



Beyond INTOLERANCE

*Towards a Paradigm Shift
for Religious Pedagogy
in Nigeria*

Stella Adamma Nneji

FOREWORD

The work before you holds implications of great significance for the current state of affairs in religious education. In her work in *Beyond Intolerance*, Sister Stella confronts the dominant Western models of religious pedagogy with the realities of her native Nigeria—a nation perceivably confronted with an enduring history of postcolonial strife, religious intolerance, and violence.

Beyond Intolerance gathers to a summit the most authoritative voices and schematics in the world of religious education, critically sketching how the nuances of her Nigerian context challenge and, at times, exhaust the expressive power of these models. Sister Stella is especially critical of the monoreligious and multireligious models, which, while dominant in current practice and in academia, nevertheless fall short of expressing the authentic challenges and opportunities religious intolerance presents in her homeland.

Inevitably, for Sister Stella, the Western colonial disposition out of which these models have sprung runs the risk of recapitulating the very intolerance that each, in its own way, purports to overcome. The monoreligious model (“learning in religion”) lends itself toward either to the exclusion of difference or to an inclusivism that presumes a monolith faith that blinds itself to difference and actively silences authentic religious expression of others. The multireligious model (“learning about religion”), often motivated by a similar attention to tolerance, presumes the possibility of a disengaged disposition toward authentic religious expression, opting for universal critique and objective rationality that, in effect, “waters down” the values of all particular religious perspectives in the school.

Again and again, Sister Stella rigorously details how the Nigerian context resists the attempts of the monoreligious and multireligious models to ameliorate intolerance and the dramatic and even violent effects these attempts have had on individual and communal formation in Nigerian schools. *Beyond Intolerance* proposes a model of interreligious learning (“learning from religion”) as incorporated within the so-called

hermeneutical-communicative model in Nigeria. This model, preferred by Sister Stella, but in a critical-enculturated way, attempts to recognize the tensions of authentic religious difference, presupposing a broad spectrum of difference in the classroom in a way that also incorporates genuine religious encounters and expressions of identity. It is a model where openness to the other and having a genuine nonviolent religious identity are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in the encounter and dialogue with the other, one also discovers and renews one's own religious identity. This model makes it possible for confessional religious education to provide a crucial contribution to a more peaceful society in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Beyond Intolerance presents a serious challenge to religious pedagogy and discourse. The reader will gain immense and, at times, firsthand knowledge of the manifold ways the Nigerian context discloses new constructive meaning for our field. An original work, *Beyond Intolerance* leads to a new model for the role of religious education in the long term—not merely as instruction in tolerance, but as overcoming intolerance through dialogue. The great achievement of the work, therefore, lies in how the apparent crisis of religious intolerance in Nigeria speaks of a crisis much closer to home for religious educators the world over. If Nigeria is to disclose such an exemplar, as is indeed my expectation and hope, that will in no small way be due to the deep resonances Sister Stella here captures of a nation looking to educators who embody authentic religious beliefs in their opposition to intolerance and indifference—both inside and outside our schools.

Prof. Didier Pollefeyt

Full professor, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium