

## JACQUE DUPUIS' THEOLOGICAL MODEL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: A FRAMEWORK FOR CURRICULUM REVIEW IN NIGERIA BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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### Abstract

Religion is a significant indicator in Nigeria social and political index. Nevertheless, in the currently riddled paradox of alteration of experience, religion now consists of weaponized ideologies and breeds hatred and separatist tendencies. Various governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals have not successfully reversed the seemingly unstoppable trend of interreligious disaffection. However, Arts and Humanities scholars have argued that the nation's education sector is a potent medium to revert the situation. Nevertheless, the major problem is the catechetical and confessional nature of the religious education being offered at the country's basic and secondary education levels. This paper adopts a qualitative content analysis research method to examine the contents of the religious education curriculum operative at the Basic and Secondary Education sector for their relevance to interreligious challenges in the country. It was discovered that the curriculum contents have more capacity for exclusive religious disposition than a pluralistic outlook. The paper suggests a review of extant religious studies curriculum at the Basic Education and Secondary Education level to include inclusive-pluralistic contents.

**Keywords: Jacque Dupuis, Interreligious Dialogue, Curriculum Review. Nigeria Basic and Secondary Education Levels**

### Introduction

The Constitution and the people of Nigeria have the shared vision and desire to build a united, virile, and just society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The nation is constituted by many ethnic groups and adherents of various religions. All citizens are recognized and given a voice in the nation's affairs, living in peace, and respecting each other. Hence, the Constitution advocates "religious tolerance" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Art. 23) and freedom of "thoughts, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change [...] religion or belief" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Art. 1). However, the disparity between what is desired and what is obtainable, *de iure* and *de facto*, in the socio-religious relationship

Nigerians have continued to haunt Nigerians.

The government has offered various solutions to the problem of interreligious conflicts and the near-absence of peace among the citizens. However, rather than the proffered solutions to ease the incessant cases of religious crises in the country, peace has continued to elude citizens at the slightest provocation. The palliatives and reassuring works of consolation often offered in the aftermath of many religious crises in the country are principally ephemeral. They do not go deep enough to convince interested parties in changing their ways or prevent reprisals. The situation is not unexpected as it would naturally be difficult to solve a religious problem with a non-religious solution; twisted

ideologies are not fought with physical guns.

Since political and military solutions have continued to prove inadequate to solving interreligious skirmishes in the country, a more robust solution that is profound and takes the interest of all stakeholders abreast must be engaged. It has been argued that the issues behind most of the crises witnessed in the country are based on political manipulation of religion, inordinate soul-winning campaigns, discriminate defence of religious beliefs, and one-sided apologetic slant (Boer, 2004, 2008; Çancı & Odukoya, 2016; König et al., 2020). Therefore, attempts at a solution must necessarily take cognisance of the issues identified as the causal factors to religious disharmony in the country. According to Ajibola (2018), Jacque Dupuis' theological model for interreligious dialogue provides an executable platform for negotiating interreligious peace in a multi-religious society. On this premise, this paper considers the dialogical model of Dupuis as a framework for curriculum review in the Nigerian education sector.

### **Methodology**

This article adopts a qualitative content analysis research method to determine the implication of the religious studies curriculum operative in Nigeria Basic Education sector on interreligious relations. It interrogates the content and relevance of Jacque Dupuis' model of religious pluralism to Nigeria interfaith landscape. Inferences are derived from the text analysis considered for recommendations in the policy review. The method is justified based on its systematic procedure and because other researchers can replicate the study with high reliability of the yielded result.

### **Religious studies curriculum operative in Nigeria basic and secondary education level**

Nigeria runs a 9-3-4- education system whereby the first nine years constitute the basic education years. The pattern is in three divisions of lower basic education level, Primary 1-3; middle basic education level, Primary 4-6; and upper basic education level, JSS 1-3. The three between the 9 and 4 refers to the Senior Secondary School (SSS), while the last four symbolically refer to the 'tertiary school' years. The various components of the basic education level have an appropriate curriculum. For this article, we shall concentrate on the religious studies curriculum of the Basic and Senior Education sector. The reason for selecting the basic and senior education levels for this research is that they have designated teachers' training colleges designed to teach at their level. Therefore, the study would provide ground for comparing the curriculum of would-be-teachers and the students they will teach.

The religious studies curriculum operative at the basic and senior secondary school level of the country's education sector is built on the thematic progression of topics. The curriculum is planned for the basic education level and tagged: Religion and National Values (RNV). The RNV is further divided into themes and sub-divided into topics. The division comprises Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Civic Education (Basic), Islamic Studies (IS), Security Education, and Social Studies. According to the National Education Research and Development Council (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012), the RNV's "contents are planned for all children to take Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education themes," but in separate classes for CRS and IS themes.

**Table.1 Civic Education and Religious studies curriculum operative at the upper basic and senior secondary school tranche of the 9-3-4 education system.**

	<b>Christin Religious Studies</b>	<b>Islamic Studies</b>
<b>JSS 1</b>	God And His Creation God's Call Keeping God In Our Relationship	Qur'an And Hadith Tawhid/Fiqh Sirah/Tahdhib
<b>JSS 2</b>	The Early Life of Jesus The Ministry of Jesus The Sacrifice of Jesus	Qur'an And Hadith Tawhid/Fiqh Sirah/Tahdhib
<b>JSS 3</b>	The Beginning of The Church The Ministry of The Apostles The Christian Church Today – first of which is unity among Christians	Qur'an And Hadith Tawhid/Fiqh Sirah/Tahdhib – which has one of its topics as Human relation in Islam
<b>SSS 1</b>	Jesus Teaching About Himself Love: God love for man, and love for one another Justification by Faith New Life in Jesus Sonship Faith that works The Fruit Of The Spirit Spiritual Gift Forgiveness The Family Humility Effectiveness of Prayers Christian Living In The Community The Christian And Persecution Impartiality The Resurrection and The Second Coming Of Christ	Qur'an And Hadith Tarikh Tawid And Fiqh
<b>SSS 2</b>	The Sovereignty of God Leadership Of Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Deborah God Cares for His People Parental Responsibility Consequences Of Obedience and Disobedience Friendship Submission To the Will Of God Making Decision as A Christian Greed And Its Effects The Supremacy of God Religious Reforms Concern for One Nation Faith In God True Religion and Social Justice	Qur'an And Hadith Tarikh
<b>SSS 3</b>	Baptism And Temptation of Jesus Call Of Discipleship Mission Of Disciple The Trial, Death and Resurrection Of Jesus Fellowship in the Early Church The Holy Spirit and The Mission To The Gentiles Opposition to the Gospel Message Civil Responsibility HIV/AIDS Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Dignity of Human Labour	The Qur'an and Hadith

Religious studies have always been on the curriculum of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, but they were taught independently. However, a review initiated in 2012 and activated in 2014 generated a heated debate with the merger of religious studies curriculum with other subjects under Religion and National Values. The review caused heated debate and immeasurable angst across the nation. Both Christian and Muslim parents became apprehensive of the curriculum, wiped up immense religious sentiment, and called on the government to revert to the *status quo ante*.

The reaction of the Christians to the reviewed curriculum is understandable because the curriculum of religious studies in Nigeria has always been confessional and catechetical. Hence, placing both religions under the same umbrella of Religion and National Values was suspicious and could confuse the young minds about the rudiments of their faith.

Reactions from the government debunk fear over any hidden motive concerning merging the two religious subjects and other subjects. According to the then Executive Secretary of NERDC, Prof. Ismail Junaid, the decision by the Federal Ministry of Education to reduce the workload of students at the basic education level, from 20 to a maximum of 10 subjects is in line with global best practices and contemporary national concerns (The Guardian Newspaper, 2016).

If "national concern" includes interreligious conflicts and mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims, the contents of the religious curriculum at the basic and secondary education level must be the government's concern. The review should be about

where to place the subject and how well the contents address national problems.

In Today Newspaper of December 11, 2021, Nigerian author and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka argued that religion is the number one problem of Nigerians. While his claim may be too broad, the reality of religious manipulation for political and economic purposes is an albatross to the collective peaceful co-existence of compatriots. The history of Nigeria as a nation is strewn with interreligious conflicts and the bitter aftermath of interreligious religious violence. The causes of such violence have been ascribed to religious intolerance, twisted religious ideologies, or ignorance of each other's religious beliefs (Kalu, 2001; Boer, 2003; Sampson, 2014; Çanci & Odukoya, 2016).

Among the numerous solutions proposed to the issue of national concern attributed to religion is forming a peace broker committee, military engagement, and other *ad hoc* transient efforts. Rather than a permanent solution to the problem, Nigerians now witness weaponised religious tendencies and terrific and heinous interreligious activities.

### **The value of the basic and secondary education curriculum for interreligious peacebuilding**

The current religious studies curriculum of basic and secondary education operative in Nigeria does not seem to have the capacity to promote interreligious peace. Considering both CRS and IRS curriculum contents from basic through secondary education, there are no specific themes to promote interfaith learning.

Secondly, the religious studies curriculum of basic and secondary education in Nigeria is designed to be confessional and catechetical. Table 1 above demonstrates a curriculum

designed to teach the rudiments of a child's chosen religion to better understand the child's faith and spiritual growth.

Furthermore, the religious studies curriculum contents are infused with exclusive religious content. The peculiar Christian teachings on God and model for relationship with neighbours and the environment and dispositions towards political authorities are carefully crafted. The same goes for Islamic religious studies. *Ab initio*, therefore, an unplanned curricula outcome of such curriculum is exclusive religious dispositions among pupils in the basic and secondary education sector.

Given the points listed in the preceding paragraphs, the consequences of an apologetic religious curriculum are religious intolerance and weakened national cohesion. Therefore, youths aged 18 and below are vulnerable to exclusive religious dispositions and attendant melees.

In its present form, the problem with the reviewed curriculum of basic and secondary education religious curriculum is not about the placement of the subjects under the particular title but their relevance to the nation's interreligious challenges. Currently, the religious curriculum of both basic and secondary education cannot promote interfaith peace in Nigeria.

### **Jacques Dupuis's theological model for interreligious dialogue: a background**

Theological theories are better understood within the contexts of their development. A theological position does not arise from a vacuum; certain experiences are given expressions in theological analysis to arrive at a theory that would, in turn, be used to revisit the situation. This procedure can be described as a movement from praxis-

theology-praxis. Methods of theological reflections varied in approaches; however, they all consider human experiences as a prominent factor in theological analysis and development of theological models. For example, while Lonergan (1990) emphasises a movement from the classist theological notion to an empirical method of theology, Browning (1995) dwells on a method of Correlation. To Dupuis, and concerning religious dispositions, the current religious landscape of today's world is characteristically pluralistic, and the same goes with the plurality of religions. By all human predictions, that reality is not about to end in any near future. Therefore, the plurality of religions is a factor to be reckoned with, rather than merely welcomed (Dupuis, 1997).

Dupuis was a Jesuit priest who left Belgium for India in 1948 on missions. Living in India provided him with the rare opportunity to relate with Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and Muslims and mediate the religious culture of the East and the West. Dupuis was most qualified for interreligious dialogue on which he speaks from his baggage of interreligious exposure. He was a director of Gregorianum journal and consultant at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

He developed the theology of inclusive pluralism in which he speaks concerning the salvific potency of other religions outside the church's confines. He argued that religious pluralism is not only "in fact" reality to be accepted, but God's will "in principle" (Dupuis, 1997, 2002). Although his ideas landed him in frontal confrontation with his church, his theology has significantly influenced many contemporary theologians. The hermeneutics of the model have also witnessed variation in perspectives.



## Dupuis' model of interreligious dialogue

In *Nostra Aetate* (Pope Paul VI, 1965), the church encourages dialogue with other religions within some given parameters. The question that Dupuis takes further in that conversation is "whether religious pluralism is summarily to be accepted or tolerated as a reality *de facto* in our present world. Or can it, on the contrary, be viewed theologically as existing *de jure*?" (Dupuis, 1997).

In response to his questions, Dupuis notes that the current religious landscape of today's world is characteristically pluralistic, and the same goes with the plurality of religions. By all human predictions, that reality is not about to end in any near future. Therefore, the plurality of religions is a factor to be reckoned with, rather than merely welcomed (Dupuis, 1997). He notes that the persistence of religious plurality is partly due to "the partial failure of the Christian missions," and the dual response to religious pluralism. In the latter case, he notes, "the same plurality is welcomed as a positive factor which witnesses at once the superabundant generosity with which God has manifested himself to humankind in manifold ways and to the pluriform response which in diverse cultures human beings have given to the divine self-disclosure" (Dupuis, 1997). In other words, while the plurality of religious presence is accepted within the Christian tradition as means by which God manifests himself to humankind, responses to that fact have existed in different forms. Thus, Dupuis asks if religious pluralism is only permitted by God or, on the contrary, positively willed by him in his overall design for humankind. Dupuis' response to this profound question is the content of his

theology of religions, which is now known as inclusivist religious pluralism.

The theory ventilates contemporary religious and cultural realities while upholding the centrality of Jesus in the matter of faith and salvation but holds that idea in tandem with "the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ as neither absolute nor relative" (111). Simply stated, Dupuis version of religious pluralism maintains the centrality of Jesus in God's plan for human salvation but concedes that people of other religious traditions can attain salvation without recourse to Christianity (Iwuchukwu, 2009). According to Dupuis, "genuine religion necessarily entails a relationship with other religions .... In short, to be religious is to be interreligious . . . By way of consequence, a theology of religions becomes interreligious theology with a universal imperative" (Dupuis, 1997). By Dupuis' model, Christianity does not have a monopoly of the reign of God. Members of other religious traditions share truly in the reign of God present in history, and they can contribute to the building up of the sovereignty of God in the world; "they exercise a certain sacramental mediation of the reign of God, different, no doubt, but no less real" (Dupuis, 2002). His theology recognises religious pluralism to be in accordance with God's salvific plan not only in *de facto* but also *de jure* (in principle).

