslim Relations and Space Contestation in Nigeria <i>Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin</i>	63
6. Muslim/Christian Encounter in Nigeria and Yoruba Muslim Educational <i>Jihād</i> <i>Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman</i>	85
7. Islam in Nigeria Through Fifty Years of Independence <i>Joseph Kenny</i>	94
8. Promotion of Religious Peace and Harmony in Nigeria: An Islamic Perspective <i>M. O. Raheemson</i>	102
9. Trust and Confidence Building in the Management of Interreligious Conflicts in Nigeria <i>Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo</i>	113
10. A Survey of Unhealthy Inter-Religious Relations in Nigeria <i>Olumuyiwa Olusesan Familusi</i>	131

11. Muslim Perception of Christians and Christianity in Nigeria
Yushau Sodiq 147

**12. Space Contestation and Religious Identity Among
Christian and Muslim Students in Nigerian Universities**
David O. Ogungbile 158

List of Contributors 169

Index 171

Introduction

Sacred Rumbling: Reflections on Christian-Muslim Encounters in Nigeria

AKINTUNDE E. AKINADE

The most commonly enunciated Nigerian ideal is *unity*. So important is it to us that it stands inscribed on our coat-of-arms and so sacred that the blood of millions of our countrymen, women and children was shed ... to uphold it against secessionist forces.

CHINUA ACHEBE

The universally acknowledged but deliberately suppressed truth is that religious extremism is a malignant fungus that not only attacks weak tissues but casts its spores worldwide, encouraging emulation in its benign relations, even origins, by denigrating their innate pacifism as enfeeblement.

WOLE SOYINKA

Background: A Struggling Relationship

Christian-Muslim encounters¹ evoke a protean image. They are always in a state of flux and continuous change. The possibilities of models and paradigms in these encounters are indeed complex and often bewildering. In the twenty-first century, no one can ignore the complex paradigms connected with the precarious relationship between Christians and Muslims all over the globe. Since the seventh century, Christians and Muslims have interacted with one another in a variety of ways. It is truly a relationship that is sated with both meaningful engagements and baffling ambiguities. It runs the gamut of constructive dialogue, lethargic encounters, open conflicts, and internecine violence. Nonetheless, nowhere is the need for interreligious cooperation, dialogue, and understanding more pressing than with the followers of the two largest religions: Christianity and Islam. Together they constitute 60 percent of the world's population. Our contemporary times hold a unique importance for Christians in the religious sense because it commemorates two thousand years of Christian

history. What is also significant is that for nearly three quarters of this period, since the 7th century, Christianity has encountered and lived with Islam, the other of the world's geographically most dominant monotheistic religions. Both are considered Abrahamic religions, to use an apt description by Louis Massignon,² so they have strong historical and theological linkages. The encounters between Christianity and Islam for over nearly fourteen centuries cover a whole gamut of relationships: from conviviality to conflict, from commercial ties and communication to contestation and crisis. Our contemporary world is characterized by an amazing plurality of ideologies, cultures, and religions. This situation creates the imperative to find ways to live in unity even if they are different from each other. The often-repeated cliché is that we are now living in a global village. It is apt to mention here that this is a village yearning for tolerance, peace, and dialogue. Christians and Muslims find themselves living in a world longing painfully for unity and harmony. In the past, the world was characterized by watertight religious demarcations. But that is no longer the case. In our contemporary global landscape, Christians and Muslims are found everywhere living side-by-side and dealing with the same political, economic, and cultural realities. We have been ushered into a brave new world in which all major world religious traditions can be found in everyone's hometown. This is an essential hallmark of the postmodern reality. In the words of Mark Juergensmeyer,

scarcely any region in the globe today is composed solely of members of a single strand of traditional religion. In an era of globalization the pace of cultural interaction and change has increased by seemingly exponential expansions of degrees. So an accurate coloration of the religious world, even fifty years ago, would have to show dense areas of color here and there, with enormous mixes and shadings of hues everywhere else.³

Our world today is shaped by fluid processes of religious and cultural expansion, interaction, adaptation, and adjustments. These processes have been going on for a long time; however, in recent times, the forces of globalization and transnationalism have introduced new paradigms and models in interreligious and cross-cultural adaptation. Religious traditions now operate within a new context of fluid, dynamic, and permeable boundaries. Any theology of religions in the twenty-first century must take into account the new geo-religious realities that characterize the world today.

This book examines an important African dimension in Christian-Muslim relations: the Nigerian case study. This African nation with its equal distribution of Christians and Muslims provides an auspicious case study for understanding the cultural, social, theological, economic, and political issues that are involved

in Christian-Muslim encounters. The essays in this book, written by Christian and Muslim scholars who are actively engaged with the Nigerian context, examine some of the issues that are germane to Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria. The essays offer new perspectives as the writers situate interreligious dialogue and tension within the cultural, social, political, and economic context of Nigeria. They also probe the role of technology and media in Africa's largest media market play in shaping interreligious understanding, contestation for space, religious and cultural ideals, and the unfortunate violence that has blighted these efforts. The authors provide ethnographic, historical, and theological insights into the multiple levels and structures of Christian-Muslim encounters in Nigeria. One of the major themes that runs through these essays like a crimson thread is a new engagement and understanding of the other. This is a critical issue within Nigeria's diverse religious landscape. In a pluralistic context, encountering the other presents both opportunities and challenges. In his reflection on the will to embrace the other, Miroslav Volf stated that

The commitment to live with others is the simplest aspect of our relation with them. Yet, it is often the most difficult one. Instead of considering others as my own diminishment, I have to imagine them as potential enrichment. Instead of thinking that they disfigure my social landscape, I have to think of them as potentially contributing to its aesthetic improvement. Instead of only suspecting enemies, I have to see them as potential friends.⁴

This book deals with some of the dimensions, paradigms, and models of Christian-Muslim encounters in contemporary Nigeria. With a population of over 160 million people, Archbishop Teissier of Algiers once described this country as "the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world."⁵ By this, he means that there is no other nation in the world where there are as many Christians living side by side with so many Muslims. This important fact makes Nigeria an important test case for evolving patterns of Christian-Muslim relations not only in Africa, but all over the globe. Nigeria truly provides an excellent context for understanding the cultural, social, economic, and political issues that are involved in Christian-Muslim encounters. The democratization of the public space has enhanced interreligious discourse and communication in Nigeria. An integral part of this phenomenon is an increased discussion on the influence of religion in the public domain. Religious leaders, political leaders, and people from all walks of life continue to have passionate discussions on the role of religion in a pluralistic context such as Nigeria. The crucial challenge is how to engender a dialogical framework that will safeguard pluralism, freedom, and justice. Such an agenda is particularly important in a fragile nation such as Nigeria. A recent study by the Pew Charitable Trusts indicates that both

Christianity and Islam continue to experience exponential growth in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶ It should however be noted that religious vitality and growth may also aggravate existing competitive and centrifugal tendencies between Christians and Muslims. In the Nigerian context, the politicization of religion has added more fuel to the embers of mistrust between Christians and Muslims. Socio-economic, ethnic, and political considerations have also contributed to new rhetorics and formulations on the role of religion in politics and vice versa.

A Legacy of Inter-Religious Competition and Cooperation

Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity has been a bane as well as a boom, the basis of the nation's pluralistic framework, but also a nagging albatross. The essays in this volume underscore the perplexing paradox within the Nigerian landscape. While there are instances of religious violence, sectarian conflicts, and clash of ideologies, there are also creative interfaith initiatives for peace and reconciliation.⁷ The Nigeria state vacillates between the peace of Eden and the horrors of Armageddon. The nation presents an excellent context to engage the various manifestations of the "ambivalence of the sacred."⁸

In many parts of the country, Christians and Muslims continue to live together in peace. They engage in a robust dialogue of life that transcends myopic religious sensibilities. The rich legacy of interreligious cooperation in many parts of Yorubaland confirms that Christians and Muslims are committed to interreligious solidarity and alliances. The rich dialogue of life⁹ that is pervasive in many parts of Yorubaland provides a good insight into the form of interreligious dialogue that is engendered from the grassroots and connected to the experiences of the *dramatis personae* in interfaith discourse.

