

# The Role of Dialogue in the Search for National Security in the Face of Boko Haram Phenomenon: a Case Study of 2 Samuel 20:16-22

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## Abstract

The coordinated and unrelenting attacks by the Boko Haram sect in the northern states of Bornu, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi, Niger, and Adamawa which have claimed several lives, besides making life miserable for Nigerians, remain a threat to national security and survival. Although efforts have been made to curtail the menace, the quest for security of lives and properties is still elusive. Could this menace of insecurity be regarded as ethno-religio-political? This work explores the role of dialogue in the search for National Security as premised on its antecedent case of 2 Samuel 20:16-22. The problem of insecurity in ancient Israel arose from insensitivity of the Judahites which aroused the grievance of the Northern tribes (2 Samuel 19:41-44), leading to the revolt of Sheba, who realizing the implications of his actions, fled to *Abel of Beth-maacah* where dialogue between Joab and a wise woman brought the war to a satisfactory end though with minimum casualties. One may therefore conclude that dialogue is a way forward. The lingering security threat in Nigeria can be resolved through an effort geared towards probing into the fundamental reason(s) for the spate of violence in the country. Unless genuine dialogue is adopted, Nigeria may end up treating the symptoms rather than arresting the real cause(s) of the problem.

**Keywords:** Security, Boko Haram, dialogue, insurgents, violence, peaceful co-existence

## 1. Introduction

Over one year ago under the inspectorate of Mr. Hafix Ringim, the nation has experienced an unprecedented rise in violent terrorism, armed brigandage, religious insurgency, and near total breakdown of law and order (Onwubiko: 2012). This unsavory situation has led to the deployment of modern technology like Global Positioning Tracking System to boost surveillance; (Onwubiko: 2012) but it seems the war against terrorism is anything near being won. The incessant bombings, kidnappings, armed-robbery, aside general insecurity, remain unabated. It is as if unidentified but determined bands of opportunistic rebels are waging a psychological warfare against the nation. It is 'psychological' because its effect is traumatic and opportunistic because this sect realizes and takes advantage of the government's apathetic attitude towards securing its citizens.

Expressing his concern over the worsening security profile in certain parts of Nigeria, William Hague, sounded his displeasure over the menace when he states:

I am shocked and appalled by the large scale terrorism in Kano, Nigeria. The full horror event is still unfolding, but we know that a great many people have died and many injured. The nature of these attacks has sickened people around the world... There is no place in today's world for such barbaric acts and I condemn in the strongest possible terms those who carried them out. These events underline the importance of the international community standing together in the face of terrorism in all its forms (Hague: 2012).

This expression of shock by the UK foreign secretary is worrisome; it presupposes the fact that insecurity is a huge challenge in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that these "barbaric acts" of grievous attacks on life and properties in Nigeria are a threat to national unity. Insecurity, to say the least, undermines national development. It stultifies the economy while at the same time engenders instability which may subsequently result in disillusionment and disintegration.

Although this phenomenon was once an issue confined to the Western world, it is obviously now a Nigerian problem. However, it is the burden of this paper to extrapolate the dialogue approach used by the unnamed wise woman of the Biblical account of 2 Samuel 20:16-22 for the Nigeria's situation.

## 2. Dialogue in 2 Samuel 20:3:22

### 2.1. Background of the text

Israel had been a theocratic nation under Samuel; he was both a Judge as well as a prophet. Samuel had distinguished himself as a godly leader but he was now old. Israelites feared for the future of Israel especially after Samuel must have died. The fear of Israel was premised on the demeanor of the sons of Samuel who neither displayed his honesty nor competence (1Sam 8:1-9) and the threat of Israel's neighbors, especially the

Philistines whose victories had resulted in the destruction of the central sanctuary at Shiloh and disintegrated their amphictyonic organization. Accordingly, the elders of Israel came to the aging prophet-judge and demanded that a visible king be appointed over them, so that they might be like the well organized nations surrounding them and that they might have a leader who could conduct them to victory over their pressing foes (Unger: 1954).

Subsequently, at about 1020 B.C., Saul the Benjamite was chosen as Israel's first ruler. As a king he was unable to advance beyond effectively ruling over a loose political confederacy, mainly because of his innate weakness of character, (Albright: 1940) so he left an unfinished task to be completed by David, his brilliantly successful successor. What he could not do, David did. After the rejection of Saul as the king of Israel, he became the ruler, first in Hebron over the House of Judah (2 Sam 2:1-4), and later, by a covenant, he became the ruler over the northern tribes (5:1-3). His installation was by an anointing which the representatives of the people (2:4; 5:3) and, at least a prophet acting in God's name performed (2 Kings 9; cf. 1 Sam 10:1; 16:13) (Schmidt: 2008).

Biblical account shows that the installation of David as king over Israel was not without conflict, in 2 Samuel 2:12-4:12, we see an early disagreement between the house of David and Ishbosheth of the house of Saul, the Benjamite, David however prevailed (Wood: 1986). Coming to 2 Sam 19:9-20-22, we read of another revolt championed by Sheba. This time, Sheba who was particularly vocal, induced the northern Tribes to secede from David's Kingdom and follow him. And David who had just gone through one revolution found it most alarming to have another break out. However, he remained undaunted and immediately dispatched Amasa his new general to gather an army from Judah to put down the revolt (2 Samuel 3-22) (Wood: 1986).

Sheba was the son of Bichri a Benjamite, and he was referred to as "a man of Belial" (2Sam 20:1-22) a word derived from a combination of: *Beli* "without" and *ya'al* "usefulness," i.e. good for nothing. "A man of Belial" therefore means a worthless, lawless, or reckless fellow (Deut 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1Sam 2:12). The tribe of Benjamin through Sheba sought to regain the ascendancy which it lost at Saul's fall. Judah alone remained faithful to David "from Jordan even to Jerusalem;" the rest of Israel followed Sheba. The division between Israel and Judah already had shown itself under Ishbosheth as mentioned earlier (2Sam 2:4-9). Again, at the close of Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 19:41-43), David felt the greatness of the crisis, and he exclaimed, "Now shall Sheba do us more harm than did Absalom" (2 Samuel 20:6).

Sheba on realizing the implication of his revolt thus traversed the country gathering followers, and finally aimed at fortifying himself in *Abel beth Maachah* (Wood: 1986) in the far North. This was probably connected with Absalom's rebellion through Maacah his mother, and was famed for worldly wisdom. It is at this juncture we hear of the dialogue between Joab (King David's general—though later rejected). She was called a *wise* woman probably because she understood the power of dialogue through which the city was spared from Joab's intended mass destruction. We wish to observe here that the Sheba's revolt was more of a Problem, Reaction and Solution strategy (PRS) (Johnson: 2012). It was to gain control (for the Benjaminites) over the kingdom of Israel as against the rule of David (a Judahite) who succeeded Saul—Israel's premier king and the representative of the Benjaminites' constituency. We see here that the problem of insecurity at that time had a tribal as well as a political undertone, as it resulted from the insensitivity of the Judahites (2 Samuel 19:41-44).

### 2.2. Dialogue

The Northern tribes here felt their exclusion from the ceremony in which the king (David) was escorted over Jordan on his way to Jerusalem so keenly. And this resulted in discontent in Israel. Subsequently, in 20:1-2, the self-appointed leader of the disillusioned tribes, Sheba, the son of Bichri, took advantage of the discontent, and declared independence for Israel, under his own leadership. Chapter 20:13-14, tells us of the pursuing army of Joab who pursued Sheba to *Abel of Beth-maacah*. On getting there, in the middle of the attack, terrifying to those within the city, an unexpected intervention occurred. A wise woman from Abel called for Joab to seek opportunity for dialogue. This wise woman's city, *Abel*, had an honorable reputation in Israel as a center for wise advice and she quotes the proverb, *Let them but ask counsel at Abel and so they ended the matter* (2Sam 20:18). The dialogue between Joab and this wise woman brought the war to a satisfactory end though with a minimum of casualties (Baldwin: 1988).

The wise woman said: "Please say to Joab, 'come nearby that I may speak with you (vs. 16).'" The first thing she did was to seek to know the other party when she said, "Are you Joab?" Then Joab defined himself, "I am." By this, Joab affirmed that he was the person she thought he was. Then, she sought for audience when she said, "Here the words of your maidservant." Joab then granted her audience when he said, "I am listening." Verse 19 shows how she defined herself in the light of her identity as shown in verse 18. She made him to realize that destroying the people will mean destroying the inheritance of the Lord. Realizing this, Joab simply said, "far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! (See verse 20). Joab then gave the specific reason for the attack as he said, "a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri, has raised his hand against King David. Then he offered the terms for negotiation when he said, "Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." In this narrative we see this women engage herself in inter party dialogue.

Having discovered the terms from Joab, she then turned to her people for intra-party dialogue. The bible account

says the woman in her wisdom went to all the people, and they cut off the head of Sheba, the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. And the result was that Joab blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So, Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem (vv. 22). It is dialogue—the ‘wisdom’ of this un-named woman of 2 Samuel 20:3:22 that this paper seeks to explore in the face of the realities of Boko Haram related insecurity in Nigeria.

### **3. A Brief Survey of the Boko Haram Related Insecurity**

Before the widely reported August 26, 2011 suicide attack on the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, it all started as small attacks on the people of Maiduguri, Bornu State. Since then there has been a noticeable escalation of attacks especially in some northern states. This coupled with the sporadic attacks on the Nigerian security apparatus (the police and army) has clearly heightened the renewed insurgency in the Northern Nigeria. Long before the Boko Haram phenomenon, Northern Nigeria has been a hotbed of ethno-religious violence. As far back as 1984 there were violent uprisings masterminded by the Maitatsine-Islamic extremists in the Northern part of Nigeria. The death toll was colossal; as many as 764 people were killed besides property worth millions of naira that was destroyed (Isiramen: 2010). Again, in 1987 there was another violent confrontation between Christians and Muslims left in its wake many casualties.

The snowballing effect of these violence is worrisome for its scope; it has spread to many parts of Northern Nigeria, turning the region into a war zone. One informed commentator reports in 2002: “10,000 people have been killed in recent religious unrest in different parts of the country. About 750,000 people have been displaced in the last two years (Isiramen: 2010).” It is a sad commentary on Nigeria that since the early 1980s the country has been a cinder-box of violence, mostly instigated by vested interests that employ religion and politics as platforms to carry out their anarchistic agenda.

Yet the twist that violent acts have assumed since the emergence of Boko Haram has paled all previous incidences of violent eruptions. Boko Haram insurrectionists operate in such a manner that leaves no one in doubt that they are out to wreak maximum havoc. Indeed, they operate with obscene brutality. They hack down defenceless citizens (including children), using machetes and sophisticated weapons or detonating bombs in market places (Sanni: 2011). Bwala comments; “The fear of Boko Haram is, to state the fact, the beginning of wisdom in some states of the northern part of Nigeria.” (Bwala: 2012) There is no doubt that because of the sinister activities of Boko Haram some northern states in Nigeria, like Kaduna, Yobe, Bornu and Plateau seem to be under a siege. For example, a 24-hour curfew was recently imposed on Kaduna by the state government in order to curtail the menace (Suleiman: 2012). This has hardly helped the situation as these desperadoes are still on rampage. They seem to have adopted the philosophy that the only pathway to peace is war (Goodenough: 2012).

#### *3.1 Boko Haram and its Religious Coloration*

The question that many have asked is whether the Boko Haram violence is really a religious terrorism or a political attack. Some have even linked it with tribal or ethnic chauvinism. However the one looks at it, it important to state that it may be difficult to dissociate religion from whatever reason that may be given.

No doubt Boko Haram, the group associated with the current security problem is publicly linked to a particular religion (that is, Islam), this thus gives the attacks a religious coloration. This is not to say that the security challenges in Nigeria, particularly those posed by Boko Haram are solely religiously motivated. Just like in the time of Prophet Samuel and King David the political tribal or any other is often intertwined with the religious. Even if, the Boko Haram insurgency is politically motivated, and one may also identify a thread of ethnic or tribal chauvinism, there may be reasons to believe that religion may sometimes be used as a façade by some vested interests to carry out their despicable agenda.

Another reason to believe that the Boko Haram insurgency has its religious connection is its reported link to the Al-Quaida—an international Islamic fundamentalist group. Both the international and national security reports have shown that some of the attacks have been trained by their sister Al-Quaida groups. Another reason to believe the link is the current incessant attack on church and Christians even during worship sessions. One more reason to believe that Boko Haram has its religious link with Islam is that no culprit or suspect caught so far has been linked to any other religion other than Islam. If the attack has religious coloration, clearly, religion will be relevant in the effort to resolve the security challenges through dialogue.

#### *3.2 Boko Haram Attacks and Dialogue Controversies*

The sinister operations of Boko Haram insurgents have obviously posed a huge security threat to the country and Nigeria now seeks to find solution to the menace. As well-meaning people discuss the panacea to the current security logjam one word that keeps recurring is “dialogue.” Some feel dialogue is the way out, others however feel there should be no dialogue with terrorists. Clearly, the viewpoints of many Nigerians have been polarized on this issue. For example, Ayo Maria Atoyebi, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ilorin, urged the Federal Government to engage the dreaded Islamic sect, Boko-Haram, in dialogue (Azeez: 2012).

Another voice in support of dialogue is that of Chief Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, a former Federal Commissioner of

Information and the South-South leader. He is of the view that dialogue between the Federal Government and the extremist group, Boko Haram, will likely thaw hostilities (*Channels Television*: 2012). One may equally point out the call for dialogue as a platform for resolving the security problem in Nigeria by Aminu Tambuwal, the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Tambuwal has even taken a step further to appeal to members of the northern radical Islamic sect, Boko Haram, to dialogue with the federal government. Tambuwal even identified lack of understanding of the tenets of Islam as responsible for the rise in insecurity, especially in the northern part of the country. While he condemned the terrorist activities, he called for dialogue to stem the crisis (Tambuwal: 2012).

While some people are calling for dialogue however, others are saying, it would be wrong for the Government of Nigeria to dialogue with the terrorists. A Leader of Hausa Community in Abia, Alhaji Mohammed Umaru, for example, has advised President Goodluck Jonathan to jettison plans to dialogue with the Boko Haram group. Umaru sounded the warning that “dialoguing with the group would be counter-productive as it would explore the opportunity to re-organise and cause more havoc.” Elaborating on this he said, “Islamic religion does not preach the killing of human beings, anybody who kills in the name of Islam is not a true Muslim (Umaru: 2012).”

Another important voice saying that there should be no dialogue with Boko Haram sect is the former Primate of Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, Most. Rev. Peter Jasper Akinola. He is convinced that Boko Haram insurgency is a war on Christians and therefore warned President Goodluck Jonathan against dialoguing with a criminal sect carrying out a Jihad against Christians (Ikuomola: 2012).

Others have traditionally been against dialogue on missionary grounds. For example, people like John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, John R. Cobb, Raimundo Panikkar, and Leonard Swindler have argued against dialogue because of the fear it may lead some away from the light to the errors of the non-Christian faith. As it is said, through interfaith dialogue, Christians may convert from Christianity, the non-Christian may convert to Christianity, or both may become agnostic (Stott: 1975).

As if to debunk the view that dialogue is self-defeatist in the quest for peace, Lateef Adegbite, the secretary general of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), declared: “Dialogue with the Islamists now if you want peace!” He is obviously in disagreement with those taking the position that dialogue is not a viable option to end the Boko Haram crisis. In fact, Adegbite took a swipe at the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), questioning their opposition to dialogue with the Islamists. According to him there is just one way out of the imbroglio, which is dialogue. Indeed Adegbite would rather have the Federal Government adopt the conciliatory approach since “even after wars, you must come around the table and dialogue to have terms of peace.” (Olatunju: 2012).

One thing that seems clear from this is that dialogue has a role play in resolving this and any conflict. But is dialogue the way forward to entrenching peaceful co-existence, particularly in the Nigerian context? If it is, what is dialogue and how can it be used to squelch the Boko Haram insurgency?

