



Unity in Diversity: Perspectives on Uganda as a Multi-denominational Society

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By
Mwambutsya Ndebesa
Lecturer Department of History & Development Studies
Makerere University
Tel: +256 783 717101

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World Religions by Population Percentage

- The world population is estimated to be around 7 billion people (2010 estimates).
- Out of this population of 7 billion, Christians are about 2.2 billion (32%), Moslems are 1.8 billion (23%), Hindu are 1 billion (13%), Buddhists are 8%, unaffiliated 16% and others such as Jews, Bahai etc constitute the rest.
- Christians, Moslems and Jews (Abrahamic) faiths constitute about 55% of the global population.
- The Roman Catholics are about 1.1 billion world wide and in Uganda they are about 14 million (42%).
- The Anglicans are around 85 million worldwide (1.3%) and in Uganda they are about 13 million (36%).
- Moslems are about 12% of the Ugandan population.



Definition of some Key Concepts

- **Denominations:** These are sub groups of the main religion e.g. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox etc are denominations of Christianity or Christians, Sunni and Shia are denominations of Islam.
- **Religious bigotry:** A pejorative word referring to the irrational intolerance towards a creed, belief, opinion that differs from ones own.
- **Xenophobia:** It refers to the irrational fear of that which is foreign or strange to you such as foreigners, people of a different tribe, race or sometimes religion.



Definition of some Key Concepts (Cont.)

- **Islamophobia:** This is irrational fear of Islam and Muslims especially by the West since 9/11.
- **Hexabosiohexehontahexaphia.** This refers to the irrational fear of the number 666.
- **Tolerance:** This refers to the practice of deliberately allowing or permitting a thing of which you disapprove. Allowing others to co-exist with you although you may think they are wrong. Putting up with something that one disapproves provided it is not harmful to you or the general public.



Relationship between religion and violence (global)

- Killing in the name and in defense of religion is ancient and modern.
- Religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have plenty of blood on their hands.
- The Old Testament is full of violence texts and bloody wars fought in defense of Judaism. For example Joshua's war as he led his people to the promised land.
- In the 11th and 12th Centuries there were Christian Holy wars—the crusades fought against Moslems by Christians to retake the Holy places in Palestine especially Jerusalem. Today Islamic fundamentalists refer to Western intervention in the Middle East as crusaders in reference to these earlier crusades



Relationship between religion and violence (global) Cont.

- Many wars between Christians and Christians were fought in Europe after the Reformation.
- The Ecclesiastical courts known as inquisitions condemned millions to death accused of being heretics.
- Islam spread from the Arabian peninsular to Asia, North Africa and Europe through Jihads.
- In the contemporary era we have Islamists and Jihadist groups involved in terrorism such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Isis, Moslem brotherhoods, Boko Haram etc all killing in the name of Islam.



Relationship between religion and violence (global) Cont.

- There are Christian fundamentalists who have in the recent past killed in the name of Christianity. Examples such as the Oklahoma city bombing in the US, the ongoing persecution of Moslems in the Central African Republic are vivid examples.
- In Asia there are fundamentalists killing in the name of religion. These are in Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippians, Burma and Sly Lanka.
- There is rising Islam phobia in Europe and USA.



Tolerance of Religion in history (global)

- The Persian King Cyrus the Great is mentioned in the Bible as having tolerated the Jews and even allowed them to return to their homeland Israel from exile.
- The Greeks and the Romans tolerated Judaism until after 70 A.D.
- Christians in the Roman empire were for a longtime co-existing with other belief systems.
- The Moslem Arabs in the early period co-existed with Christians in the Arabian peninsular referring to them as people of the Book.



Inter-denominational tension in Uganda (past and present)

- Just like on the global level inter-denominational tension in Uganda is historical.
- There took place in Buganda religious wars between Christians and Christians and then Christians and Moslems in the 1880s and 1890s. Many people lost their lives and a feeling of inter-faith animosity was created and maintained during the colonial era
- The rivalry between Catholics and Protestants was institutionalized in politics, schools, the church, in resource allocation and even in sports competitions.
- Moslems were largely excluded from politics and education during the colonial period.



Inter-denominational tension in Uganda (past and present) cont.

- In the 1960s there was intense rivalry and hatred between Muslems and Muslims i.e. between NAAM and UMC supporters.
- Idi Amin's regime pitted Christians against Muslems when it suited regime interests.
- Idi Amin used Islam as an instrument of political rule.
- In the recent past we have had Muslems of the Tablique sect fighting the mainstream Muslems. We have the Kibuli Muslem faction against the Old Kampala based faction.
- The ADF rebels are said to be inspired by tension between Muslims and Muslims and Muslims and Christians. The ADF used a Muslim ideology and continues to use religion as a political instrument to recruit supporters.
- LRA used and continues to hide under religion to inspire its members to carry out senseless killings



Inter-denominational tension in Uganda (past and present) Cont.

- A certain Pastor Umar Mulinde was recently disfigured by acid attackers believed to be Muslims. Pastor Mulinde has also been preaching the gospel of hatred against Islam.
- Muslim extremists attacked a church in Kyegegwa and killed some Christian worshippers.
- A number of Muslim clerics (8) of them have been murdered in Uganda by people believed to be from rival Muslim groups.
- There is tension between the Muslims and evangelicals as reflected in each others hate preaching in open air, the church and Mosques.



Inter-denominational tension in Uganda (past and present) Cont.

- Some Anglicans are considering setting up their own butcheries to avoid eating meat of animals slaughtered by Muslims.
- There is some negative inter-religious debate on some FM radio stations as well as in the open air preaching.
- The fear of the number 666 among some Pentecostal churches is fueling some tension. The Pope and President Obama are depicted as representing this number among some Pentecostal Christians.



Why is there increased inter-faith tension in the world and Uganda?

- Globalization has made it possible for people of different faith to interact more and has facilitated inter faith competition than before.
- Globalization has made it easier for extremism to be spread to all countries.
- Globalization has led to fear among some faith especially Moslems that the principles and doctrines of Islam will be undermined by secularism.
- The fear of secularism and feminism is causing anxiety among Christians and Moslems. Feminism, a secular movement is said to be undermining patriarchal belief systems which are the foundations of many religions.
- The exchange of information through IT as well as western entertainment is causing anxiety among Moslems and conservative Christians who feel that through these channels western influence is eroding the foundations of Islam and Christianity.

Why is there increased inter-faith tension in the world and Uganda (Cont.)

- The increased overlap between religion and politics is an other factor.
- The overlap between religion and poverty of some sections of society is also to blame.
- The use of religion as an instrument of resistance to globalization.
- The overlap between Christianity and the west on the one hand and Christianity and Western secularism and culture on the other.
- Increased discourse of sexual politics in the public
- The rivalry between Christian right evangelicals from the US and Muslim fundamentalism from the Middle East.
- Increased inequality in the world and the use of religion as a mobilization ideology to resist inequality.



Commonalities between Christianity and Islam

- Both faith share Abrahamic traditional belief systems.
- In both religions, most of the fundamental divine revelation came from Angel Gabriel.
- They both believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.
- They both believe in the second coming of Jesus.
- They both believe in eternal life and eternal hell.
- They share the belief that the means of salvation is through correct belief.
- They are both monotheistic religions.
- This shared traditional belief system should be a basis for dialogue the other doctrinal differences notwithstanding.



Precedents of Inter-faith dialogue in Uganda

- As far back as 1963 the ecumenical movement that aimed to bring about understanding and co-existence among the three main Christian denominations i.e. Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox started.
- These denominations set up an institutional framework for co-operation—the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC).
- This Council has done a lot to create harmony among these three denominations.
- In 2001 the Inter-religious Council which brings together the Anglicans, Catholics Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventists, Moslems and some Pentecostals was formed.
- This Council helps to promote dialogue among religions in Uganda as well as bringing them to work together in certain social ministry activities and programmes.



Threats of Inter-denominational dialogue in Uganda

- The emergency of sexual and cultural politics in Uganda instigated from the U.S. and the Arab world.
- The use of religion as an instrument for political mobilization including African traditional religion such as the Holy Spirit movement of Lakwena.
- The overlap between religion and poverty such as that which is happening in Iganga and Mayuge districts.
- The aggressive methods of the Pentecostal churches to convert Moslems to Christianity.
- The infiltration into Uganda of forms of religious fundamentalism from U.S., the Arab world, Pakistan and Iran.
- The fundamentalist influence from Somalia and now Kenya.
- Perceptions and feelings of economic and political exclusion by some religious groups.



Opportunities for Inter-faith co-existence in Uganda

- The Uganda social and family fabric is founded on inter-faith marriages and families. Almost every other family has somebody from another faith-tradition.
- The existence of inter-faith institutions and such as UJCC and IRCU through which differences can be resolved.
- The political tradition of having no official and formal state religion in Uganda.
- Uganda also has no religious discriminatory laws such as blasphemy and apostasy laws such as those you find in the Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.



Opportunities of Inter-faith co-existence in Uganda (cont.)

- The different denominations do collaborate through social ministry projects such as the Joint medical stores.
- Inter-faith marriages take place freely especially among the Christian denominations.
- There is a joint Christian syllabus in schools and students from different faith backgrounds study together.
- There are no fundamental doctrinal debates, differences and competition in Uganda.



The Way Forward

- Ugandans should continue to celebrate the inter-faith co-existence.
- Uganda should commemorate the international day for tolerance declared by UNESCO in 1995 which falls on the 16th of November every year.
- Any signs and tendencies of religious bigotry in Uganda should be shunned and publically condemned and discouraged.
- Religious curricula at higher institutions of learning should have a course or courses on religious tolerance / dialogue or courses on the role of religion in peace building
- The Islamic faith in Uganda should set up an institutional framework and strategy for inter-Islamic faith dialogue.
- Government and politicians in general should desist from using religion as a tool of political mobilization and support.
- Ugandans should resist cultural and values re-colonization from the US and the Arab world.
- Ugandans should avoid juxtaposing religious beliefs with ethnic nationalism.



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Thank you