Beyond Interreligious Dialogue: Dialogue of Life as a Means to Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

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Abstract
         Interreligious dialogue has gained prominence in Nigeria against the backdrop of cultural and religious plurality cum tolls of violence, loss of life, vandalism, and disruption of peaceful coexistence in the nation. Huge resources have been invested into various forms of interreligious dialogue. However, interreligious dialogue has proved quasi-effective due to mistrust, dishonesty, and lack of commitment to the common goal of dialogue as a means of promoting mutuality in a religiously plural society. The cycle of killings continues unabated with its corresponding effects on political and economic situations. Hence, this paper proposes that Nigeria must shift from the promotion of interreligious dialogue to dialogue of life as a worthy alternative to promote mutuality. Drawing a line of demarcation between interreligious dialogue, which exists as a means to building bridges across religions, and dialogue of life, that perceives and focuses on life beyond the scope of religion, this paper stresses that both the government and civil society groups must arise to promote genuine dialogue of life to bring peaceful coexistence and mutuality.

1. Introduction

         Following a careful analysis of the scope and practice of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria, there is the need for a fresh starting point in promoting peaceful coexistence and mutuality. This new starting point is in dialogue of life. This article progresses by highlighting some of the research on violence and interreligious dialogue cum suggested ways of building mutuality in Nigeria. It further analyses the complex interplay of dialogue. The article emphasises the need to embark on a fresh notion of dialogue of life and ways to strengthen it.

Religious multiplicity and multi-culturalism, if perceived progressively, offers huge possibilities. Through multiplicity of religion, there are opportunities for dialogue, mutual learning, and exchange with the view to live together in a harmonious atmosphere that will enhance nation building. In the case of Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world, the reverse is the case. The negative sides of cultural diversity and religious composition is ubiquitous as evident in the frequency of religiously induced violence since the early 1980s.

The series of violence experienced in Nigeria over the years have been well treated with high scholarly erudition (Falola, 1998; Kukah & Falola, 1996; Agi, 1998). Scholars have paid a close attention to the immediate and remote causes of violence in Nigeria, the effects on the economy, religious and social space, and how these crises were managed. Boer (2003) described the decades of 1980-2002 as 'decades of blood.' A group of international observers have noted that next to Bosnian War of 1993-1995, Nigeria is the only country that has experienced the most communal violence in the world (Report of Joint Visit, 2012, p.3). The situation has progressed from communal or religious violence to wars of Islamic ideology in the current millennium.

With a view to curb and eradicate the wave of sporadic violence, interreligious dialogue emerged in Nigeria with impressive prospects. Many scholars and religious practitioners have affirmed a pragmatic stance of interreligious dialogue in the quest for mutuality in a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. This affirmation is based on certain values that are promoted in the name of common good and benefit of all when all the concerned persons come together to engage in a heart-to-heart talk. Thus, this will result in the advancement of the social wellbeing and promotion of the prosperity of a nation and its citizens. This opinion is represented in the work of the Nigerian Catholic Cardinal, Francis Arinze, when he captioned a chapter of his book *The Risks and Rewards of Interreligious Dialogue,* "Interreligious Dialogue is not Optional". Arinze alluded to eight various factors which necessitate interreligious dialogue in modern times. Arinze informs us that when there is a dialogue across religions, there will be harmony, promotion of moral values, development, justice and peace. In addition, there will be solutions to the problem of religious extremism. Arinze (1998, p.29) further writes:

> While a few people are enough to cause tension, confusion, and destruction, the cooperation of all is needed in order to promote lasting development, justice, and peace. There are problems and challenges that do not respect religious frontiers: corruption in public life, wrong attitude to work or to the good of the country, and discrimination against people because of their color,

ethnic background, or sex. There are development questions that no one religious community can solve single-handedly: uncontrolled urbanization, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, runaway inflation.

The above excerpt could only be right in a situation where there is mutual understanding and common focus on the goal of interreligious dialogue. Cornille (2008) identified five elements that must be present if dialogue among religious practitioners will remain a possibility. These include epistemic humility, mutual commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality. The commitment to the common goal of promoting the core elements that could aid interreligious dialogue, in the case of Nigeria, is practically non-existent. Hence, interreligious dialogue has yielded little or no positive results. The existing structure of interreligious dialogue has not helped the nation, and some of the reasons will be examined in the course of the study. Also, further research on the space of interreligious dialogue in the context of Nigeria will be explored.

2. Previous Research: Religious Interaction, Violence, and Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria

The mid-1980s witnessed a proliferation of literature by scholars in the field of social sciences and religious studies. This wave of researchers focused on violence, ethnic or communal clashes, and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. Each of these authors examined a series of religiously motivated violence and suggested likely ways of nurturing peaceful co-existence.

Toyin Falola (1998) linked the Nigerian religious crises to multiple factors. These include the influence of religious politics, economic conditions, and secular ideologies. Analysing the intricacies of the interactions between the two major faiths which are always at logger head, Islam and Christianity, Falola states that their relationship is marked by activism and contest for control and recognition within the spectrum of national politics. In another publication, Falola (2009) traced the origin of violence in Nigeria to the nature of the colonial conquest of the pre-colonial Nigeria. Different regions of the pre-colonial Nigeria were forcefully taken over with the use of arms and violence. This in a way became a legacy of colonialism. Years after the independence, this legacy transited in different shapes and magnitude by creating a dichotomy between the Muslim-populated north and Christian-populated south. The inner dynamics of religion and politics equally aggravated an unhealthy interaction and dialogue in religious space in the form of religionalization of politics and politicization of religion (Adogame, 2005). Korieh (2005, p.113-118) further corroborated the place of politics and religion in violence by arguing that the colonialists supported a religious based

political party system in the north, which eventually transited into a rallying point for an Islamic political campaign in the decades following independence.

Hyacinth Kalu (2011) is different in his own approach to fostering peace and mutuality in the face of constant arising violence and disruption of peace. Kalu is concerned with the failure that has marked interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. In setting a 9-point agenda as "guidelines that should be adhered to for successful, fruitful and meaningful interfaith relationships among the three religions in Nigeria" (2011, p.1), Kalu advocated that the nation must move away from dialogue—which focuses on Christian and Muslim relation—to trialogue—which brings together the three major Nigerian religions, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR). He argued that the scope and methodology of interreligious dialogue has been least effective because of the exclusion of the traditional religionists in favour of Christians and Muslims.

The subject bordering on evangelism for Christians and *dawah* for Muslims are the factors that have orchestrated religious extremism and volatility in Nigeria (Ahmed-Hameed, 2015; Adogame, 2009). Evangelism and *dawah* constitute the notion of propagating both faiths. In many instances, leaders of these faiths claim an exclusive view on the truth to the extent that the other group finds it offensive. When the truth is monopolised and is presented without due regard for its reception in a social space, violence and disruption of peace is inevitable (Ayantayo, 2005; Opeloye, 2014; Aliyu, 2014). Ahmed-Hameed (2015, p.87) suggests that in order to curb religious violence, interreligious dialogue must be strengthened by the use of certain state apparatus that must guide the religious practices in Nigeria, including the proselytization of faith. Hence, these guidelines may be in the form of basic rules and procedures that must be followed in faith propagation.

Salawu (2010) convincingly proposed that there is a link between several factors such as ethnic identity, economic, and social conditions which constitute the phenomenal clashes and violence in Nigeria. Salawu indicated that those myriads of factors often manifest as communal clashes, political crises and ethno-religious crises but are often categorised as religious violence. Salawu concurs with both Falola (1998) and Adogame (2009) that in view of the above, religion in Nigeria has assumed a fertile soil for breeding violence.

Jan H. Boar (2003) conducted a study on the series of violence and clashes in northern Nigeria since the early 1980s, highlighting the immediate causes and remote triggers of this violence. Boer indicated that the violence took various dimensions by documenting the actions of the major faiths involved, and the participation of government and its agencies in curbing or escalating the crises in some situations. Boer advocates a Kuyperian option, which embraces plurality of worldviews in politics and religious affiliation.

More recently, some researchers have explored theological approaches as having great possibilities of contributing to the peace process, reconciliation, and upsurge of religiously motivated violence in Nigeria. Nguvugher (2010) examines different clashes that have occurred between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria, and how their relationships have turned sour over the years. Nguvugher proposes that an element of the divinity of Jesus, a high Christology that orthodox Christianity stands for, which is found among the *Isawa* (a small version of Islamic sect in northern Nigeria), can serve as a beginning of mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. Hence, Nguvugher recommends that interreligious dialogue can be built upon this through proper collaborations to assuage the persistent conflicts and violence.

Olorunnisola (2016) called to question the resurgence of Christian revivalism and vivid advancement in the growth of the church as what could be explored to foster healthy interaction and peaceful coexistence in the Nigerian nation. In observation, the Nigerian church has witnessed massive development in recent years leading to gigantic church buildings, frequent church meetings, and an official recognition of the church and its officials by the state. However, this growth is far from developing into corresponding social action. Hence, Olorunnisola proposed that the solution is in recovering relevant Christological themes, such as reconciliation and the reign of God, which could be strengthened through prophetic Christology and prophetic dialogue to enable ideal engagement in the Nigerian religious and social space.

The survey of some of the existing literature on religion and violence in Nigeria and possible ways of curbing it reveals an eclectic theory of religious violence (Kieh Jr., 2002; Tidwell, 1998). There are multiple causes of conflict and violence. Hence, it requires multiple approaches to ameliorate the violent clashes. One major popular approach to facilitate peaceful coexistence is interreligious dialogue, which would be examined in the next section.

3. Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria

The scope of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria can be categorised into three intertwining frames. First, there is a form of interreligious dialogue that occurs in the local communities amongst various religious practitioners. It is the practical, most common expression of dialogue in the nation motivated by religion. It is a common practice for various religious practitioners to assemble occasionally and when a need is perceived to talk about how to live together in peace. Traditional community leaders are often facilitators of this form of dialogue.

Second, there is a form of interreligious dialogue that occurs in academic circles where scholars gather periodically to challenge one another

on ideal ways of relating in a religiously plural nation. This form of interreligious dialogue focuses at educating the religious other about basic theological concepts underpinning beliefs and practices in a religion. Conferences and seminars are organised around themes of national interest.

The third is the institutional or structured interreligious dialogue that is found in Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC). The composition of this third expression of interreligious dialogue has enjoyed the official recognition of the government and its agencies. However, Onaiyekan (2011, p.11-14) has two forms of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. These include informal and formal dialogues.

An honest, unbiased assessment of the progress and process of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria must consider the scope of the ongoing dialogue in the nation, the major agencies in the nation vis-à-vis the constellations in the Nigerian religious space. The local interreligious, academic, and institutional dialogues have all contributed to the ongoing Nigerian religious space. Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC) has emerged as an official symbol of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. This organisation provides an opportunity to understand the interplay of interreligious dialogue in the local, academia, and at an institutional level.

4. Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC)

There are justifiable reasons for selecting Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC) as a case study for examining the progress of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. First, it represents the three layers of interreligious dialogue that bring together people at community levels, academia, and religious leaders in the nation. Members of NIREC are drawn from these three fora. Second, NIREC received a warm acclamation from the Federal Government of Nigeria at its inception because of its prospects. Founded shortly after the nation's return to civilian administration, when Shari'a law was gaining prominence, NIREC was perceived as a way of instituting a new encompassing social and religious order.

On September 11 1999, NIREC was inaugurated as a body "to provide a permanent forum where the Christians and Muslim counterparts in the country could meet to hold dialogue on how to foster and strengthen mutual understanding among themselves" (Oduyoye, 1999, p.111). NIREC, often referred to as "the Council", consists of 25 equal representatives of Christians and Muslims who meet quarterly to discuss religious affairs and related national concerns. The Council issues communiqués following its meetings to intimate the general public of its deliberations and decisions. In 2008, the Council decentralised its meetings to hold rotationally in the six geo-political zones of the country. It was anticipated that this would facilitate the establishment of the state chapters of NIREC and draw the Council's attention

to religious issues at the grassroots

During its formative years, NIREC was determined to reduce inter-religious tensions and to foster interreligious cooperation as a bedrock of peaceful co-existence and development. Pursuant to this determination, it has continued to admonish religious leaders to be exemplary in doctrines and character, so that their followers could emulate the good character of truth, honesty, and the fear of God in them. To spread its message at the grassroots, the Council promotes the establishment of NIREC Clubs, comprising Christians and Muslims in secondary schools to promote interreligious interaction, mutual respect, and understanding among the youth. Different states also began branches of NIREC to bridge the gap between interreligious relations at the federal, state, and local levels.

5. An Assessment of NIREC

NIREC has used certain strategies to carry out its responsibilities. These include meetings, condemning of wrongdoing, making recommendations to the government and its members, and releasing communiqués to the public. It has also conducted public awareness programs such as seminars and conferences on national issues. The work of NIREC is plagued by a lack of concerted efforts and practical steps to initiate and sustain the desired change. The Council is fond of issuing communiqués reflecting its resolutions. However, most of the communiqués issued are one-sided. They are either condemning an act or calling on religious leaders and government at all levels to be proactive in providing a solution to the problem of religious violence.

Communiqués would be useful only if they contained practical steps to bring about a solution to the religious conflicts. This should involve plans for implementation, follow up and constant evaluation of the success, progress, and further steps of improvement by members. The Council's communiqués mirror a repetition of the statements issued years before. This level of performance reduces the status of NIREC to a toothless bulldog. Hence, NIREC has not achieved its purpose.

The spate of violence and religiously motivated violence has not subsided since 1999, when NIREC started. Rather, it has been on the increase. The answers to why interreligious dialogue has been quasi-effective can be found in the following four major considerations.

First, there seems to be a frequent subtle quest for an Islamic theocratic state in Nigeria. A theocratic system of government is defined as a "government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law" (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theocracy/conciseEncyclopedia). This assertion is

based on a frequent push for national promulgation of Shari'a laws. An Islamic state is an independent state in which Islam is the official religion and the Shari'a laws are implemented. The move towards a theocratic state by the Islamic religio-political elites in Nigeria is not a recent development. It dated back to the first decade of the Nigerian independence in 1960. Then, the Sardauna of Sokoto who was also the first Premier of the Northern Region, embarked on a national political tour of the country but with a religious undertone. This mission failed and was hindered by the civil war between 1967 and 1970 (Falola, 1998). A few decades later, the move has not stopped.

There are two indications to corroborate the above. The first is the public implementation of Shari'a laws in northern Nigeria by the fifteen northern governors beginning with Zamfara State in the year 2000. The mobilization of Christians and their appeal against the implementation of Shari'a was thrown out. The second issue is the Nigeria membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference, which later changed to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 1986. The Charter of OIC reads in part on the agreement of the member States:

> To be guided by the noble Islamic values of unity and fraternity, and affirming the essentiality of promoting and consolidating the unity and solidarity among the Member States in securing their common interests at the international arena;... to preserve and promote the lofty Islamic values of peace, compassion, tolerance, equality, justice and human dignity;... to endeavour to work for revitalizing Islam's pioneering role in the world while ensuring sustainable development, progress and prosperity for the peoples of Member States;... to foster noble Islamic values concerning moderation, tolerance, respect for diversity, preservation of Islamic symbols and common heritage and to defend the universality of Islamic religion; to advance the acquisition and popularization of knowledge in consonance with the lofty ideals of Islam to achieve intellectual excellence; (OIC Charterwww.oic-oci.org/oicv2/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en).

The beginning of article two stated that "The Member States undertake that in order to realise the objectives in Article 1, they shall be guided and inspired by the noble Islamic teachings and values and act in accordance with the following principles..." (Article 2 OIC). OIC is an Islamic organisation created to promote the Islamic values and principles. The joining of Nigeria occurred during the military era, when a Muslim was the head of state. This was done without any consultation with the national military council. Christian leaders have not stopped to accuse the northern political elites of an

Islamization agenda.

Second, the three forms of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria are characterised by prejudice, mistrust, and dishonesty. It was barely a year from the inauguration of NIREC when the Shari'a law was implemented in some northern states in the year 2000. When northern states began to introduce Shari'a law, it reawakened a national debate on the implications of Shari'a law in a secular state, especially for non-Muslims. In response to the Shari'a debate, NIREC organised a seminar on Shari'a law between 21st and 22nd June 2000. It gave the Muslims and Christians a chance to share perspectives on Shari'a's implementation and its effects on non-Muslims. Kathleen McGarvey (2009, p.250) captured the ordeal of the Christians during this seminar:

> The Christians reiterated their commitment to collaborate with Muslims towards greater social justice for all people in Nigeria and their non-acceptance of the full implementation of the Shari'a because of its negative effect on Christians and because it was contrary to the Constitution. The Muslim speakers insisted that non-Muslims would not be affected.

In the end, Shari'a laws were implemented. This is a clear indication of prejudice in a dialogue context. Such attitudes of mistrust, prejudice, and dishonesty are not limited to this level of dialogue, but it is also found in the academia.

In his book entitled *Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience,* Murtala Bidmos, a professor of Islamic study at the University of Lagos, explored various issues on the practice of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. In chapter seven, the author offers a perspective on Shari'a and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. Bidmos argued that Shari'a is the best thing that could ever happen to a nation because human beings cannot be exposed "unaided to all he should know in order to live a life of peace, comfort and harmony" except that "he needs the divine guidance as contained in Shari'ah" (Bidmos, 2006, p.98). In the same chapter, the author highlighted a few dissatisfactions. For example, the nation's public life is recklessly given Christian coloration at the detriment of Muslims. Public facilities like ambulances carry a Red Cross sign which is more of a Christian religious symbol, which theologically remains unacceptable to the Muslims. He referred to the common law practised in Nigeria as being of western origin with which Muslims are not satisfied (Bidmos, 2006, p.57, 59).

Observing this kind of predisposition, Ezegbobelu (2009, p.171) concluded that "dishonesty, insincerity and mistrust, among the Muslim communities in Nigeria have systematically obstructed the process of genuine dialogue". Any dialogue that occurs in an atmosphere of dishonesty and prejudice will definitely be devoid of any useful outcome.

Religious extremism is the third factor. Extremism is a major element that has inhibited true dialogue in Nigerian religious space. Arinze (1998, p.111) noted that the rise of extremism and fundamentalism are obstacles on the road to dialogue. This extremism is either from Christian preachers who offer offensive statements to the members of the Muslim community. Extreme dimensions could also emerge from the Muslims on the issues that could have been settled amicably. An example is the Miss World Beauty Pageant crisis of 2002 which ended up in the death of about 215 people and burning of 58 church buildings (Olorunnisola, 2016, p.60). This was an issue that could otherwise be resolved in dialogue and an amicable settlement. It is extremism to insist on what benefits only a section of the main component of the religious community in the nation.

Fourth is governmental influence and partisan politics. One vital role of government is to create an enabling environment where social, economic, political, and religious interactions can hold in a nation. If the political space is unstable, it is most probably that all of these other developing factors will be hampered. Boer (2002) as well as Falola (1998) stated that the devastating effects of the Shari'a law crises would have been averted had the government assumed its proper non-partisan position as an unbiased umpire. Instead, the government has consistently deployed the state apparatus to aggravate the crises situations.

5. Moving from Interreligious Dialogue to Dialogue of Life

The above signified the need for a shift in the focus and priorities of both the government and private individuals on what can be done to foster peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. There is an urgent need to shift from interreligious dialogue to dialogue of life.

Suraya Sintang, Azizan Baharuddin and Khadijah Mohd (2012) have argued that dialogue of life is a form of interreligious dialogue involving personal interactions among people in the same community. They were right in stating that dialogue of life occurs in an informal and ordinary day life experience. However, they went as far as citing Ugwoji (2008), who described dialogue of life "as a form of inter-religious dialogue that is within the reach of anyone who lives or interacts with believers in a different religion". Haney (2009) categorised interreligious dialogue into five groups, including living dialogue or dialogue of life. Categorising dialogue of life as a form of interreligious dialogue is prevalent in the academy today beginning with the publication of the Catholic Church's *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) and the initial document published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (DM, 1984, p.28-35).

This categorization has a potential to breed misunderstanding and confusion about the meaning and focus of interreligious dialogue as against

dialogue of life. Contrary to the above writings, dialogue of life should by no means be categorised as a form of interreligious dialogue. Dialogue involves sharing between two people which sometimes involves negotiation or collaboration. For example, different forms of dialogue exist in a democratic setting, such as parliamentary, political, or ecumenical dialogue. These forms of dialogue cannot and should not be categorised as types of interreligious dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991, p.214) discretely used the word 'dialogue' and moved on to identify three of the ways in which it could be understood. First, purely on a human level; second, as an attitude of respect and openness; and third, in the context of religious plurality. It is in the third context that the document used the term dialogue. The contextual usage of dialogue in *Dialogue and Proclamation* has religious connotation. That is why the document categorised dialogue of life as a form of interreligious dialogue.

Broadly speaking, dialogue should be understood as a discipline under which interreligious dialogue and dialogue of life exist and not vice versa. Interreligious dialogue exists for religious cooperation, understanding, learning, and bridge building for the sake of knowing more about others religion for common good. Dialogue of life occurs because human beings are created as social beings who function by interactions, relationships, collaboration for mutual enrichment on social and communitarian levels. The reason behind interreligious dialogue is because religion is a powerful tool that offers great potentialities for peaceful coexistence. The purpose of dialogue of life is the acknowledgement of the precious gift of life as what human beings need to invest, cultivate, and cherish to enable them realise their full belonging in the community with one another.

Except we have a proper grasp of the real meaning and purpose of dialogue of life, our knowledge of it and how it can be useful in modern times automatically becomes distorted. Samwini (2011) corroborated the above by stating that "Dialogue of life, by virtue of primarily basing relations on blood or social ties, can lead to the dispelling of prejudice and engender mutual understanding." Dialogue of life is the interaction that occurs in a human community where people of different ideologies, belief systems, religions, and sometimes cultures, collaborate and engage one another on the basis of common humanity. Samwini draws a clear distinction between interreligious dialogue and dialogue of life by arguing that:

> "Dialogue of life is a direct challenge to religious people, non-religious individuals, towns, and communities to accept one another no matter their differences in beliefs or practices. It differs from inter-religious dialogue, which often involves listening to one another about the content of each other's faiths."

"Unlike inter-religious dialogue which seeks, among other things to build understanding on similarities between the different faiths, dialogue of life does not necessarily look for similarities but seeks to bring peace even amidst acknowledged differences. The process thereby generates peaceful co-existence and enables people to promote spiritual and cultural values, which are found in the distinct outlooks of followers of the other religions. Peaceful co-existence leads to a growth in relationship through a process of mutuality that generates greater understanding and mutual enrichment."

The unique feature of dialogue of life is that the primary motivation for engaging in it is because of the common good which human beings are created to enjoy from one another irrespective of secondary differences that tend to set them apart, including religion.

The cardinal roots of the dialogue of life that is proposed in this article is that which is deeply orientated in the African ontological worldview. Drawing insight from Placid Tempels (1949) and Vincent Mulago (1965), one of the precursors of African philosophy has proposed that African Traditional Religion (ATR) can be construed in terms of four essential elements, namely unity of life and participation, belief in the enhancement or diminution of beings and the interaction of beings, symbols as the principal means of contact and union, and an ethic that flows from ontology. Mulago argued that there is a vital participation in life which first and foremost is evident in family union and also in terms of community relation.

The first and last element that Mulago proposed offers a striking insight into understanding the need for dialogue of life in Nigeria. Unity of life and participation implies the common element that joins the entire family, clan, and lineage together including the living-dead. It is the life-giving principle that binds everything together. Participating in this communion of life is what results in an inclusive community in which the identity of the community or family or clan corporately subsumes the unitary identity of an individual. Following on the first element identified above, there is an ethic that proceeds directly which states that since life is sacred and common to all, therefore, its sanctity must be upheld by all means. Mbiti (1990, p.106) writes based on a view of life and a person's identity in the traditional African background:

What then is the individual and where is his place in the community? In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.

A person therefore exists to witness to the collective life of his community first before his own. Each person holds a responsibility to protect and safeguard the gift and sacredness of life.

The wave of sporadic violence that Nigeria has witnessed in the last two decades with thousands of lives lost and others disabled signalled a massive erosion of the value of life which is an inherent component of African value systems. Except this instinctive value for life is recovered, all forms of organised interreligious talks or dialogue that is engaged between government and its agencies with Christians and Muslims would remain superficial.

The implication of my proposal for the source of this dialogue of life is clear. It establishes the place of a person as belonging in human community, where there are strong ties, and collective identity (Heywood, 2004, p.33). Heywood further notes that the term 'community' would be identifiable through bonds of comradeship, loyalty to common causes and interest, and social roots of loyalty and duty.

It shows that it is impossible to witness to life in a way that leads to peace and mutuality in a nation when each person does not see him/herself as belonging in a whole, community. Contrastingly, those who have come to specialise in the disruption of peace to the detriment of human life may be seen to have considered themselves or others as not belonging to the same part of the human entity.

This raises questions about how an individual achieves personhood. A person is more than a biological entity, although personhood could be in degrees. Following our analysis so far, an individual would be seen as achieving personhood in a community with others (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992, p.107; Masolo, 2010, p.218). The degree of personhood depends on the action and comportment with others. For example, an individual who values others, their wellbeing, and peaceful coexistence in the community and the nation at large would be described as 'a good person' and those who behave otherwise would be seen as 'bad or evil person' (Wiredu, 1992, p.104).

It is necessary to examine one major factor that confronts the proposal for a dialogue of life that is firmly rooted in an African ontological worldview. This factor is globalisation. The effects of globalization are felt everywhere nowadays. Discussing the grave effects of globalization is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice to say that it is having dramatic influence upon the subjects of this article. Most of the recent analyses of globalization focus on economic benefits (Dappa & Thom-otuya, 2010). Konyeaso (2016) investigates the impacts of globalization on Nigeria and concluded that Nigeria is benefitting from the process of Foreign Direct Investment through globalisation. As Nigeria becomes exposed to the rest of the world, it aids contacts with other economies and a transnational view of market and labour. However, it has negative effects on cultural perception. Globalization comes

in forcefully into Nigeria and other African countries by enforcing the domination of foreign culture upon the existing traditional culture. Ibrahim (2013) has observed in this regard that:

> "As a result of the cultural domination from outside that goes with globalization, African countries are rapidly losing their cultural identity and therefore their ability to interact with other cultures on an equal and autonomous basis, borrowing from other cultures only those aspects that meet its requirements and needs."

One of the areas is the erosion of the aspects of culture that would ordinarily facilitate peaceful coexistence and nation building. Through Information Communication Technology and media, there is a breakage of ethnic barriers and erosion of national identities by creating "a homogeneous entity" (Igwe, 2013, p.111). The invasion of multiple foreign cultures which engender violence and the use of arms is a clear example here. The extension of this is the promotion of the procurement and the use of Small Arm and Light Weapons (SALW) that are being used in the current stage of the insurgencies in Nigeria.

6. How to Strengthen Dialogue of Life

The ideal concept of dialogue of life that is envisaged here needs to find expression within the Nigerian national life. It needs to be strengthened through various avenues that currently exist within the nation. There are six ways in which dialogue of life can be strengthened in Nigeria.

First, there is the urgency of exploring the traditional African values of life through traditional African leadership. One of the commonalities to the Nigerian societies until now is the retention of traditional leadership in its cities and villages as an addition to the political and religious leadership. This institution is often considered as a custodian of culture and tradition. The participation of life and its conspicuous place in human interaction is a sacred element of African spirituality (Magesa, 2013, p.11-22). Traditional leaders can take periods of their interactions with religious and political institutions to reinforce various aspects of dialogue of life as what need to be emulated for peaceful coexistence.

Second, the government of Nigeria at all levels needs to be aware of the current failure of the interreligious dialogue. Government has invested so much in interreligious dialogue through its sponsorship of NIREC and various seminars that are intended to create an atmosphere of peace through which various religious practitioners can coexist. When there is such unbiased, sincere assessment of the government's promotion of interreligious dialogue, it will reveal various reasons which have fraught the practicalities of any meaningful interreligious dialogue. The government and its agencies in

different states and at the Federal level have its good share of the spark to every conflict or violence experienced in Nigeria. In some instances, the government has initiated policies, like Shari'a law implementation, which are prone to violence. The contradiction is that in spite of such policies, it continues to invest in interreligious dialogue as a possible way of ameliorating the situation. It is through such an assessment that dialogue of life would emerge as a laudable alternative to curbing the violence.

Third, the church can also perform useful roles by using various elements that are recognisable within the social context to better the ongoing political processes and to promote dialogue of life. The contributions of the church elsewhere, like South Africa, where the leadership of the church was actively involved in the reconciliation and healing processes from the era of Apartheid through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), signals how the church can still serve the mission of social reconstruction in the nation of Nigeria (Olorunnisola, 2016). Ecumenism is ripe in Nigeria at this time partly because of the threats of a supposedly Islamic agenda that has continued to resurface as a perennial issue. Nigerian ecumenism has become a channel for checkmating political policies and a popular method of protecting the entire Christian interest in the nation.

Enwerem (1993) alluded to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body for Nigeria ecumenism, as an awakening that is both fragile and dangerous because of its politico-religious participation. Decades after Enwerem's publication, we can confidently affirm that the awakening of CAN needs to be directed at promoting the value of life through which all Nigerians can have a new perception about life and how to share it together. Closely associated to ecumenism is the ecclesiastical channels which can further be used to aid a renewed understanding of life and how it can be shared.

Fourth, the media could be used to educate the citizens about the importance of dialogue of life and the value of genuineness in its practice. The print and electronic media are powerful tools of conducting public enlightenment and creating awareness. Social media recently joined the traditional media channels. The potential of media houses assisting in the promotion of dialogue of life is very high with privately owned media outlets. Media houses can no longer be used for seeking elections alone and other elements that cause division and violence. If the government-owned media are slow at embracing it, private media groups can arise to pioneer it.

Fifth, the civil society groups and non-governmental organisations have been involved in the pace-setting in bringing sanity and creating awareness over issues that are affecting the nation and its politics. It is clearer now than ever that NGOs need to participate in rebuilding both the economy and social integration in Nigeria. Studies such as McGarvey (2010) and Nwabugbolu (2010) have shown that various local organisations are working

at learning and growing together to benefit their communities. One can imagine that many more would join them soon. Non-governmental organisations as well as civil society groups contributed to the rescue of the Nigerian nation from the military regime and facilitated the transition into a democratic governance after years of military dictatorship (Kukah, 1999). There is a need to continue to promote active participation of NGOs and civil society groups in the national polity.

Sixth and lastly, the core idea of the dialogue of life may be incorporated into the Nigerian educational systems. Many studies have advocated the need to integrate interreligious dialogue into the Nigerian curricula (Ahmed-Hameed, 2015; Toki, Gambari & Hadi, 2015). These studies advocated that religious education should be made compulsory at all levels. This proposal has been accepted to some extent at various universities, e.g., the National Open University of Nigeria (NOU) is currently studying interreligious dialogue as a unit. When dialogue of life becomes integrated in the educational system from primary school to university level, every student will be exposed to the need to make religion a secondary factor of association. When educational policy makers allow dialogue of life to be studied, it will help reorientate the populace and reposition them on the path towards nation building.

8. Conclusion

Dialogue of life has the capacity to become a cutting edge in providing solutions to the problem of incessant outbreak of violence and even insurgencies. The violence in Nigeria over the years and in its current phase are manifest violations of life.

Between May 22nd and 26th 2002, an International Joint Delegation of The World Council of Churches and The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought visited Nigeria on a fact-finding mission to experience the situation in Nigeria due to the sporadic violence experienced from the year 2000 to 2012 (Report on the Inter-religious Tensions, 2012). The joint delegation met the government, community, and religious leaders to ascertain the factors responsible for the interreligious tension. At the close of the visit, this joint delegation categorised the causes of interreligious violence into five broad areas: Religious, Political, Economic, Social/Ethnic, and Legal. However, strangely as it may appear, the delegation in its wisdom refused to make any recommendations, "because obviously Nigerians know best how to deal with them" (Report on the Inter-religious Tensions, 2012. p.12).

Furthermore, the way to deal with the problem of religion-motivated violence is not primarily external, but rather it is by uncovering, promoting, and practising dialogue of life which is rooted in life as an utmost gift rather than religion. It may be a long route but it will surely lead to a new era in

which all Nigerians will appreciate the life of one another and be willing to share without any prejudice. When this happens, it will aid the governance and abolish corrupt practices. Based on the final analysis, dialogue of life represents a well-intentioned alternative to the current heavy investment into interreligious dialogue.

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