

**EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY,
ABAKALIKI.**

(EBSU)





23rd Inaugural Lecture

**ECCE QUAM BONUM ET IUCUNDUM FRATRES
HABITARE IN UNUM**

**(Behold, how good and pleasant it
is for brothers to live together in
unity, *Psalm 133*)**

**(A Reflection on the need for brotherly love among Religions
through
dialogue and mutual co-existence)**

**An Inaugural Lecture of the
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki**

**Delivered by
Rev. Fr. Isidore Uchechukwu Nwanaju
Professor of Comparative Religion
and
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy of Religion
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This day is very memorable to me because it gives me the opportunity to share with you my life-long passion for mutual co-existence through mutual dialogue and mutual understanding among different peoples and religions.

This is the raison d'être for the topic of the inaugural lecture:

**1. Ecce quam bonum et iucundum fratres habitare in unum (Psalm 133).
Behold! How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.**

**2a. Sicut unguentum in capite quod descendit in barbam,
Like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard,**

**2b. barbam Aaron quod descendit in ora vestimenti eius
the beard of Aaron, which ran down to the skirt of his garment:**



3a. Sicut ros Hermon qui descendit in montes Sion

❖ As the dew of Hermon, which descends upon Mount Zion.

3b. quoniam illic mandavit Dominus benedictionem

❖ For there the Lord has commanded blessing,

3c. et vitam usque in Saeculum

❖ and life for evermore.



- ❑ Though carved out from a Judeo-Christian perspective, its **relevance** cuts across religious affiliations and answers to the challenge for dialogue between religions and nations of the world – politically, economically, diplomatically, religiously, culturally, etc.
- ❑ My lecture would concentrate only on **verse 1** of the whole of Psalm 133: *ecce quam bonum et iucundum fratres habitare in unum*, with the **primary objective** of telling the world how relevant it is for world unity and global harmony.
- ❑ The **other objectives** include:



- To convince the world *in toto* of the existential relevance of this biblical injunction.
- To illustrate that theology, religion, and philosophy should be very pragmatic in order to change the world for good.
- To state that theological, religious, and philosophical speculations should be applied to a positive societal transformation and development.



- To reaffirm with the Vatican II Council Fathers (1965) that “all men form but one community and share in a common destiny, namely God” (**Nostra Aetate**, no.1 & Acts 17:26: Paul’s Speech before the Council of the Areopagus). Nostra Aetate is an acronym for “In Our Own Time”
- To tell you that I share in this dream, which I also want to share in my reflection with you from the point of view of comparative religion because religion is pivotal in the promotion of this chosen and vital biblical verse – Ecce Quam Bonum---
- To restate that this topic is very much *ad rem* for the Nigerian context where people of diverse religions, especially, African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam must live and co-exist for mutual development and progress.



- To affirm that though the problem and challenge of universal unity are enormous, they can be minimized through sincere religious dialogue and mutual relationship.
- To remind all religious groups that their role to achieve this goal is pertinent because entire humanity 'look to their different religions for an answer to the unresolved riddles of human existence' (**NOSTRA AETATE, I**).



The Perennial Problem of Man and the *Ten*

Questions they evoke include:

- ✓ What is man?
- ✓ What is the meaning and purpose of life?
- ✓ What is upright behavior?
- ✓ What is sinful?



- ✓ Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve?
- ✓ How can genuine happiness be found?
- ✓ What happens at death?
- ✓ What is judgment?
- ✓ What reward follows death?, and finally,
- ✓ What is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend? **(NA, I)**.

- To admit the truth that the actors, perpetrators, victims, and oppressors in this unwholesome field of activity belong to one religion or the other.
- To admit that the actors, perpetrators, victims, and oppressors are not faceless.
- To admit that these actors are human beings, who unfortunately, often forget that they can also die.



The Present Reality Shows (GS, 9):

- That there is a strong dichotomy of a world that is once *powerful* and *weak*,
- That man is capable of doing what is *noble* and what is *base*,
- That man is disposed to *freedom* and *slavery*,
- That there is *progress* and *decline*,
- That there is an obvious tendency to *brotherhood* and *hatred*.

The Dilemma (GS, 9): From the reality on ground, it is clear that man is becoming conscious of two important consequences:

1. That the forces he has unleashed are in his own hands;
 2. That it is up to him to control them or be enslaved by them;
- ❖ The dilemma shows that there is a pervading universal injustice.



ENDURING QUESTIONS:

- i. Is man willing to embark upon this voyage or journey to make the world habitable and harmonious?
- ii. Are we willing to make our own little and great contributions from our various vantage positions?
- iii. Are we ready to accept the individual and collective responsibilities this task demands from us?

THE UNDENIABLE TRUTH:

- It is clear that the perpetrators and victims of the described situation are not faceless.
- But, who are they?



The Proposed Solution in this Lecture:

- ❖ To contribute a solution which argues that the dilemma necessitated by these mentioned discrepancies can be mitigated, if not completely eliminated, through genuine dialogue, especially engineered and powered by sincere religious tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.
- ❖ It can be solved by man's ability to question himself very deeply and critically. This is because “the dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself because he is the meeting point of many conflicting forces” (**Gaudium et Spes**, 9).
- ❖ In other words, man is central to the whole challenge of achieving global peace.



MY NARRATIVE INCORPORATES:

- The Influence of My Family Background
- Primary/ Junior Seminary/Secondary School Experience
- My Senior Seminary Formation/Undergraduate Studies
- My Graduate/Post-Graduate Studies and choice of topics for dissertations/theses

- My EBSU Experience as Lecturer:
 - ✓ As teacher of comparative religion
 - ✓ As teacher of Philosophy of Religion
 - ✓ As teacher of Islamic Philosophy and Theology
 - ✓ As teacher of the Qur'an; Hadith, etc
 - ✓ As teacher of Christian Ethics
 - ✓ As teacher of Theodicy, etc

➤ **My EBSU Experience as Student:**

✓ As PG-STUDENT and a Ph.D researcher;

➤ **Finding:**

✓ that there is a rational justification for God's existence;

✓ that global peace and harmony is tenable through *Agape*

The Psalm of our Study: PSALM 133

- ❑ Generally, the psalms are designed to guide the daily lives of ancient Israel.
- ❑ The book of Psalms is a **collection (an anthology) of about one hundred and fifty songs;**
- ❑ **Psalm 133** belongs to the group of Psalms called the 'Pilgrim songs' (Pss.120-134) known as the **Psalm of blessing, praise, dialogue, mutual interaction and love.**
- ❑ These **fifteen** psalms are also often called the **fifteen Songs of Ascents.**



- ❑ They must have been **composed for worship** at Israel's religious sites, particularly, the Jerusalem Temple.
- ❑ In this lecture, however, **they are not intended for mere liturgical practices for any particular religion.** Rather, they are chosen to **'signpost'** the direction for world peace and love.
- ❑ In this context, it provides a unique impetus for the comparison to be drawn in the X-ray of different religions and demand from them an enhancement of brotherly love and mutual co-existence in the whole world.



- The use of the Psalms, here, draws out certain **moral messages**:
- Example: to **warn against hatred and selfishness** which seem to have taken the centre-stage in our human and spiritual interactions.
- to remind us of the **eternal value of love and altruism** in our lives as children of God in general.
- to remind us to foster, like Aaron, holiness and closeness to God **through faithful Mediatorship** between God and his creatures.
- This Psalm is, in fact, **like a trumpet that calls entire humanity to perfection through brotherly love and understanding.**



THE IMAGES USED IN PSALM 133:

- The image of the **fragrant oil and beneficial dew**: to nourish genuine relationship between different religions and peoples.
- Both the Dew and Oil signify the visible presence of God's blessings and his love for humanity
- In other words, **no particular people or race can live in isolation** without serious challenges and difficulties.



2.0 Definition of Religion

- There is **no universally accepted definition of religion** till date.
- Religion is an inexhaustible reality.
- For majority of scholars, however, it is a vital way of making sense in their life, as well as giving purpose and meaning to existence.



Etymological explanations, however, abound:

First, **religare**: ‘to bind’ shows that the primary concern of religion is to bind humanity and the divine together.

Second, **relegare**: ‘to thread carefully’ - This reflects ‘a respect and care for both the natural and supernatural worlds, which for many is the primary concern of religion – to provide us with guidance as to how to live’

Third, **Religio**: therefore, means relationship and essentially links a human person and a divine person believed to exist.



The mentioned explanations constitute its:

- diversity,
- variety and
- enigma,
- This is why there are **theists, atheists, deists, skeptics, rationalists, agnostics, theologians, philosophers of religion**, etc.

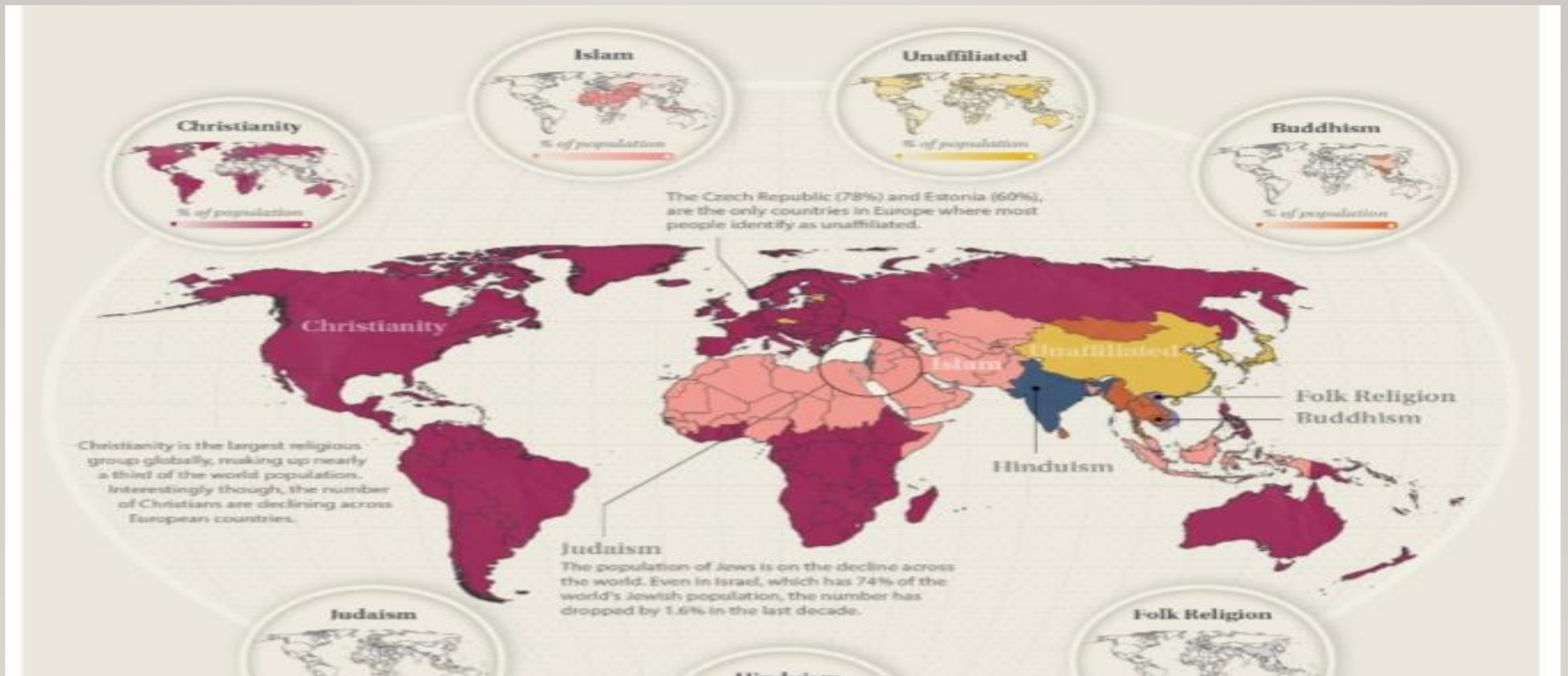
- The word, **religion**, is therefore, as diverse as the attempt to define it, and
- as important as any effort to deny it.

- Religion **has been, is, and will continue** to remain a 'Puzzle'; a 'Raetzel'.
- It is global and universal

- The following **Map** shows the existence of varieties of religions:

(A Map and Statistics of world religions: cf. www.pewresearch.org, 2010 Census)





World Religions

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Christianity | 2.8 billion followers (31.5 % of the world's population) | 6. Other Religions: Shintoism, Jainism, |
| 3. Islam | 1.6 billion (23.2%) | Taoism, Baha'i faith, Sikhism, Tenrikyo, |
| 4. Hinduism | 1 billion (15.0%) | Zoroastrianism, Wicca, 58 million (0.8%) |
| 5. Buddhism | 500 million (7.1%) | 7. Folk/Traditional Religions 400m (5.9%) |
| 8. Non-religious people (Secular, Agnostics, Atheists, etc) | 1.1 billion (16.3%) | |

❑ The word, religion, can as well, be used **to express ‘a particular interest or influence that is very important’** in one’s life;

- ✓ Example: football is an absolute religion for him or her;
- ✓ boxing is one’s religion;
- ✓ swimming is one’s religion;
- ✓ politics is one’s absolute religion, etc.
- ✓ In other words, one’s passion or professional hobby could be translated into a form of religion for the person involved.

❑ **The manner of expression of a particular religion:**

- ✓ Could attract the description of that person as being ‘religious’ or ‘devout’;
- ✓ That is, classify them into one system or the other:
- ✓ Example: **Mr.A** could be described as ‘being religious’ or ‘too religious’,
- ✓ Which connotes some form of **extremism, bigotry, or fanaticism.**



Religion could also **express religious education:**

✓ That is, **education about religion,**

✓ Religious instruction (instruction in a particular religion), beliefs or faith of a particular group or persons in the same group.

✓ For instance, the religious beliefs of a Buddhist is highly associated with asceticism.

One could often hear: ‘Catholics are very traditional and doctrinal’;

‘Protestants are scriptural’;

‘African Traditional Religion worshippers are very ancestral in belief’;

Jews are very conservative;

Muslims are radical monotheists, etc.



❑ **Religion could be used to describe:**

➤ An administrative competence or civil dexterity:

➤ When Mr Chibuzo, a staff of the Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities' Office died a few months ago, he was variously described to be very **religious** with his job;

➤ In this sense also, even an **atheist** or **agnostic** could be described as being religious in his duty.

❖ **Religions** have often been deeply involved in **political matters and cultural developments**;

❖ Religions have also been used to legitimize, suppress or inspire regimes, philosophies and artistic movements.

❑ It is also a known fact that **religious institutions have in most cases dominated or undermined secular establishments of many kinds.**



❑ The names of some of the religious institutions have been used to promote some base instincts such as:

- ✓ Kidnapping of fellow human beings for ransom;
- ✓ Kidnapping of Religious persons, such as catholic priests
- ✓ Kidnapping of young girls and women for rape;
- ✓ Kidnapping and impregnating/ forcibly converting them to religions different from their (victims') own religious beliefs;
- ✓ Kidnapping and allowing them to die in captivity;
- ✓ Underlying force behind conflicts, civil as well as international wars;
- ✓ Social stagnation or even retrogression, oppression, and discrimination.



- Religions have either moulded good leaders,
- Or produced corrupt and tyrannical bigots.

❖ **Religion has also fostered Progress and Development: Examples**

- Social progress and development;
- Educational development, through mission and islamic schools;
- Interpersonal and international cooperation; as well as
- Mutual understanding among people.

❑ 2.2 Approaches and Attitudes to Religion:

❑ Communal vs Personal/

❑ Collective vs Individualistic

❑ Example:

- Apathy towards religion because of the involvement of religious groups in the exploitation of Africa and a growing tendency towards the individualist approach to religion

- Religion has also been associated, if not identified with racism, dictatorship, war, sexism, slavery, global injustice and inequality in international relations and hypocrisy.

- Critiques of religion cite the seeming violation of Mtt 7:2 (The Golden Rule) as reason for:
 - ✓ Apathy towards religion, especially Christianity.
 - ✓ Religion becomes for them a matter of personal conscience
 - ✓ To buttress and express their protest, some of them have switched their religious allegiance from Christianity to Islam, or even, fallen back to African Traditional Religion.



- ❖ But the issue remains whether this attitude has really helped the growth of the African society, or whether it ends up as mere **reactionary approaches** aimed at achieving some socio-political advantage of a sort.
- ❖ The situation on ground shows however that the oppression of Africans by their own leaders supersedes their colonial experience.

□ **The Nature of Religion as explained by 19th Century Scholars.**

- **Karl Marx (1818-83):**
- Religion as merely soporific and exploitative
- Recommends Socialism



□ Anthropological theory of Religion

❖ Feuerbach:

- ❖ man worships his projected self, which he terms God;
- ❖ man himself is the mystery of religion;
- ❖ religion is man's alienation of himself whereby he strips himself of his own essence, his best qualities, and reduces himself to nothing.
- ❖ In the end, man realizes that it is his own idealized nature that he refers to as God.

□ The Psychological perspective

▪ Sigmund Freud:

- Sees religion as a continuation or prolongation into adulthood of a child's attitude towards his father.
- It is a childhood's mentality extended into adulthood.
- Freud summarizes religion as **childishness or infantism**.



□ Sociological Theory

Auguste Comte (1830 and 1842):

- ❖ The **religious stage** of human development or mind is the **first and lowest** of this development, the primitive stage; Compared to the Jahiliyya in Islamic development (period of ignorance)
- ❖ The **metaphysical stage** and
- ❖ **The positive stage.** The religious stage constitutes the primitive and the earliest stage or level in the development of the human mind.

❑ **Sociological Theory**

Emile Durkheim:

- ❖ Espouses the society as a creator of religion;
- ❖ The society uses it to control people and shape their minds in order to control their thinking.

❑ **Theological Perspective**

Saint Augustine:

- ❖ Traces the origin and nature of religion to the human spirit's search for its source – the infinite spirit.
- ❖ Man experiences uneasiness, dissatisfaction, and insecurity in this eternal search.
- ❖ There is an emptiness or vacuum, which no finite being can satisfy.



2.3 Ultimate Power and Reality

- Almost all the religions lay claim to worship an Ultimate Power, which are variously presented as God, Buddha, Tao, Chineke (Chukwu), Oluwa, Abasi, Allah, etc.

❑ **The Dilemma of an Ultimate Reality has created two Schools of Thought:**

- The theist School and
- The atheist school of thought.
- They have tried to justify or refute God's eternal features of omnipotence, omniscience, and omni-benevolence
- This forms the background to the discussion of Theodicy

My Contribution to the Dilemma of Ultimate Reality

- Through a Ph.D Program in Philosophy of Religion (2018 to 2021) at EBSU
- To contribute to the Question of God's Goodness and the Problem of Evil



- My study of this phenomenon helped me to ask further questions regarding:
 - ✓ the issues of rape;
 - ✓ kidnapping for ransom;
 - ✓ cultism for ritual;
 - ✓ all manner of injustice in the system;
 - ✓ bribery and corruption;
 - ✓ vote buying to impose the wrong candidates on the citizenry during elections, ethnicism and favoritism;
 - ✓ dishonesty and nepotism, murder, etc.



➤ **Findings:**

- These are contextualized evils or negativities that demand serious discussion and recommendations, if not outright solutions.
- that just as Leibniz could not solve the whole problem in spite of his honest effort to demystify the millennial impasse, I submitted my thesis as a *desideratum*.
- This means that the study remains open to further inquiries.
- This is why religion and its perennial problems cannot be solved by one person or particular generation.

Nigeria as a unique Experience:

- ❖ Despondency of people in the face of Evil
- ❖ Many people ask and question about the relevance of their deep religious belief and faith in the ultimate power of God.
- ❖ Many have become skeptical in their faith
- ❖ A lot of people are bending towards agnosticism and atheism
 - Many have lost hope in politicians and governance.
 - The Epicurean Paradox and Humean Fork return to reality
 - Persistent Question: Why does evil take upper hand in a society where many are purportedly very religious, prayerful, and abstinent?



These doubts have recalled Epicurus's old questions, which are still unanswered:

- Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able?
- Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing?
- Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing?
- Whence then is evil (De Ira Dei, 'The Anger of God', 13, 20-21)

- ❖ The Challenge to the gathered *intelligentsiae*: men and women of the ivory tower, especially as assembled here today, should not contribute to this religious precipice through their commissions and omissions.
- ❖ In other words, as we strive to be distinguished in the academic world, it behooves us to be highly distinguished both morally and politically.



❖ They are ever challenged to uphold:

❖ brotherhood,

❖ fraternity,

❖ harmony, and

❖ Unity

❖ Though this feat seems a mirage most of the time, especially when one reflects on the long-lasting crisis, conflicts, and wars between Muslims and Christians, beginning from Jerusalem to our doorsteps here in Nigeria.



❖ The demand for dialogue is also based on the premise and reality that man is everywhere he is found to be a 'dialogical being'

❖ My paper is of the opinion that both religions can be used positively to transform the face of Africa and its continent, especially through dialogue and promotion of mutual co-existence.



❖ **Dialogue and Mutual Co-existence**

- ❖ In the contemporary world and society that has become diverse and yet unified, **dialogue is as necessary as daily food and drink** in order to maintain peace, growth, trade, harmonious relationship in order to attain mutual co-existence.
- ❖ **Human beings must mutually co-exist** to sustain creation and the universe. This is why the world is automatically paying a lot of attention to mutual interactions and discussions and the religions of the world cannot be left out in this all important exercise. I have observed with keen interest the benefits of dialogue, even in family circles.



2.6 The Human Society and the Imperative for Peace

- ❖ The human society is supposed to be an abode for peace and harmony.
- ❖ This brings us to the most fundamental benefit of dialogue between persons, groups, societies, and nations – peace.
- ❖ Where there is real peace, there is life and love.
- ❖ Peace thrives and gives room for unprecedented development and progress.



2.7 The Judeo-Christian Creation Narrative

- The natural order of things in creation manifests peace, orderliness, and goodness (see Gen 1:24; Psalm 8:4-5; Songs 2:33; Sirac 17:3-4).



- ❖ Man's betrayal and fall brought about other ugly things to creation, and it did not take long before wickedness overtook the natural order of things. For instance, Cain killed his brother, Abel (Gen.4) in anger over their individual talents and disposition to God.
- ❖ The Flood (Gen.6:5-12) manifested the corruption of humanity and God's punishment on it.
- ❖ In our own day and time, the sad story of Cain and Abel is replicated in different forms and manners – physically, psychologically, economically, politically, socially, culturally, etc.



2.8 Islam and Account of Creation

- ❖ In the Qur'an, creation also has a prominent narrative to show that there was order in the universe *ab initio*.
- ❖ Surah 23:12-14 (Mu-minūn, or The Believers) emphasizes the creation of man from clay; variety in creation (Surah 35:27-28, Fatir, or The Originator of Creation or Malaika, or The Angels);
- ❖ God commands: 'Be' and it is (Surah 2:117, Baqara, or the Heifer, which sums up in 286 verses the whole teaching of the Qur'an; 16:40, Naḥl or The Bee; 36:82, Yā-Sin, being abbreviated Letters, which refers to the Holy Prophet and the Revelation which he brought).

❖ For instance, Surah 23:12 says, “Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay)”, and in surah 35:27 asks, “Seest thou not that God sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out produce of various colours...”



❖ **In Surah 2:256**, the Quran enjoins, “Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy Hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things”.



❖ With this clarification, it becomes necessary to inquire into the cause of fanaticism, fundamentalism and extremism in religion, as well as their influence on cordial relationship in the society.

2.9 The Abrahamic Sacrifice (Gen.22) and interpretations: Three Examples

❖ **Gen. 16** is very relevant to my presentation today because of the relationship between Abraham, Sarah, Hagar (the slave girl) and Ishmael.



- ❖ This is the origin of the configuration called the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- ❖ They are supposed to be from the stock of Abraham, and as their common father in faith also work together to sustain and promote peace in the world.
- ❖ But is it the case? One observes a crisis of relationship, which has also made religion suspicious in most quarters.
- ❖ For more than one thousand years, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have variously led claims to their Abrahamic origin with attendant challenges. Religious zealotry has often been traced to the event of Gen. 22 (the Aqedah or binding of Isaac as sacrificial lamb).



❖ Thus, the Abrahamic attempt to sacrifice Isaac, his only legitimate son in **Genesis 22** as commanded by God has often been used as justification for religious fanaticism and extremism in the so-called Abrahamic religions. They see the event on Mount Moriah as a representation of martyrdom.



- ❑ There is imbedded in the understanding of Gen.22 (binding of Isaac for sacrifice), an impulse to praise martyrdom even when it is wrongly applied to destroy human life.
- ❑ Gen.22 and its misinterpretation has led to unbridled fanaticism, fundamentalism, and extremism



Three Examples of Religious Extremism, Fanaticism, and Fundamentalism:

- a) Thomas Mcveigh and bombing of Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklohoma on April 19, 1995**
- b) Yigal Amir and the killing of the Yitshak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister on November 4, 1995**
- c) Mohammed Atta and September 11, 2001 Twin Tower Terrorist Attack in New York**

□3.0 Ecce Quam Bonum et Iucundum Fratres habitare in Unum As Remedy

3.1 The Meaning of Psalm 133 further illustrated and solution to Religious Extremism, Fundamentalism, and Fanaticism

- I would like to refer us to the elaborate explanation of Psalm 133 at the beginning of the Lecture for want of time.
- It is important to recall that it offers a lot of hope, promise of kiship, and reconciliation
- Psalm 133 is the old Testament version of St. Paul's hymn to love in 1 Cor 13

3.2 Jesus Christ as fulfilment of the Blessing promised in Psalm 133

- ❖ The Sacrifice of Christ in the new dispensation –the New Testament - is a sacrifice rooted in love.
- ❖ By his own sacrifice, Jesus Christ showed the Old Testament priests in the temple in Jerusalem the complete externality of using the blood of animals to make people clean.

❖ **3.3 The Apostolic continuation of Christ's fulfilment of Ps 133 (The Koinonia)**

- ❖ The New Testament community built around the apostles was to keep alive the “fellowship”, “communion”, and “sharing”, which Christ's whole life and death signified.
- ❖ Christ's resurrection elevates this “koinonia” to a sharing of love for the unity of mankind, for reconciliation and progress.



- ❑ The life of the priest, like that of Christ whom he represents is obliged to preach love and condemn ills in the society.
- ❑ The silence of the priest is the support of evil in the society
- ❑ The silence of the priest is working against Ecce Quam Bonum...



3.4 The Qur'an and brotherly love: Correlation with the Judeo-Christian Interpretation

- ❑ Islam is rich in her teaching on brotherly love and mutual co-existence, especially among believers.
- ❑ Surah 49:10 (Al-Hujurat) called *Ayat al-Ukhuwwah* emphasizes the brotherhood of believers with each other, thus: “the believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers”. This hinges on the instruction that mutual love between people is a gift from Allah.
- ❑ This paper wishes a global reorientation and inclusion of entire humanity for this Surah.



- The **Hadith** (no.13) (cf. 40hadithnawawi.com) of the prophet Mohammed, as related by Bukhari and Muslim, as well as Abu Hamzah Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself”.
- This is the **Islamic teaching on Golden Rule** and Justice as stated in surah 83:1 (Tatfif, or Dealing in Fraud: “Woe to these that deal in Fraud”). It condemns injustice in human relationship, especially in religion and spiritual life.



3.5 Divisions and Party Spirit (1 Cor. 1:10ff)

- ❑ Paul condemned factionalizing the Christian community;
- ❑ Pointed to a future crisis and disintegration,
- ❑ therefore, he needed to act promptly to ensure lasting peace and love among the brethren who claimed to belong either to Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ.
- ❑ Paul would have none of such categorizations.

- ❑ Paul's solution: return to the centrality of Christ, the crucified by calling on the church to return to unity and love so that they would be a good example to the world.

- ❑ This is again for me, *ecce quam bonum...* in practice and action.

□ Recommended Solution for the Contemporary Society:

- ❖ With the inevitable diversity of faiths and religions, everyone is equally invited to promote genuine inter-human and inter-religious dialogue.

3.6 The Need for Dialogue – Varieties of Dialogue

3.6.1 Interreligious Dialogue

- ❖ **Meaning:** Inter-religious dialogue is a conscious, deliberate, and organized effort to talk, converse, and relate with people of other religions with understanding and openness to their differences in faith and belief.
- ❖ **Aim:** to heal some old wounds of religious acrimony and bigotry, which perhaps also led to crises and loss of confidence in one another.



Four Kinds of Dialogue (The Catholic Church's Example and Explanation):

- Dialogue of Life*
- Dialogue of Joint Action
- Dialogue of Experts
- Dialogue of sharing religious/spiritual experience

3.6.3 Benefits of Inter-religious Dialogue

- ❖ A deeper knowledge of other people's religion;
 - ❖ A mutual understanding of each other;
 - ❖ An increased respect and love for others' religious convictions and beliefs;
 - ❖ Reducing or even, total destruction of barriers and walls of prejudice and bias about others.
-
- ❖ When all the parties involved are sincere to this goal, there is an improved inter-human relations, reduced aggressions, sharing, tolerance, mutual acceptance, and improvement in the sense of justice and equality in the polity.

3.6.4 Obstacles to Interreligious Dialogue

- ❖ State patronage of a particular faith or belief.
- ❖ Unwillingness to listen to other opinions
- ❖ Unwillingness to share religious experiences such as Pope John Paul II recommended at Assisi in 1986
- ❖ Unwillingness to share or participate in joint actions such as the UNO organises against HIV/AIDS; COVID'19 etc.

4.0 Religious Extremism and the challenge to brotherly love

4.1 Religious Fanaticism, Fundamentalism, and Extremism:

- ❑ Points to extremities, exaggerations, and disregard for others' beliefs and faiths

- ❑ Religion always has its two sides:
 - ❑ As promoter of Social Change and inhibitor of Social Change;
 - ❑ As conflict promoter and conflict resolver, depending on the protagonists and antagonists involved.

- ❑ It is based on this distinction that the following part of this lecture would be discussed.



- ❑ Fanaticism and fundamentalism are all about **exclusivism** in any position taken by a person or a group of persons, and are mostly associated with religious beliefs and interreligious conflicts;
- ❑ Today, I want to boldly extend the scope of these three nuances to both economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of human existence.
- ❑ Wherever these ‘-isms’ are existent, life is very difficult and complicated.
- ❑ They also make meaningful dialogue very problematic and almost impossible.



❖ It is part of my life project, even after this inaugural lecture to promote mutual and meaningful dialogue among peoples and cultures, including religions using the principle of *Ecce Quam Bonum et lucundum fratres habitare in unum.*



4.2 Religious Violence and Consequences of Religious Extremism

- ❖ Violence and religion are two incompatible and strange bed-fellows in the history of mankind.
- ❖ Violence diminishes the integrity of religion, especially when we consider its link with the Transcendent.
- ❖ **Examples Abound:**



4.3 Examples:

- Boko Haram: Western Education is forbidden (2002 by Mohammed Yusuf)
 - ISWAP: Islamic State - West Africa Province (a splinter group of Boko Haram)
 - rejects existing national borders
 - opposes elected governments
 - seeks to remove such governments through violence
 - ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
 - ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
- Both ISIS and ISIL are called the Islamic State.
 - Founded: April 2013
 - Leaders: Abu Mohammad al-Adnani (Chief Spokesperson)
 - ISIL: transnational insurgent group based in western Iraq and eastern Syria
 - Specialised in the violent promotion of the Sharia, terrorism, extremism, suicide bombing,

etc

The Allied Democratic Forces in the Congo (ADF)

- Founded by Musa Baluku since 2019
- *The Forces democratiques allies*
- *Operates in both Uganda and the Congo and have damaged the regions*

4.4 A Flashback on my Observations on Christian-Muslim Relations in 2004

- I recommended an urgent and committed **leadership revolution** of both religions (Christianity and Islam) in Africa and Nigeria particularly.
- It was my honest perception then, and still is, **to challenge the political and religious structures** to do their best to promote harmony, peace, and co-existence (p.383).
- My work further emphasized that religion in Nigeria should never apply any political structure or bureaucracy to inflame **hatred** and **fundamentalism** in the polity.



4.5 Two Countries in Africa: An Attempt at a Comparison in Dialogue

- Tanzania and Nigeria:
- Whereas Tanzania manifests a deep commitment to interreligious dialogue and mutual co-existence;
- Nigeria is still struggling with the dilemma of diversity in unity



4.6 The Media

- ❖ Has an Obligation to promote Brotherhood of Unity
- ❖ The Media is very important in promoting mutual co-existence through sincere dialogue and mutual understanding, especially in Nigeria and beyond.

➤ The Media has to revolutionize itself for a glorious future, especially in Nigeria and Africa by promoting patriotism and true sense of mutual co-existence.



5.0 The Challenge of 'brotherly love' as Mission

- I have been of the opinion, and still of the conviction that brotherly love is a challenge for everyone.
- In fact, it is an inescapable mission for all.



5.1 Love as a divine Witness ('āhab)

- ❑ Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike are challenged to witness to love as divine Mission. This is testified to by their various scriptures.
- ❑ For instance, *āhab* is a Hebrew word used in a variety of contexts, basically signifying a voluntary attachment.
- ❑ The essential function of any religion should be the promotion of Love (Agape)

5.2 Love as a duty beyond boundaries

- ❖ With the example of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37), Jesus answers the questions as to who my neighbor is; as to how I must relate to him, etc.
- ❖ With this parable, Jesus challenges the hostility between Jews and Samaritans, between Christians and Muslims, between Buddhists and Hinduists, between Catholics and non-Catholics, between State and Federal Universities, etc.



5.3 Love as a duty to proclaim God's Forgiveness and Mercy

- ❖ Love attracts, in this context of Christian profundity, God's forgiveness and mercy (Lk.7:36-50 The woman with a bad name who washed Jesus's feet with).
- ❖ In the Pauline tradition, love attracts God's blessings and all things work together for good to those who love God (Rm. 8:28). It means that it is only Christian love which can reconcile the entire creation to God. The fruit of such a reconciliation would be peace and unity.



5.4 Love as mission to reconcile nations through Peace and dialogue

- ❑ In Islam, the Qur'an teaches that Peace is the greeting of the Righteous: Surah 7:46; 10:10; 14:23; 36:58 (a-salam-u-alaikum, waalaikum Salam): *peace – shalom*.
- ❑ Jesus evokes the Old Testament (Lv.19:17; Dt.19:15) injunction on brotherly reconciliation based on dialogue and peace to teach brotherly love based on brotherly correction as well (Lk. 17:3 and Matt.18:15-17) to his audience.



❖ **5.5 Some Practical Initiatives at Dialogue in Nigeria**

- ❖ The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has done a lot of work through her various commissions to promote dialogue with other Christian denominations.
- ❖ The year 2000 saw to the establishment of the Department of Mission and Dialogue under the supervision of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), which coordinates and facilitates the activities of the CBCN in the areas of Missions and Missionary Animation, Ecumenism, Dialogue within the Family of the Church and Dialogue with other religious bodies, etc.
- ❖ I know that other Christian denominations also pursue a vigorous program of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. CAN is outstanding.



5.6 The Mission of the Catholic Priest in promoting Love: My Personal Account

- ❑ My life in EBSU, for instance, is basically an APOSTOLATE, not a CAREER, and that has a lot of implications for me.
- ❑ This is why I cannot be regarded as just a lecturer or professor. I am first and foremost a catholic priest with all the implications involved in academics, politics, normal human relationship, etc.



□ It is walking the talk, which is a huge practical and pragmatic challenge, especially in an environment where ‘standing out’ and rejecting the *status quo* is considered awkward and uninspiring. He does not know ‘what’s up’!
He does not belong!



5.7 Some Liberal Opinions regarding Mutual Co-existence in Nigeria

5.7.1 Senator Shehu Sani (Former Senator representing Kaduna Central)

- Advocates inclusive Governance and recognition of diversity in Nigeria.

❖ **5.7.2 Dr. Yusuf Datti Baba Ahmed (Labour Vice-Presidential Candidate at the 2023 Elections in Nigeria)**

- ❖ Advocates equity and justice in a diverse society like Nigeria
- ❖ Condemns marginalization based on religion/politics
- ❖ Calls for responsive leadership and governance

5.8 The National Inter-religious Council (NAIREC)

- ❖ Established to promote interreligious dialogue but has remained an Utopia

5.9 The Moral Message from the sampled opinions

- ❖ It is not religion *per se* that is the problem in Nigeria but a strong-rooted *selfishness* wrongly sold to the populace on the platform of religious bigotry.
- ❖ There is a preponderance of poor ethics whereby family and social upbringing is entangled with loss of manners in terms of social relationship.
- ❖ It is always 'us' and not 'they'. The misguided 'us' superiority complex overrides the 'we' inclusive conviviality. Thus, when the 'us' becomes a 'we', it must be the 'we always feels right' mentality.



5.10 African Traditional Religion and Mutual Co-existence (Igbo Traditional Religion)

- ❖ The trio of ATR, Christianity, and Islam must work together to ensure mutual co-existence as a *sine qua non* for a healthy society.

6.0 The Historical and Constitutional Basis for Global Fraternity and Peace

The United Nations Organization and Charter of Peace

- ❖ As nations developed and interacted with one another there was need for a universal or global membership to promote security and mutual cooperation.
- ❖ Before the formation of the United Nations' Organization in 1945, there was The League of Nations (1918), which was regarded as a child of war.



