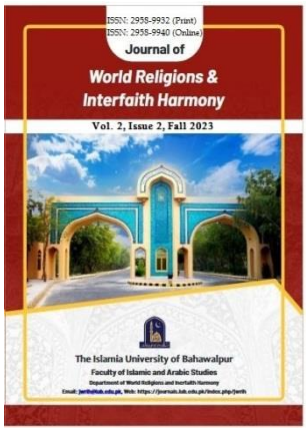


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The Exegetical Significance of the Phrase "Εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων" (pursue peace with all men) Towards Religious Mutual Respect in Nigeria

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Abstract

The state of peace, oneness, harmony and political stability of Nigerian nation is dwindling as a result of conflicts among the various religious adherents, especially the Christians and Muslims. This pandemonium has grown into extremism and intolerance. Hence, the need for political stability in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The purpose of this paper was to give a concise insight into the exegetical significance of the phrase "Εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων" (Pursue peace with all men" and the roles of Inter faith dialogue towards religious mutual respect in Nigeria. The writer adopts the use of analytical exegesis of the relevant scriptural passages, using the Greek texts of the New Testament and interpretation of such selected passages; to give room for sound understanding of the subject matter, historical and descriptive methods is equally employed in this paper. The findings reveal that, a careful look at the society reveals pathetic situation as a result of lack of peace; there was no positive understanding and interaction among all religions. In conclusion, religious peace has remained elusive and Intractable in many parts of the world. The writer recommended that there was need for integration which involves subsuming all physical, social, linguistic, economic, religious, political, regional and cultural differences and promoting the spirit of oneness, brotherhood and good neighbourliness among the people living in a particular geographical environment.

Keywords: Peace (Εἰρήνην), Inter-faith dialogue, Religious Mutual Respect, Religious Tolerance, Peaceful Co-existence.

Introduction

Religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs, it draws them together in common goal of life. This goal may be ‘‘life’’ in the most literal sense since religions are the earliest protective systems we know about that enable people to have children and raise them to adulthood. Religion, therefore, bind people together and supply the means through which their lives can be lived with truth and purpose. In the same vein religion has constituted a major point of divergence, crises and misunderstanding; while on the one hand, it has facilitated mutual growth and development between various people groups, families and ethics, it has, on the other hand bred dissentions that are characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties. This has become more prevalent in pluralistic religious settings, where both superiority and inferiority complexes gravitate toward hatred and gruesome loss of lives. Such has been the experience in Nigeria, a nation of multi ethno-religious and social economic diversity.[1]

Religion has come to occupy a central stage in people’s consciousness and academic discourse. Religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands; the religionist is earnestly devoted and attached to religion. Religion can be both an integrative and divisive factor in any society. When the divisive elements of religion are not properly handled and brought under strict control, they create tensions and unrest in a society. Religion has been mostly used negatively in Nigeria politics since independence; the nation has witnessed scores of religious conflicts and crises as a result of intolerance and total disregard for human rights and reprisal attacks.[2] The two religions preaching peace has become a mere statement devoid of honest meaning and commitment.[3] No wonder, Afolabi opines that, “religion does not make people good or bad; on the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit in Nigeria.[4] The world has become a global village where happenings in one part of the world have their bearing on the rest of the world. Therefore the need to foster positive understanding and interaction among all religions has increased manifold,

[1] Oladosu Samson Bisi & Yisa Segun Zubairu, “Harnessing the Oracle of Simeon (Luke 2: 25-35): As a Nexus for Peaceful Co-Existence among Religious Adherents in Nigeria.” S*apientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.6 No.1 March, 2023: 135 – 146; ISSN: 2695- 2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online).*

[2] Bisi & Zubairu, “Harnessing the Oracle of Simeon (Luke 2: 25-35),” 135.

[3] E. Bolaji Idowu, ‘‘Religion on Peace. ’’*Orita Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies.*1971 : 83.

[4] Oluwaseun Olawale Afolabi, “The Role of Religion in Nigerian Politics and its Sustainability for Political Development.” *Net Journal of Social Sciences Vol. 3(2) {May, 2015}*: 42

especially in view of the peculiar nature of threats posed to global order and peace.[5]

Religious peace has remained elusive and Intractable in many parts of the world. Typical headlines in current newspaper report include: "Hindus, Muslims Clash," and "Fresh trouble brews in Kano…over planned demolition of churches." In another report, titled, "Religious tension grips Yoruba land," one reads that "Religious crisis, an unusual event in Yoruba land, is now taking a center stage in the area, as a result of militant activities of Christian and Muslim preachers." The fear is thus not unfounded that humanity may continue to witness various forms of Jihads and Crusades.[6]

Adamolekun opines, "Conflict is an integral part of human life."[7] It is generally experienced as human beings find their interests clashing with other groups of people. It is a "state of disagreement between two or more people, groups of people or countries.[8] Adamolekun observed:

> Conflict resolution seeks to find a satisfactory end to the dispute of conflict. A conflict has the potentials to accelerate or retard the progress and development of a community. Conflict is inherent in all kinds of social, economic, or political settings and in business management. It is characterized by ethnic, religious and other forms of pluralism. Conflict is a dynamic phenomenon which consists of five stages: initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement and termination/resolution. In this process, peace is the ultimate target or result of conflict or even violence. Thus, the aim of an individual or group in a conflict may not necessarily be achieved but it may be subdued by the conflict through negotiated settlement.[9]

Concepts of Dialogue

[5] Gerard MA Forde, *A Journey Together: A Resource for Christian Muslim Dialogue.* Ireland: Cois Tine, 2013:2 (www.coistine.ie)

[6] P.O. Abioje, "Christian Recognition of other Religion: Towards Religious Mutual Respect in Society" in *Issues in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria.* Edited by M.T. Yahya. (Jos: Nigeria Association for the Study of Religion (NASR), 2006), 103.

[7] Taiye Adamolekun, "The Principle of Conflict Resolution and Peace Making in Christianity" in *Issues in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria.* Edited by M.T. Yahya. (Jos: Nigeria Association for the Study of Religion (NASR), 2006), 20.

[8] Akpenpun Dzurgba, *God and Caesar: A Study in the Sociology of Religion.* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, Ltd. 2000), 19.

[9] Taiye Adamolekun, "The Principle of Conflict Resolution and Peace Making in Christianity,"20.

A dialogue is a literary technique in which writers employ two or more characters to be engaged in conversation with each other. In literature, it is a conversational passage or a spoken or written exchange of conversation in a group or between two persons directed towards a particular subject.[10] The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines dialogue as a conversation. It is a formal discussion between two groups or countries especially when they are trying to solve a problem, or end a disagreement.[11] In other words, dialogue has been described as a written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing.[12] Also, it is a conversation between two or more persons. In addition, it is an exchange of ideas and opinions. Furthermore, dialogue could also be seen as a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution.[13] D.K. *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* sees dialogue as a conversation in written form; a discussion, especially one between representatives of two groups.[14]

From these definitions, one could sum up that dialogue is the coming together of the three main religious adherents in Nigeria to discuss issues that could enhance and promote peace in the country. No one can know what the other party has in mind until they (the other party) expresses it. The need for dialogue to enhance peace in the Society cannot be over-emphasized. Husband and wife, father and son, government and the citizens, kings and the subjects must discuss burning issues if they want to live in peace and harmony. Absence of dialogue could be seen as a cause of intolerance in the country.[15] It is organized and aimed at solving a problem in order to end disagreement, discord or conflict. Dialogue could be formal or informal. Ilori asserts:

> Dialogue is the international engagement with persons of other faiths for mutual understanding, co-operation and learning. It may be as informal as a conversation in the market place, or as formal, as the leader of one religious group explaining to the other its philosophy, or worship life. The essence of dialogue therefore, could be to seek relationship with another in order to expose

[10] Patrick M. Jenlink, *Dialogue as a Means of Collective Communication*. (New York: Plenum Publishers, 2005), 25.
[11] *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary.* (Oxford: University press xxxx), 403.
[12] *Webster's New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary.*
[13] Isaac. A. Abolarin, "Inter Religious Dialogue as a Means to Enhance Peace in Nigeria" in *Igbaja Journal of Theology. Vol.1, No.1 2014.* 158.
[14] D.K. *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary,* 223
[15] Isaac. A. Abolarin, "Inter Religious Dialogue as a Means to Enhance Peace in Nigeria," 158-9.

misunderstanding and stereotypes, and to break down barriers that separate and create hostility and conflict.[16]

According to Awokoya, dialogue is a continuous process that involves peacemaking and strategies towards building peace. Dialogue refers specifically to Christian/Muslim engagements involving in discussions towards evolving means in order to forge greater relations, harmony, understanding, tolerance and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.[17] Organized interreligious dialogue only began in the 1950's when the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican held meetings with representatives of other faiths. In the 1960's the Second Vatican Council marked a major step forward in Christian openness to interreligious dialogue. The World Council of Churches established a program for Dialogue in the 1970's. In this period the efforts of Christian Churches focused on increasing awareness and understanding of Dialogue through the publishing of reports, articles and books written by both Muslims and Christians. By the 1980's organizations such as the Muslim World League and the World Muslim Congress together with Christian organizations had established both formal and informal structures and programs for Muslim Christian Dialogue.[18]

Analytical Exegesis of the Phrase "Εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων"

Εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων, καὶ τὸν ἁγιασμόν, οὗ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὸν κύριον· ἐπισκοποῦντες μή τις ὑστερῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ· μή τις ῥίζα πικρίας ἄνω φύουσα ἐνοχλῇ, καὶ διὰ ταύτης μιανθῶσιν πολλοί (Hebrew 12:14-15).[19] Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it may be defiled; (Heb 12:14-15 NAS).

There are three aspects to our lives as they relate to the physical world. First, there is our relationship with God. That has a great effect upon how we live in this world. The writer of Hebrews speaks of following after "holiness (12:14). Only God is holy, so this must refer to our relationship with God. But we are also urged to "follow peace with all men" (12:14). This concerns our relationship with

[16] J.A. Ilori, "Dialogue between Christians and Muslims: How Feasible?" *The First International Conference on Christian Muslim Relations*, (Miango, Jos, November 1993), 43.
[17] S.O.D. Awokoya, "Inter Religious Dialogue as a Tool for Sustaining Peace and Unity in Nigeria" in *Igbaja Journal of Theology. Vol.1, No.1 2014:* 47
[18] Gerard MA Forde, *A Journey Together: A Resource for Christian Muslim Dialogue.*, 5 (www.coistine.ie).
[19] Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Text Form*, 2005 Database www.chiltonpublishing.com.

our fellow men. Peace is something that comes when hearts are brought together in love and understanding. We are to be at peace with our fellowmen. In addition, we have a distinct relationship to our fellow-Christians-"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God" (12:15). There are, thus, three aspects of our lives and relationships in this passage. There is our relationship to men in general, our relationship with God, and our relationship with the church and the saints.[20]

According to Hale, "it is not possible to live in peace with everyone, because some people will oppose us simply because of our faith in Christ. But we must try as far as possible to remain at peace with everyone. And if we are supposed to remain at peace with non-believers, how much more should we strive to remain at peace with our fellow believers"?[21] The Apostle Paul says that we are to live peaceably with all men as far as it is possible for us to do it (Romans 12:18). There is to be a relationship with men in the world that is free from bitterness, hostility, and contentiousness. We are to have an attitude toward those about us that does not draw us into the anxiety and bitterness of the world.[22]

Peace with all men is possible only within the limits of what is right. There are in fact times when standing for just causes brings intense antagonism and peace is inevitably shattered. But the meaning must be that every effort must be made to maintain peace if at all possible. The word διώκετε (strive) is a strong word, expressing something of the eagerness of pursuit. The idea of tracking down peace is echoed from Psalm 34:14, where it is linked with a conscious departing from evil. The second objects of pursuit, ἁγιασμόν (holiness), is taken up from verse 10, but the qualifying clause –*without which no one will see the Lord*- explain why the essentially spiritual quest is indispensable. This is really a fuller statement of the reason why God desires us to share his holiness. It amounts to raising us to the same level as himself. Absolute purity cannot but abhor impurity. The 'seeing' of God could be understood in a spiritual sense of communicating with him, but there is now possible (cf. 1 John 3:2 which points to the coming again of Christ).[23]

Communal harmony and solidarity in the face of suffering can be ensured only as the church lives in the wholeness God has worked in Christ. Linking of peace and holiness was possibly also suggested by Ps. 34:14. Holiness, too, is

[20] James T. Draper, *Hebrews: The Life that Pleases God.* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tydale House Publishers, Inc., 1976), 346.
[21] Thomas Hale, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, Global Mission, 1996), 880.
[22] James T. Draper, *Hebrews: The Life that Pleases God,* 347.
[23] Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary.* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 257.

