RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM & RELIGIOUS SPACE
The Problem of Street Praying in a Nigerian Town

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This article focuses on the typical Nigerian Muslim and Christian, and how s/he copes with the problems of religious exclusivism. Compared with the adherents of indigenous religions, who are more peaceful and tolerant because of the inclusivist nature of their faith, religious intolerance and violence is more often perpetuated by Muslims and Christians who perform iconoclastic activities in favour of their God/Allah. This is because they believe only members of their faith, sect or denomination will gain entry into paradise. This is exhibited in street praying, which is exemplified by glaring examples from Jos town. The aim of this paper is not so much to apportion blame to Muslims or Christians (who should, however try to check some of their irreligious and hypocritical rituals, such street praying), but it seeks to explain the mentality behind such practices which it locates within, among other areas, the exclusivist claims of these faiths.

This contribution is not discussing ecumenical dialogue because it is too intellectual and less pragmatic in addressing the issues of every day living between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria at the grass roots. Ecumenical dialogue though yearned for and organised fairly seldomly, involves mostly high ranking religious leaders such bishops, grand khadies, the ulema, top imams, emirs, traditional rulers and famous pastors. Very often, the process of ‘passing the cup too politely’ is experienced during ecumenical dialogue sessions. Participants become ‘too polite’ and ‘too nice’ in their interaction with each other. Moreover, initiative for dialogue is very often carried out by government or its agent(s). Thus some participants during ecumenical dialogue sessions see themselves as responding to an official call. The forum is not used for discussing religious realities of Christians, Muslims and adherents of Traditional Religions and their diverse sects, denominations and groups. The orthodox position of scripture and official stand of dogma are not discussed, but avoided. Discussions are too shallow and there seems to be just ‘enough sugar to create a thin icing’ over the bitter venom of religious hatred and intolerance beneath.

The term religious exclusivism is used in this paper to describe the intentional segregational attitude of some Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It encapsulates the feeling of rejection of the other as not belonging to 'own group'. This rejection of 'the other' exists in both camps along inter and intra-religious lines that divide members of the two faiths and their numerous denominations and sects. While religious inclusivism which is being prescribed as one of the solutions for Nigeria's religious trauma denotes genuine understanding and warm interaction between and within members of diverse religious groups without necessarily enforcing the precondition of conversion or any hint of trying to convert others to own faith. This is even more urgent a task since the Nigerian religious atmosphere is essentially a pluralistic one.

Religiosity of Nigerians: the Jos Experience

With about one hundred million citizens, Nigeria is the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa. It provides us with some of the most pluralistic and diversified societies in the world in terms of culture, language, art and particularly religious beliefs and practices. Jos is an old city established early in the 20th century as a result of tin mining activities by the British colonial government. Taking Jos as an example, a majority (not all) of the Muslims constitute the Jasawa, a group of persons who descended from early Hausa-Fulani settlers. The founders of this group of people migrated from Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, etc. to Jos for the purpose of tin mining, early in the twentieth century. Thus from the onset Jos was a tin-city as it is fondly called.

The Berom, Afisare (Jarawa), Anaguta (Naraguta), Irigwe (Miango), and Bache (Rukuba) who indigenously occupy the Jos area in pre-modern times are now predominantly Christian groups, with few Muslim members. They were converted mostly by the Sudan United Mission (SUM), the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) who came on the Jos Plateau in 1904, 1906 and 1907, respectively. Other settlers of Jos are groups of persons who come from other of the about one hundred and fifty ethnic groups of the Jos Plateau, being predominantly Christian groups, with large Muslim settlers from Keffi, Lafiya, Nassarawa and Wase sub-emirates of the Bauchi and Zaria emirates during the Uthman dan Fodio jihad in the 19th century. A number of indigenous peoples in such areas were converted to Islam due to the influence of the jihad3 and later due to the Sardauna conversion jihad4 of the 1960s. In addition to these groups, many

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4 M.H. Kukah, Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria, Ibadan, Nigeria: