

Faith and Citizenship

Report of a Consultation organised by the Network for Inter Faith Concerns for the Anglican Communion at St Christopher's Anglican Church Hall, Kaduna, Nigeria, 3rd-7th February 2007

The Network for Inter Faith Concerns for the Anglican Communion (NIFCON) is the organisation mandated by the Lambeth Conference to monitor and co-ordinate the involvement of the churches of the Anglican Communion in inter faith relations. In preparation for Lambeth 2008, a number of regional consultations are being organised in different parts of the world. Following a consultation in the Hindu-majority context of Bangalore, India in 2003, this consultation focused on faith and citizenship was convened in the Christian-Muslim context of Kaduna, Nigeria, chaired by The Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher, Ireland, Chairman of NIFCON's Management Committee. A list of participants is appended.

Meeting in Nigeria

We were privileged to meet in Kaduna by the kind invitation of The Most Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Archbishop of Kaduna and one of NIFCON's presidents, and with the support of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) as a whole. Archbishop Josiah and his colleagues, ably co-ordinated by The Ven. Praises Omole-Ekun, Archdeacon of the Kateri-Kagarko Area, were generous, hospitable and inspiring hosts, sharing with us both the challenges and the opportunities of living as Anglican Christians in Northern Nigeria. At our opening Eucharist, a message of greeting and commendation was read from the Archbishop of Canterbury. We were also strengthened through representation of the Church of Nigeria at national level, through The Ven. Dr Sola Igbari, archdeacon with responsibility for Inter Faith, Ecumenical and Inter Anglican Relations, who was a valued participant in our consultation. We were delighted at the concluding Eucharist when The Most Revd Dr Peter Akinola, Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) conveyed his warm greetings and appreciation to the consultation. It was a great joy to be able to share in Sunday worship with parish churches in the city of Kaduna, and to receive their warm hospitality. The vitality of the worship taught us much about the strength of Anglican life in Kaduna. Throughout our meeting, a varied daily rhythm of prayer, worship and hymnody, Eucharist and Daily Office, provided the indispensable foundation for our consultation. Worshipping together was a constant reminder of our shared membership in the universal Body of Christ, embracing the various contexts to which we severally belonged. Our participants were citizens of Canada, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Liberia, Pakistan, Sudan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zambia, as well as a strong representation from the states comprising the Province of Kaduna and from other parts of Nigeria. It was a particular blessing to be joined at some points by friends from local Muslim communities, including members of the influential Bridge Builders Association.

The Diocese of Kaduna has a sophisticated strategy of involvement with the media, and this, together with the dedicated work of our media consultant Sandra Herbert, helped to ensure that our consultation received a great deal of positive publicity locally. Several participants gave interviews, there was extensive press coverage, and our chairman appeared on national TV as Celebrity of the Week. It was clear that all this reflected the considerable interest shown locally in the consultation. In this regard, it was significant that our time of meeting should have included, on 5th February, the seventh anniversary of the Kaduna incident of 2000.

The consultation began with a powerful presentation from Archbishop Josiah, describing the situation of Muslim-Christian relations in Kaduna and exploring issues of mission, evangelism and conversion. He explained the historical background – as the area had formed part of the northern Islamic emirates, the Sharia had been part of the ordering of society from the beginning, and therefore also potentially part of the context within which the Christian population of the state had grown substantially since independence. Kaduna, with its rich ethnic and religious diversity, conveyed both a local sense of identity and a wider belonging in Nigeria. The roughly equal number of Christians and Muslims in the city could generate mutual suspicion. In such a situation, the mission of the Church, understood as reaching out with the Gospel through human development, necessarily involved the building of good relations with Muslims. Archbishop Josiah explained that, despite some reluctance from parts of the Christian community who had experienced oppression at the hands of Muslims, he had promoted the teaching of basic information about Islam to Christians, in order to equip them to enable their Muslim neighbours to experience the missing Christ in the Qur'ān. He also organised regular seminars with Muslims at which the Bible was able to speak into theological discussions of core issues of faith, and engaged alongside Muslims in the local political situation through organisations such as the Bridge Builders Association of Nigeria, which sought to

intervene particularly in areas of tension. He summarised his missiology by saying that mission without proclamation was dumb, while proclamation without dialogue was deaf. Christian witness involved both evangelism and social care. While conversions of Muslims to Christianity were always to be welcomed, they must be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, and not something which we could ourselves create.

We were also able to experience something of the Kaduna context at first hand through visits in and around the city. We saw the bustling commercial and social life of this important centre, a place where poverty and wealth are found side by side in marked disparity. We were taken by our hosts to places of government, of memorialisation, and of outreach. At Lugard Hall, named for the first Governor of British Nigeria, we were told of the dual mandate, by which the colonial power administered the North through the indirect rule of traditional and Islamic rulers, and we also saw the meeting place of the contemporary state assembly. At Arewa House, a museum devoted to the memory of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the first Premier of Northern Nigeria after independence, reminded us of the distinctive history and character of the North. At Jacaranda Farm, a relatively new diocesan project just outside Kaduna city, we were presented with Archbishop Josiah's inspiring project for a centre which could bring together promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue, training of young people, and development of a valuable resource for the diocese. Jacaranda showed how a bold vision for holistic human development could be turned into practical reality in an inter faith context.

It was made clear to us that the conception and implementation of the Sharia varies from state to state in the northern parts of Nigeria where it is in place. All the north-western states which comprise the Province of Kaduna can be described as 'Sharia-compliant', yet each includes in different ways the operation of three legal systems – Sharia, magistrates' courts, and customary law. To varying degrees, the emphasis in each is on the civil and familial application of Sharia, rather than on the hudūd punishments, and even in Zamfara State, the first to reintroduce Sharia, its criminal code has fallen into practical disuse. This is not to say that the Sharia is problem-free for Christians; on the contrary, it can treat them, and other non-Muslims, as second-class citizens in areas where it is operative. However, its introduction and administration can in general be seen as a political rather than a primarily religious problem.

Across Nigeria as a whole, the situation is even more diverse. We were reminded that, outside the North, Christians form a majority of the population, and that Christians and Muslims in some southern areas – notably among the Yoruba communities of the West – share in one culture, are often found as members of the same family, and generally live together in mutual respect and affection. The history both of governance and of mission in these parts of the country is very different from that of the North, and this seemed to be reflected in the diversity of experiences we heard from Nigerian participants in the consultation. It is clear that the Church of Nigeria has a great wealth of practical experience, won from very different contexts, to share with the wider Anglican Communion in the area of Christian-Muslim relations, and that it faces both challenges and opportunities in engaging fellow Christians, Muslims and Nigerians of traditional religious background in shaping a sense of citizenship for Africa's most populous nation.

B Faithful Citizens: Reading the Scriptures

A central feature of our consultation was the study in small groups of the Bible. We sought through this methodology to discern how the Word of God is addressing us in our contemporary situations. This approach was built on a recognition that both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament were delivered in and shaped by the multi-religious environments in which the people of God lived – Israel among the peoples of the Ancient Near East, the early Church among the manifold cults and philosophies of the Roman Empire. Coming to the texts with questions from our own multi-religious contexts, we found that they could speak to us powerfully of the challenges and opportunities of inter faith encounter and co-citizenship.

The five passages used for our studies were from the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles: Luke 4.14-30, Luke 19.1-27, Acts 10.1-48, Acts 16.25-17.9, and Acts 26.1-29. This series was chosen because Luke-Acts provides a connected narrative setting forth salvation history in three interlinked stages: the story of Israel, the life of Jesus, and the early history of the Church. History is crucially important in understanding the meaning of citizenship. In each stage, we recognised that a different paradigm of citizenship in relation to faith can be identified. In the first, faith and citizenship are regarded as coterminous. In the second, the people of God are non-citizens subjugated to the Roman Empire. In the third, the Church lives out its mission in a plural world, seeking to influence the imperial power through the commendation of its message and the exemplary nature of its life. Each pattern can be identified in Christian history at different times and places, and each resonates with different ways in which Christians and Muslims can relate to the theme of citizenship. It is important to realise, though, that Luke-Acts holds the three together in creative intersection, and this dynamic interplay provided a stimulating framework for our discussion.

Our study of particular passages yielded an abundance of particular insights. It is not possible to record all of these within the scope of this report, though it is hoped that a summary will be made available on the NIFCON website. However, a few points may be indicated here.

In Luke 4, Jesus' stress on the acceptability of all in the year of the Lord's favour – a teaching which paradoxically makes him unacceptable in the eyes of his own people at Nazareth – speaks eloquently into debates about citizenship in the African context and elsewhere; Christians are challenged in the name of God to accept others as fellow citizens even where they are themselves not fully so accepted by others.

The story of Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus in Luke 19 shows the love of God reaching across social boundaries to bring a salvation which dramatically changes Zacchaeus' lifestyle. The message of the Kingdom which we proclaim is not to be limited to any one group in society, and has transforming consequences for all. Similar themes are present in the meeting of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, yet here there is also evident a conversion in the apostle himself through his engagement with the Gentile soldier. It has been the experience of many of us that inter faith encounter leads us into a new and deeper understanding of the Gospel.

In the account of Paul's arrest and release at Philippi, Acts 16-17, it is notable that Paul is keen to assert his rights as a Roman citizen in the context of freedom to preach the Gospel. Experiences of harassment of this kind are not unknown to Nigerian Christians, and the apostle's forthright insistence at this point underlines the importance of safeguarding human rights to religious freedom for all.

Paul's own narrative in Acts 26 of his conversion is recited before both Jewish and Roman political authorities, and demonstrates how a defence of religious freedom can provide an opportunity for personal witness. In all our churches, we recognise that it is often when we are most hard-pressed that we can most authentically proclaim the Christian faith.

C Citizenship in Diverse Contexts

As well as learning about the Nigerian context, we were also given some account of situations in different countries, both in Africa and in other continents. We plan that the full texts of these presentations will be available on the NIFCON website; here we can only give a short taste of each. In a wide-ranging review of faith and citizenship in the African context, Dr Johnson Mbillah of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, PROCURA, highlighted the multiple identities with which African people lived – national, ethnic, religious, denominational (and, participants added, male or female). He suggested that 'Body of Christ' and 'Universal Umma' provide roughly equivalent senses of trans-national belonging for Christians and Muslims respectively, each conveying in effect the sense of a spiritual rather than a temporal unity. He pointed out that in both Christian- and Muslim-majority states at the time of independence the sense of citizenship was dependent on a sense of shared political responsibility and allegiance irrespective of religious identity. This had to some extent been derailed through political manipulations of religious loyalties, and also through the growth of extremist currents in religion, yet he felt that a practical and existential African spirituality, issuing in a natural acceptance of the other, held hope for the renewal of a shared sense of citizenship. One immediate challenge to allow this to flourish was to prevent clashes in one part of the world impacting negatively on relations in another place: a 'deglobalisation' of religious conflict would nurture citizenship. This was a discussion to which our Muslim guests contributed with enthusiasm, as they responded positively to Dr Mbillah's model.

This perspective of co-existence was broadly similar to those presented from some other African contexts. Dr John Azumah characterised the situation in Ghana by the traditional proverb, 'too much meat does not spoil the soup' – meaning, 'religious difference is not a problem'. Despite occasional and isolated instances of confrontation, often created through political machinations, the primary way in which Christians and Muslims relate to one another in Ghana is mutual celebration. In like vein, Revd Raja Zabaneh spoke of Anglican inter faith work in the Diocese of Egypt and North Africa, stressing the patterns of co-operation which Bishop Mouneer had developed with al-Azhar al-Sharif, the leading seat of Sunni Islamic learning based in Cairo. He spoke particularly of the 'Plant a Tree of Hope' project, co-sponsored by the diocese and al-Azhar to spread awareness of Christian-Muslim dialogue among school students. Canon Herman Browne eloquently described the way in which Christians and Muslims in Liberia had worked together to restore a sense of shared citizenship in very testing times. Mrs Serah Wambua described the efforts of the Church Mission Society, working in partnership with the Church in Africa, to respond to the contemporary situation.

We also heard of situations where relations between Christians and Muslims were much more difficult. Bishop Andudu A. Elnail and Revd Enock Tombe from the Episcopal Church of the Sudan rehearsed the successive attempts of Khartoum-based governments to Arabise and Islamise other parts of their country, and the conflicts which these policies had created. They also spoke of their own commitment to promoting dialogue with local Muslim communities around the country, suggesting that this was an area in which NIFCON might usefully be

involved. Canon Patrick Augustine gave graphic personal testimony from his own experience to the tests of discipleship faced by the small and marginalised Christian community in Pakistan as a consequence of Islamising trends there; at the same time, he emphasised the power of the resurrection in bringing profound hope out of deep hurt through the Gospel.

It was instructive to hear alongside these African and Asian perspectives some contributions from Western Europe. Canon Guy Wilkinson charted the extent to which English society had changed through the arrival and growth of other faith communities over the past forty years, and explained the initiatives the Church of England was taking in response, both in inter faith relations and in the 'Presence and Engagement' dimension of renewing mission in multi-faith areas. He also referred to some of the inter faith work taking place at a wider Anglican Communion level. From a German Lutheran perspective, Dr Barbara Burkert-Engel drew attention to the issues of religious freedom in a secular state. She mapped out various areas of church involvement in Christian-Muslim relations, but warned of the danger that dialogue would move outside the churches unless they could find ways to express Christian identity through dialogue and witness as part of their theological self-understanding.

D Conclusions and Recommendations

We feel strongly that the holding of this consultation in Kaduna has been a timely and valuable exercise. We have experienced it as an opportunity to share insights, problems and opportunities together out of our different contexts, to reflect together in the light of the scriptures and of our Anglican heritage, to strengthen one another through prayer and fellowship, and to draw our concerns to the attention of the wider Anglican Communion. We were aware that we were meeting in a situation marked by several anxieties and tensions, and indeed we held anxieties and tensions among ourselves; we found that the consultation provided a trusting context in which we could articulate these in various ways. We recommend that NIFCON continues to organise further regional consultations, and we hope that ways can be found to strengthen NIFCON's work in the African context, in collaboration with PROCMURA and other appropriate agencies.

Acknowledging the challenges involved in achieving a comprehensive sense of representation, we do recognise that there were some areas in which our meeting could have been strengthened. The major focus on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations meant that virtually no time was available to consider issues of African traditional religion or of other faith traditions. We were also sad that the number of women participating in our consultation was so low, and that issues of gender were not seriously addressed in our discussions. We would hope that both these points could be more adequately addressed in future consultations. At the same time, we would like to record our appreciation for the presence amongst us of Christians from other traditions (Presbyterian and Lutheran) and of Muslim guests. They helped to hold a mirror to our Anglican souls, and we hope that where possible wider involvement like this is encouraged in future consultations.

A particular situation which seems to us to require immediate attention is that of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan. In an exceptionally difficult context, the Church has resolved to promote the understanding and practice of Christian-Muslim dialogue, and has established a new commission for this purpose. We recommend that NIFCON explore ways in which it can support this courageous venture, in partnership with others.

A number of more widely applicable themes have repeatedly emerged from our discussions of faith and citizenship in the African and Christian-Muslim context; we would particularly want to emphasise the following. We have in the Gospel a firm theological basis for teaching that all human beings are of equal value in the sight of God, and so should be recognised and welcomed by us as citizens of equal standing.

There is a need for Christians to engage with Muslims, as well as with people of other faiths and of none, in promoting a sense of shared citizenship; in some national contexts, this will be a difficult and costly dialogue. Developing a robust sense of citizenship requires that the life of the nation, guaranteed by the state, should be such that we can have faith in it; this is not the case in many of our nations, in Africa and elsewhere.

While citizenship operates primarily within the nation state, this cannot be seen as a self-contained context – both because of the increasing effects of globalisation and mass migration, and also in many parts of Africa as a result of the relatively recent and sometimes artificial process of nation formation.

There is opportunity and need for the wider Anglican family to support minority churches in their endeavours to secure a fair and equal sense of citizenship, particularly through international contacts at governmental level.

Christian-Muslim relations in local contexts, in Africa and elsewhere, can easily be destabilised through the impact of events in other parts of the world, but strong bonds of friendship between leaders can provide a way of withstanding this.

Inaccurate, generalised, and alarmist reporting of events can generate hostility and suspicion between Christians and Muslims; monitoring of the media is necessary.

We have rich resources in our Anglican approach for engaging with Muslims and others in the civic arena, and the standing of Anglicanism as a bridge church means that we can be well-placed to encourage participation of other Christians.

To enable Anglicans to engage with confidence, there is an urgent need to equip church leaders, clergy and lay people with a basic awareness of Islam and an understanding of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

While dialogue should occupy a central place in our relations with Muslim communities, evangelism, advocacy, peace-building and other forms of Christian witness are equally important, and must be held together with dialogue in a holistic account of mission.

It is critically important that aspirations for better Christian-Muslim relations should be expressed in concrete and practical terms. We saw and heard much to convince us that this was happening in an inspiring way in Nigeria.

We had an opportunity during the consultation to respond to the concept of a short document to resource the Communion through setting out pointers to an Anglican theology of inter faith relations. We welcome this initiative, and ask NIFCON to ensure that the drafting process bears in mind the issues raised in our consultation.

Appendix 1

List of participants

Most. Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Nigeria, President of NIFCON (Host)
Rt Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Ireland, Chair NIFCON Management Group
Mrs Clare Amos, Coordinator, NIFCON
Revd Canon Patrick Augustine, Pakistan/USA
Dr John Azumah, Ghana
Revd Canon Noel Peter Bewarang, Nigeria
Professor Stuart Brown, Canada/Nigeria
Revd Canon Dr Herman Browne, Liberia
Revd .Dr Barbara Bürkert-Engel, Germany
Rt Revd Andudu A Elnail, Sudan
Ven. Lawrence Funso Fasola, Nigeria
Mrs Sandra Herbert, England (media consultant)
Ven. Dr Sola Igbari, Officer for ecumenical and inter faith issues, Nigeria
Ven. Zubairu I Idris, Nigeria
Ven. Dr Michael Ipgrave, England
Revd John Kafwanka, Zambia
Revd Ariire Ayo Kolawole, Nigeria
Revd Canon Samuel Kwashang, Nigeria
Rt Revd Ali Buba Lamido, Nigeria
Rt Revd Yusufu Ibrahim Lumu, Nigeria
Revd Joshua Mallam, Nigeria
Revd Dr Johnson Mbillah, Ghana/Kenya, General Adviser, PROCMURA
Ms Susanne Mitchell, Administrator, NIFCON
Rt Revd Simon Peter Mutum, Nigeria
Revd Canon Samuel O Ogundeji, Nigeria
Revd Hassan Joseph Rade, Nigeria
Revd Enoch Tombe, Sudan
Ms Serah Wambua, Kenya
Revd Canon Guy Wilkinson, Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Inter Faith Relations
Revd Raja Zabaneh, Egypt/Jordan