On the need to pay close attention to the concrete experience of participants in interreligious engagement, Charles Amjad Ali has stated that most of the discourse on Christian-Muslim relations has refused to address the needs of Christians in the South. He writes that "the present parameters of dialogue in the West mean nothing to those of us who live and breathe in an Islamic atmosphere where we are forced everyday to ask what the meaning of incarnation and God's reign is."¹⁰ Amjad Ali provides a very useful critique of the epistemological presuppositions undergirding western theologies of dialogue. These are the glorification of cognitive knowledge, based on Descartes' dictum, "I think, therefore I am." The emphasis therein is on reason as the primary means to achieve knowledge that claims to transcend particulars and achieve universality. Liberal political theory as well, celebrates individual freedoms and choice over community rights and religious identity. All these factors have led to metalogue,

or the “search for a transcendent way beyond the particulars of the dialogue partners.”¹¹

In many parts of Nigeria, there is a form of dialogue of life that operates on practical and day-to-day terms. Christians and Muslims live next to each other, mingle freely in all aspects of human endeavor, meeting in the market place and on the streets, in schools and other learning institutions. Both Christians and Muslims are awakened every morning by the strident voice of the muezzin from the minaret of the mosque, urging faithful believers that “it is better to pray than to sleep.” Christians receive Christmas and Easter greeting cards from their Muslim friends, neighbors, and relatives. Muslims are present in the church for the baptism, wedding, or burial of relatives and friends. In this dialogue of life, Christians and Muslims are enriched by each other’s experience and spirituality, and strengthened by certain features of the faith of the other.

Most studies and paradigms in ecumenical dialogue to date have focused on theological concerns, or have explored the ideological dimensions of religion. Western theories of dialogue tend to be text-centered, doctrinally-oriented, and concerned with issues of the *lex credendi*. The lived character of dialogue in places like Ghana, Yorubaland and Gambia and in many other places in West Africa offer a more grassroots example for consideration. The religious understanding, which has emerged from this popular experience, is no less significant in its accomplishments than the gains made from more formal projects. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

The dialogue between ordinary believers, harmonious and constructive sharing in the situations of daily contacts is truly a basic form of dialogue, and the one which lays the foundation for more specialized encounters.¹²

In spite of this legacy of inter-religious cooperation in many parts of Nigeria and even in West Africa, one cannot ignore the high level of sacred fury that has been unleashed in many parts of Nigeria. Since the horrors of the Nigerian civil war (1967–70), many lives and properties have been lost in crises and violence engendered by religion. The spate of religious violence and aggression reached an unprecedented proportion in the twentieth century.¹³ In recent times, a tapestry of violence has engulfed many regions in Nigeria. Nigeria’s fertile central belt, especially Jos in Plateau state has been soaked with the blood of innocent children, pregnant women, and helpless people. Inter-ethnic and religious rivalries reached a pulsating crescendo and left a city in an unprecedented sorrow, tears, and blood. It was a horrendous nightmare that was unequivocally condemned by human rights organizations and people of good will all over the world. In the wake of Boko Haram’s uprising, this extremist

religious group, whose agenda, as its name suggests, is to fight western education and imposition, has turned many states in Northern Nigeria into slaughter slabs. The crux of the issue is whether religion is the sole culprit for this violence or if we should take other factors such as politics, resource control, and disenchantment with modernity into account. In most cases, religion may provide the legitimacy and rallying point for terror and violence. In the words of Juergensmeyer,

Religious ideas have given a profundity and ideological clarity to what in many cases have been real experiences of economic destitution, social oppression, political corruption, and a desperate need for the hope of rising above the limitations of modern life. The image of cosmic struggle has given these bitter experiences meaning, and the involvement in a grand conflict has been for some participants exhilarating ... In such situations, acts of violence, even what appear to those of us outside the movements as vicious acts of terrorism, have been viewed by insiders in cultures of violence as both appropriate and justified.¹⁴

In spite of many horror stories from different parts of the nation, there are still instances of inter-ethnic and religious solidarity in the country. There are many Christians and Muslims, “religious militants,”¹⁵ to borrow a phrase from Scott Appleby that are committed to peace and non-violence in Nigeria. The different levels of meaning, interaction, and experience in Christian-Muslim encounters in Nigeria underscore the fact that one cannot approach the study from a monolithic perspective.

The Lure of Contextual Understanding

There is no universal norm for Christian-Muslim relations. Each context is different and unique. In fact, the tendency to strip Christian-Muslim engagements from their contextual situations has led to facile generalizations and hasty conclusions. To think of a new global understanding of Christian-Muslim relations is a futile exercise. Is there a global norm that can be applied to Christian-Muslim relations wherever they take place? This book boldly denies that there is. It proceeds instead on the basis of a contextual approach. The contextual approach is helpful because it challenges idealist paradigms of how Christian-Muslim relations ought to be or how they have been in the past. Such a liberal view of dialogue and interreligious encounters tends to be arrogant, guilt-ridden, and ultimately obfuscates the real issues and concerns in inter-religious engagement. Christian-Muslim engagement in contemporary Nigeria thus calls for a sound contextual analysis that is deeply rooted in a careful understanding of the nuances of the Nigerian situation. Contextualization provides the

auspicious methodological framework for understanding the historical and contemporary linkages between Christians and Muslims. In fact, one can say Christian-Muslim relations is in a state of disarray and uncertainty because most of the studies on the subject matter have been focused on *text* rather than *context*. By considering the economic, political, and cultural dynamics, the contextual range of Christian-Muslim experiences are explored and discussed extensively in this book.

A study in Christian-Muslim engagement within the Nigerian context seeks to correct an imbalance that exists in most of the current literature on Christian-Muslim relations. With few exceptions, this literature is written from a western perspective. It tends to be in three forms. One deals with Christian-Muslim relations at the textual level, either the Bible and the Qur'an, or the writings of Christian and Muslim scholars. Within this approach, Christian-Muslim relations are portrayed as idealistic or theoretical. The second approach looks at Christian-Muslim relations through history, describing ways in which Christianity and Islam have encountered each other in the past, not in an idealist or theoretical way, but as religious civilizations. This is usually focused on the Euro-Mediterranean axis of encounter between Medieval Latin and Greek Christendom and the medieval Caliphate under the control of Arabs, Persians, and the Turks, and the countries that succeeded these empires. The third type of literature deals with contemporary Christian-Muslim relations in the West, especially Europe and North America. This usually emphasizes the socio-political dimensions of religious pluralism in contemporary western countries.

Each of these approaches has its merit, but overall they project a very western perspective of Christian-Muslim relations: a liberal view of dialogue that is tainted by western bias about the idealist constructs of how Christian-Muslim relations ought to be, contrasted by a toxic memory about how they have been in the past. This way of thinking about Christian-Muslim relations is plausible in the western context, but it is not applicable to Christian-Muslim relations in other parts of the world where interreligious encounters have taken on different shapes and hues.¹⁶ This book makes it clear that Christian-Muslim encounters are not defined by only one grand narrative; rather, these encounters, just like most relationships that are shaped by human experiences consist of different paradigms, stories, and manifestations.

The African Dimension in Christian-Muslim Encounter

The most important point of departure for understanding Christian-Muslim relations in Africa is that the two communities have been engaged in a long and rich legacy of fruitful encounters and dialogue. Andrew Walls has affirmed that