## Nigeria religious landscape and the relevance of Dupuis' interreligious model in the religious education curriculum

The indexical justification for Dupuis' interreligious experience for Nigeria is validated by the akin life situation in the India within which he wrote and lived his theology. On the one hand, both countries face multiple religious presence, which necessitates

interreligious dialogue; on the other hand, India has progressively managed interreligious relations to be a model to other religiously pluralistic countries such as Nigeria. Most religious tension and interreligious conflicts in Nigeria are often heightened between Christians and Muslims.

Besides religious acrimony in the country, the continued agitation for secession and weaponised poverty that often result in calls for constitutional reform make Nigeria's situation attractive to Dupuis' inclusive pluralism. The amalgamated Nigeria remains one entity with many parts where one part ought not to be considered greater, important, or more valuable than the other. The navigation of such difficult socio-religious human terrain makes Dupuis inclusive pluralism even more attractive to addressing the situation in Nigeria.

The basic and secondary education platforms in Nigeria does not discriminate in admissions. Children grow and school in the environment where their parents live. Often, inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations are witnessed in such situations. The arrangement can help "forge and cement national unity" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Similarly, religious education curricula in Nigeria are centrally controlled. In other words, the arrangement means that there is a national minimum standard of expectations in religious education. The contents of each religious education curriculum itemise areas and activities expected to have been completed by each student before completion of studies. From a background of mixed religious presence and a centralised curriculum, public and privately owned schools are expected to recognise and implement the

contents of such curriculum. Despite various religious adherents in the same school using the same curriculum, the CRS and IRS students are confined to the contents and delivery of a religious studies curriculum muddled by confessional inflexions. The immediate implication of such a tangled curriculum is evident studies in restrictive religious attitudes and an unavoidable stressful religious encounter with the religious other on a daily basis in school.

The well-intentioned arrangement of the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) towards enhancing unity among all citizens is underscored by the nation's Federal Constitution. The Constitution advocates a pluralist attitude towards all religions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999: Sect. 38: Par. 1) but smacks the laudable injunction with advocacy of apparently exclusivist religious education curricula. It would be valid to ask if the paradox of religious plurality (promoted by the nation's Constitution and education policies) and the exclusive religious studies curricula could be resolved. The question becomes necessary because commitment to one's religion is as important as prioritising openness and respect for others' religion in the country. In the Nigerian education context, creating a balance between these two components of pluralism is of utmost importance.

### **Dupuis' Inclusive pluralism for a religious peace curriculum in Nigeria basic and secondary education levels**

The current CRS curriculum at the basic and secondary education level cannot forge the needed balance of commitment to one's religion in full recognition and respect for the religions of the other. Holding unto injunctions as to the Gospels' mandate in Matthew 24:14 and Mark 16:15, that Christians

should preach the Gospels to every part of the world, the injunction must be done within the reality of globalisation and cultural renaissance in modern times. The reality of religious and cultural plurality cannot be missed in the Nigerian society where its highly pluralistic composition and the government intention to use academic means to achieve a more inclusive pluralistic society have remained a recurrent issue.

Dupuis' religious pluralism provides a way through the imbalance in the NPE/Constitutional windows of religious plurality and required religious commitment of stakeholders of CRS. According to Dupuis (1997), the Bible contains clear indications of God's establishment of saving covenants with "other" people that may by that fact be referred to as "people of God." Dupuis' argument is in line with his other argument that the salvific act of the Word of God goes "beyond" the humanity of Christ to include the unfettered work of the Spirit among the religions (Dupuis, 1997). His theological assumption underscores interreligious dialogue as willed by God *in principle*; it recognises the multifaceted outreach of one single plan of God for humanity. The various religions in Nigeria, especially Christianity and Islam, are good ways to religious expression before God. Rejection or exclusion of one another in recognising authentic religious path to God is not within the purview of either adherent to make; rather, commitment to one's religious tradition should be the focus.

### Conclusion

Dupuis's theological assumption provides a good framework to make the basic and secondary religious education curriculum achieve the country's desired constitutional and education goals.

Dupuis' view on religious pluralism gives profound meaning and importance to the commitment of a Christian to Christ, yet it makes respect and recognition of religious validity of the other an essential element for effective interreligious relation. Hence, the model provides a basis for a curriculum that would protect individual religious beliefs while giving due ventilation to others' religious expressions.

### Recommendations

1. The National Educational Research and Development Council should create a template in the extant religious education curriculum of basic and secondary schools, for instruction in the knowledge of basic beliefs of the religious others in the country.
2. Salient points in the extant curriculum of religious studies in the basic and secondary education level should be tilted towards attaining peaceful co-existence in the country.

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