



XIX° PACE CONGRESS
ABUJA, NIGERIA
SEPTEMBER 2019, 1 – 8

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RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE BIBLE

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ARGUMENTAIRE

1. Study context

The debate about the theme and its wording indicates the deep motivations of the PACE members who attended the 18th Congress in Atakpamé, Togo, from 1st to 8th September 2017, and chose the theme of the Congress in Abuja, next year, from 1st to 8th September 2019. The theme reads: *Religious Pluralism in the Bible*. From the different interventions comes out a polychromatic picture of the living-together between religions, focusing on the rise of organized religious terrorism whose first flagbearers, at the socio-political and military levels, are the Jihadists operating in the continent, mainly in West African and more precisely in the Northern part of Nigeria and in the Sahel.

The wording upon which the Assembly agreed finally shows very well the kind of approach they prefer, without, however, hiding the sensitive issues of war and deadly terror in the name of God and his word, a “sacred word”.

2. Before Religious pluralism in the Bible, a cultural and religious pluralism

Religious reality is part and parcel of human identity and the social organization. Theological concepts such as “natural religion” and “revealed religions” confirm this statement. In the West, this is becoming more and more obvious and the end of the 20th century. Ysé Tardan-Masquelier has this to say: “The end of the century, less optimistic or more careful than the previous one, was obliged to abandon the great evolutionist, progressive and rationalist synthesis. It has also to give up the piercing of the origin of religions’ riddle, which meets a lot of darkness to build up something else than hypothesis. It was forced, despite the evidences of growing secularisation, record, indifference or atheism, and at the same time, an upsurge of beliefs with totally unexpected forms” (the translation is mine). And the author concludes:

So religious fact can no more be considered simply as a “momentum” in the growing of individuals, or a “age” in the evolution of societies, like a past being extinguished, or a survival: it is part and parcel of history and its phases¹.

The truth is that going backwards, we can say that if religious reality is part of the history of society, it is because it is an integral part both of the individual’s identity and of cultures these individuals carry along with them or that fashioned them. If “religion is the soul of culture”, then we can state *a priori* that each culture has its religion(s). In any case, cultural pluralism goes together with Religious pluralism. There remains the question of how culture manages Religious pluralism, or how religion manages cultural plurality.

¹Y. TARDAN-MASQUELIER, « Introduction », *Encyclopédie des religions*. Vol. 1. Histoire, F. LENOIR – Y. TARDAN-MASQUELIER, dir., Paris, Bayard Éditions, 1997, p. xv

3. Religious pluralism and cultural pluralism in Africa

As we know, the theological and socio-anthropological debate on the oneness and the plurality of African religions reached the conclusion encapsulated in the consecrated concept of *African Traditional Religions* (ATR). It follows that, implicitly, the existence of many religions in any African culture. To know a culture allows the peaceful living-together of the ATR is challenging certainly the Bible Scholars in their comprehension of the issue of Religious plurality in the Bible.

Even if we consider the sensitive issue of Islam and Christianity living together in African lands, it proved by Sahel countries, mainly in Burkina, Mali and Senegal, that a common cultural identity shared by the high majority of Muslims and the minority of Christians, is of the reason for a peaceful and model of living-together between the two religions we receive from the East and/or the West.

It is certainly the same factor that is at work in relationships among African Independent Churches, and between African Independent Churches and the Institutionalized Churches, mainly the Catholic Church.

Is the Bible, as a product of a given culture or even many cultures, able to favor a peaceful coexistence between religions? How does the Bible conceive the diversity of religion? How does it witness to it? Which kind of models of interreligious relationships has the Bible to offer? What about the Religious wars we can find in the Bible, and what about the wars coming from the readings of the Bible, either in the name of YHWH, or in the name of Jesus' God? Which kind of afresh readings or re-readings the African Bible Scholars can have of the Bible passages, both in the Old and the New Testaments, where religious intolerance or simply unrestrained and deadly proselytism appear to be part of Biblical teaching?

4. The Bible and religions' wars in Africa

Tentative responses to these questions will have to deal inevitably with the sources of interreligious conflicts in Africa: Are they endogenous or exogenous? Are they culture-based or not? Do these wars have to do with bad interpretations of the Bible? Are they really religious? Who are those benefiting from these wars of religions? Who are those benefiting, in Africa, from these terrorists' wars, Muslim or Christian terrorism erected as a religion?

5. The Bible in service to interreligious dialogue, ecumenism and inculturation

Wars of religion are not only by Muslims. Christianity in the Western countries had its own wars of religion, between Christians and Muslims, and between different Christian denominations. Africa has inherited these two forms. The community of culture between the members of different Christian denominations, and between these denominations and Islam has certainly helped to underrate and even reduce to nothing these interreligious or inter-confessional conflicts. However, it goes without saying that it is a normal thing to expect from an in-depth and scientific reading of the Scriptures "in African perspective", significant contributions to a perfect unity of communion (*koinonia*) between the Churches; to a harmonious and fruitful interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians, that will oppose the slight desire of religious exterminations and conquests of the Jihadists; to an in-depth inculturation that touches the Religious soul of African cultures, instead of remaining in peripheries.

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