❖ To underscore the importance of ‘Ecce Quam Bonum...’ for world co-operation, peace, love, and progress, it is important to mention the rigorous steps taken by the originating member-nations, in spite of the raging world war to build up an international organization. It included:



- ✓ The Declaration of St James Palace (June 12, 1941)
- ✓ The Atlantic Charter (August 14, 1941)
- ✓ The United Nations Declaration (January 1, 1942)
- ✓ Moscow Declaration (October 30, 1943)
- ✓ The Tehran Conference (December 1, 1943)
- ✓ Dumbarton Oaks Conference (1944)
- ✓ The Yalta Conference (February 11, 1945)
- ✓ Sanfrancisco Conference (June 25, 1945)



6.2 The United Nations and Human Rights

- ❑ The UN defines Human rights to include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, etc. Above all, everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination (www.un.org).
- ❑ One cannot speak about mutual co-existence without a deep understanding of the notion of human rights, especially as adopted by the 193 States that make up the UN General Assembly. There are presently 30 articles containing 30 universal declaration of human rights or basic human rights.

❖ To ensure global brotherhood and co-existence, the 7 main international human rights treaties should also be kept in focus:



- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration)
- 1948 Genocide Convention
- 1951 Refugee Convention
- 1960 Discrimination in Employment Convention
- 1966 Racial Discrimination Convention
- 1966 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant
- 1966 Civil and Political Rights Covenant.

6.3 The Nigerian Constitution and Promotion of Brotherly Relationship

- ❑ One of the landmarks of the Constitution was its emphasis on freedom of religion and worship.
- ❑ This is in line with the universal aspiration that every true religion and religious worship abhors compulsion and coercion.
- ❑ This is more so, in a diverse society like Nigeria, where there is the need for the conscious recognition and promotion of religious freedom.
- ❑ It has the advantage of promoting development, progress, and moral upliftment.



- ❖ It may not be an overstatement to assert that Nigeria is the only country in the world whose constitution practices and insists on a conflicting dual ideology of democracy and sharia. But we know that both cannot really co-exist or co-habit.
- ❖ This conflictual relationship has been present and the consequences are still being felt in the country and surrounding countries of West Africa, and even beyond.
- ❖ It requires a lion-hearted leader to effect a balance of mutuality in the governance of a country as heterogeneous as Nigeria.



6.4 The Reorientation of the Political and Economic Landscape in Nigeria

- ❑ The current reality challenges a new spirit of relationship and interrelationship at all levels.
- ❑ When a people or peoples in the same union have lived together for over a century, there is need for them to make serious effort to allow the system work for their own good and development.



- ❖ The Current Question is:
- ❖ How do we explain the lust for clannish oppression and suppression of ourselves?
- ❖ All these self-imposed techniques of dehumanization can only derail from any realization of sincere brotherly love and cooperation.
- ❖ The totality of our political and economic manipulations – bad governance - have only succeeded in planting deep-rooted immoral practices at all levels, especially lack of respect for principles of justice, equality, and love.
- ❖ Can we not see or feel the lopsidedness of unemployment opportunities in Nigeria, craftily coded in the concept of federal character?



7.0 Summary and Conclusion

7.1 Summary

- ❖ A day of fulfilment for me
- ❖ My foray into theological and religious studies has convinced me that the high-point of life's journey is love and mutual existence with fellow human beings.
- ❖ I have always felt the inner calling to promote mutual understanding wherever I find myself.



❖ This study is a vital reawakening to the dangers of a reckless pursuit of religious fundamentalism, extremism, and fanaticism because the ideology imbedded therein can ruin and destroy both the perpetrators and the oppressed.



- ❑ The world has become an undeniable global village, which demands a lot of understanding, mutual communication and cooperation from people of different cultures, religions, and socio-political backgrounds.
- ❑ For global peace and harmony to be sustained, the wanton craze for power at all levels – nationally and internationally – must be put under check.



- ❖ Exclusivism of any sort should be strongly discouraged to avoid unnecessary divisions, misunderstanding, and dehumanization of fellow human beings.
- ❖ In other words, global diversity, which is the beauty of nature and creation should be harnessed and promoted.
- ❖ Respect for diversity of religion and belief should be vigorously pursued because religion can fuel conflict if not properly checked.



❖ In fact, religion should be regarded as an inevitable tool towards ensuring a lasting peace process for global brotherhood and love by a conscious promotion of equality of persons.



❖ On the contrary and disappointedly, terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and every other form of criminal activity in the society, which are inimical to the universal brotherhood of love proposed by this lecture and study have been used as religious instruments to thwart genuine efforts to achieve global peace and love. This is a great challenge for world religions.



7.2 Conclusion

- ❖ This academic pilgrimage is a clear call and invitation for a renewed mutual relationship at all levels and intent.
- ❖ This is why it is believed that Psalm 133, *Ecce quam Bonum et Incundum Fratres habitare in Unum* is appropriate for my inaugural lecture as a Professor of Comparative Religion and doctor of philosophy in philosophy of religion.
- ❖ It is the summary of my positive intent and that of every human being to drive home a message of hope, faith, and love for the well-being of humanity.



- ❖ I would like to conclude my lecture by reinstating my appeal of 2007 in “Martin Buber and Impact-Oriented Philosophy of Education in a Pluralistic Society” that it has become imperative to re-evaluate our notion of community, and perhaps apply a multi-dimensional approach that is open, inclusive, discursive, and inter-subjective in order to build a better and progressive world.
- ❖ Ebonyi State University can be a model for it or a stepping stone to its realization.



❖ ***Ecce Quam Bonum et lucundum Fratres habitare in Unum*** can be a new motto for communal and global march towards genuine love, justice, mutual understanding, and development.

❖ Thank you for the special honour accorded me today and may the grace of God fill your hearts as you go back to your various destinations.

❖ **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**



**THANK YOU
FOR
LISTENING!**