#### **4 The Concept of Dialogue**

Dialogue essentially refers to an interpersonal exchange in which neither side tries to convert the other, though both seek to learn about the other and to teach the other about themselves through the process of mutual exchange of ideas (Stott: 1975). According to (Pierson: 2000), dialogue seems to defy definition. To some, dialogue includes face-to-face conversations for the purpose of understanding and growth which involves persons who have fundamentally different religious convictions. Dialogue can also be defined as a conversation which proceeds both from a commitment to one’s own faith and an openness with genuine respect to that of others. It is the openness which does not presuppose agreement, or a search for a compromise, but willingness to listen.

Dialogue is the recognition of another religious tradition as a ‘faith’ system without implying that such a religion is an equivalent or an acceptance of validity of such other religion. Dialogue involves a desire to understand the other faith better and learn from one another. It is an attitude that leads to an ongoing reflection on one’s own faith and practice in comparison to those of other religions. It is also a mission approach that promotes mutual knowledge and friendship that leads to the correction of prejudices toward other faith systems. As Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers before listening that is his folly and his shame;” it is dialogue that provides opportunity to participants to listen to people of other faith before answering or making judgment about them or their beliefs.

##### *4.1 Types of Dialogue*

In recent years J. Verkuyl identified three forms of dialogue; these are: One, the dialogue to aid missionary communication on both sides. The second is the dialogue engaged in with the goal to bring about better mutual understanding. The third is the dialogue that is aimed at producing cooperation in dealing with the most urgent problems facing societies regionally and universally (Verkuyl: 1978).

##### *4.2. Dialogue to aid Missionary Communication*

This is the missional kind of dialogue. It is evangelistic in nature. The expected result is the conversion of the



other party (or parties) to one's own position, so that there is a change of position at the end of the dialogue. Since the main goal in respect to Nigerian situation is the search for peace and security the type of dialogue that may be appropriate in this context may not be the missional kind of dialogue.

#### *4.3. Dialogue to Bring about Mutual Understanding*

Since there is a serious misunderstanding among world religions today, there is the need to seek better mutual understanding, howbeit variety of circumstances and with varying levels on intensity. This type of dialogue may be inform of dialoging to understand one's faith as it is approached as an intra-faith dialogue or to understand other people's faith as it is approached in the form of an interfaith dialogue. This type of dialogue have taken place in many areas throughout the world and the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World council of Churches has rendered valuable service in bringing these kind dialogues about. It has been used in many areas of the world where many religious communities which once viewed each other as suspicious strangers now look upon each other as companions within the same community. This approach helps to clear stubborn stereotypes, biases, and misunderstandings which can lead to conflicts, flare-ups and a retardation of progress. It helps to clear away obstacles that cause misunderstanding.

#### *4.4. Dialogue to increase Cooperation and Collaboration*

In the search for finding solution to prevailing human problems the church has in the past engaged in dialogue to increase cooperation and collaboration. In this approach people of other religious tradition are involved to bring about solutions to critical issues that affects the society. For example, in 1970 representative from many different religious communities gathered for the first World Conference on Religion and Peace in Kyoto, Japan. Four years later, toward the end of August of 1974, a second Conference devoted to the theme of justice and peace was held in Leuven. With these conferences, a powerful summons for representatives of the various traditions to cooperatively bring the strength of each tradition to bear on the pressing problems of the time brought result which has since positively impacted the society (Verkuyl: 1978).

Because of the enormity of the problems facing the world today, there appear to be greater need for the church of Christ to be at the center of pulling the world together to really address the barrage of problems currently facing the human society. As Verkuyl points out, "As individuals and peoples become increasingly dependent on each other, the need for a cooperative approach to the urgent problems facing them grows apace." (Verkuyl: ). Clearly, the world is becoming more and more interdependent, just as the human problems are becoming similar regardless of race or distance.

Considering the different types of dialogue as discussed, perhaps it may be appropriate to ask what type(s) of dialogue is applicable to the Nigerian situation today. Which of them will bring a suitable response to the Nigerian context? Are they all applicable or not? Obviously, the goal of the dialogue advocated in this paper is not the missional kind of dialogue to aid missionary communication in order to gain membership. However, the Nigerian situation may need both the dialogue for understanding and that which is directed as seeking cooperation and collaboration among cities in the different religious camps.

### **5. Dialogue as a Platform for Peace and security in Nigeria**

Following the current incessant attack of the Boko Haram group in Nigeria, the call for dialogue has become increasingly visible though a form of dialogue has been employed by the Government of the nation. For example, The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that President Goodluck Jonathan, on Tuesday, May 22, 2012 met with members of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Abuja, over the current security challenges in the country (Usigbe: 2012). Speaking to State House correspondents after the meeting, the Executive Secretary of NIREC, Professor Ishaq Oloyede, said the council had presented to the president some suggestions on how best to address the security and socioeconomic problems facing the country. He expressed optimism that the suggestions, if implemented by the government, would enhance harmony and peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the country.

As Lateef Adegbite noted, dialogue is probably the only way forward if the quest for a lasting solution to the security problem in Nigeria will be achieved. Unless Nigeria is able to probe into the fundamental reasons and the underlining philosophic worldview of the perpetrators of the violent acts through genuine dialogue, the Nation may end-up giving a cosmetic treatment to a malaise that requires surgical operation. Not only should Nigeria seek interfaith dialogue, the nation should also encourage intra faith dialogue. It is in this way dialogue offers itself as the only viable option to resolving the apparently intractable challenge posed by Boko Haram and other violent insurrectionists.

#### **5.1 Need for continuous Intra and Interfaith dialogue**

Clearly, Nigeria needs to engage her citizens in dialogue, especially for if she must curtail the seemingly intractable terrorist attacks that have recently become a daily occurrence. But the question is "Why should Nigeria dialogue?" Following are some of the suggested reasons:

1. Nigeria needs to take into account the fact that this is a multi-religious society, and different religious traditions must co-exist in harmony (Kim: 2007).

2. No religion should attempt to dominate the other through violence or political maneuverings.
3. Our dialogue should help people of different religious traditions face the common problems such as poverty, injustice, spiritual deprivation, ecological crisis, moral and ethical dehumanization, and they also encounter the common challenge of secularism, modern and postmodern criticisms of religion.
4. Because people of faith have a shared responsibility to search for answers to the questions such as the meaning of life, salvation, religious truth, and even within the physical realm such as peace, security, development and reliefs and others, there is the need for a continuous dialogue.
5. Since dialogue is an attempt to help one another in our religious or spiritual quest, it helps us to acknowledge that each religious tradition has its own historical development, though each religion takes different approaches to the questions of life, and provides different answers, so a uniform form of answer should not be expected.

### 5.2 *Effective Dialogue*

No doubt, Nigeria needs to dialogue, but the question is will this dialogue be effective, and how can we make our dialogue effective?

1. For this kind of dialogue to be effective however, each of the partners must learn to accept certain ground rules. For example, in one of his essays on Hinduism, Father P. Schoonenberg pointed out that he who wishes to build up contacts with persons from another religion ought to begin by listening to their interpretation of their own religion (auto-interpretation) rather than with his own interpretation of it (hetero-interpretation).
2. Raymond Panikkar, one of the most experienced persons in interfaith dialogues, cautioned against becoming an apologete for one's own position. "Apologetics," said, he, "has its place, but not in dialogues of this nature (Stott: 1975)."
3. Each partner must believe that the other is speaking in good faith.
4. Each partner must be crystal clear on what he believes
5. Each partner must understand clearly what the other believes.
6. Each partner must penitently admit and accept the responsibility for the mistakes which his brothers in the faith have made with respect to other religious communities and which have muddled the message, beclouded the deepest intentions and aroused a great deal of misunderstanding.
7. Each partner must be prepared to accept the outcome of the dialogue for the sake of the goal of the dialogue.

## 6. Summary

Nigeria seems to be heading towards the precipice. Probably, as never before, the problem of insecurity is driving the nation into a state of chaos and total disintegration. Well-meaning people are continually worried that the senseless and wanton destruction of lives and property as currently being witnessed in the northern part of the country may snowball to total anarchy in the entire country.

Evidently, the government has severally employed military might to squelch the roiling security crisis but it seems not to have achieved the desired result. This is why it might just be appropriate to give serious consideration to genuine and meaningful dialogue especially to seek understanding, cooperation and collaboration in finding lasting solution to the security menace. Clearly, if one truly understands the tenets of one's religion and those of the other religions, as well as understands that it is possible for religions to cooperate and collaborate in finding solution to societal problems; it may help in guiding such a person from violence. This is why both interfaith and intrafaith dialogue is necessary if Nigeria seeks understanding, cooperation and collaboration.

While the intent of NIREC co-chaired by His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Saad Abubakar III and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) president, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor as the umbrella body of the two major religions in the country is to serve as a platform for cooperation among all Christians and Muslims across the country, it may be said that it is not engaging the religions in true dialogue. Because, true dialogue will go beyond the scope of presidential or governmental parley, it must go beyond making political statements, and taking mere palliative measures. It should go beyond government holding consultative meetings with the leadership of the major religions to seek advice; it should go to finding platforms for true dialogue which will provide genuine basis for educating adherents of the parties involved in the crisis. It must get into genuine dialogue that will dig into discussing the root cause of the problem at hand, seek ways each of the traditions would address such a problem. It should go beyond the challenge of President Jonathan urging NIREC to take a united position in condemning actions and utterances of groups and individuals that may threaten the peace of the nation.

The Boko Haram group(s) is certainly not a ghostly group; they are members of the community. Religious and political leaders should show sincerity in truly identifying them and immediately put program for genuine dialogue in place. Obviously the insurgents are aggrieved because of some perceived or real injustice they

observe in the society or perhaps because of their desire to impose a perceived better worldview or religious philosophy on the society. Government must be willing to address whatever injustices that may be identified in the process of dialogue.

Even the idea that the agenda of the insurgents is to Islamize the country could also be addressed through dialogue. Nigeria is a multi-religious nation. Indeed, dialogue will help religious extremists to view plurality from a positive angle rather than seeing it as an obstacle to harmony. Clearly dialogue will help every religion to treat active engagement in dialogue with people of other faith with respect; especially if it is seen as part and parcel of, if not essential to their religious life (Stott: 1975). We should realize that effective commendation or condemnation cannot come except there is a deeper understanding of the problem and each religious tradition has come up with how it will address the challenges within its own context through intra-faith dialogue.

While Christians may fear dialogue, because it may lead Christianity to the level of a watered down religion, and for the fear of syncretism, it must be pointed out that whatever results from a particular kind of dialogue will only reflect the purpose and the structure of the dialogue. From history of Christian mission and dialogue, dialogue may not necessarily lead to deflection or even syncretism. As Vankuyl noted, “the fear of some that such conferences to seek “Increase Corporation” among religious traditions would lead only to syncretism and a polite fellowship without concrete results did not materialize, and since then, in many places, such dialogues have been used to jointly seek solution to national or racial issues around the world” (Verkuyl). With this, Christian should not entertain any fear regarding any dialogue intended for understanding, cooperation and collaboration. This is more so the case because, enduring peace may actually be a mirage if active engagement in dialogue is ignored.

## 7. Conclusion

The role of religious leaders in the quest for peaceful co-existence cannot be over-emphasized. In setting platforms for dialogue religious leaders must be made to realize that their influence matters a great deal in creating an atmosphere for peaceful co-existence. Religious fanaticism should be discouraged through dialogue and wherever it manifest it should be severely condemned by religious leaders. Dialogue is impossible if aggrieved parties are unwilling to sheath their sword and embraced peaceful initiatives.

While we seek understanding, cooperation and collaboration however, it is important to seek to affirm both the understanding and communication aspects of dialogue without surrendering biblical absolutes, the latter being a crucial distinction from the pluralist definition of dialogue. This position, combining critical relativism with theological conservatism, is held by Pierson (among others) (Pierson: 2000) Evidently, weaknesses of dialogical approach include possible difficulties in maintaining a balance among interpersonal relationships, biblical truth, and resulting psychological equilibrium additionally, losing biblical perspective may also lead toward Syncretism. However, the strengths of this approach far outweigh the weaknesses (Pierson: 2000).

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