both gift and goal (vv.10-11). The sanctity that flows from the sacrifice of Christ and his cleansing blood (see 10:10, 14; 13: 12) is to be expressed in a life of corporate holiness (13:1-5). That holiness is necessary in order to "see the Lord" (meaning God, rather than Christ, as in 8:2) is a reminder of its cultic setting. Purification by Christ's blood (1:3; 9:14, 22-26) creates the state of holiness that allows access into God's holy presence. To see God thus means as much as to "come to" God in worship (12:18, 22). Communal responsibility is expressed in mutual oversight and concern (12: 15-16; cf. 2:1; 3:12.).[24] Paul and the Gospel-writers believe not only that we are channels of God's peace, but also that we are to make peace in our families, congregations, communities and nations. Christians continue to attempt to discern the relation of peace and justice; from Psalms 85:10 and James 3:18 we learn that there is no peace without justice and no justice without peace. As peace should not be kept at any price, so justice should not be achieved by any means. Peace making is intimately related to setting at liberty those who are oppressed.[25]

If the children of God grow impatient under affliction, they will neither walk so quietly and peaceably towards men, nor so piously towards God, as they should do; but faith and patience will enable them to follow peace and holiness too, as a man follows his calling, constantly diligently, and with pleasure. It is the duty of Christians, even when in a suffering state, to follow peace with all men, yea, even with those who may be instrumental in their suffering. This is a hard lesson and a high attainment, but it is what Christ has called his people to. Sufferings are apt to sour the spirit and sharpen the passions; but the children of God must follow peace with all men. Peace and holiness are connected together; there can be no true peace without holiness. There may be prudence and discreet forbearance, and a show of friendship and good will to all; but this true Christian peace-able ness is never found separate from holiness. We must not, under pretense of living peaceably with all men, leave the ways of holiness but cultivate peace in a way of holiness.[26]

What Dialogue Aims to Achieve

[24] Victor C. Pfitzner, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, (1997), 179-180.

[25] David J. Atkinson & David H. Field (Eds.) "Peace" in *New Dictionary of Christians Ethics & Pastoral Theology.* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic: an Imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 655.

[26] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary Volume 6, Acts- Revelation*. (USA: Hendrickson Publishers. Inc, 1991), 771

During the last fifty years Interfaith Dialogue has been recognized as an integral part of the life of the Church as well as an important aspect of human life in our globalized world. This has led to the establishment of interfaith commissions, international meetings, academic, humanitarian and spiritual initiatives all aimed at creating greater understanding and cooperation between people of different faiths. In recent decades dialogue between Muslims and Christians has become an imperative needed to counter a growing polarity created by the course of world events. Dialogue is a necessity, needed to counter extremism and to promote the justice and peace that befits our common faith in one God who is Lord of all humankind and of all creation.[27] Forde observed:

> Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbors, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings.[28]

Inter-Faith Dialogue is defined as: "All positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of faith which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom." This definition tells us that Dialogue is about building constructive relationships with people of other faiths. It is about mutual understanding. It is about each partner respecting the religious freedom of the other.

> Dialogue seeks to: Increase mutual understanding, and good relations; Identify causes of tension in Christian Muslim relations. These are often economic, social or political rather than religious; Build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions; Break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry. Interfaith Dialogue is not: About

[27] Gerard MA Forde, *A Journey Together: A Resource for Christian Muslim Dialogue,* 3
[28] Forde, *A Journey Together, 3*

> talking away or brushing aside differences. It does not aim at coming to a common belief; A way of converting the other. In dialogue each party remains true to their own faith; A space for arguing, attacking or disproving the beliefs of the other. It is about increasing mutual understanding and trust.[29]

Types of Dialogue

Dialogue is a means of building the openness, understanding and trust needed for Christians and Muslims to live and cooperate with each other despite their differences. It can take place in different ways and on different levels. These are briefly described here: **Theological Dialogue or Discourse**

This takes place on academic or official levels between experts, theologians and religious leaders. This kind of dialogue helps to clarify issues, to create greater understanding and remove prejudices. By establishing links and relationships between leaders, such dialogue can facilitate and enable practical cooperation and action on the other levels described below. The aim of this exchange is not to reach a common belief, but rather to clarify what each partner believes, to appreciate each other's spiritual values and to have a better understanding of differences. Dialogue on this level has been happening for many years in places around the world, and has helped to increase understanding and cooperation. Unfortunately much of the good has been undone by the polarization of Muslims and Christians taking place due to fanaticism, violence and socio-political unrest. More dialogue, not less, is needed to counter these negative trends. The engagement of religious leaders in the dialogue process gives both encouragement and an example for people of both faiths to follow.[30]

Dialogue of discourse involves people of different faiths coming together to exchange information and ideas on their respective religious beliefs and heritage. They articulate faith perspectives and encounter one another, in an effort to understand the religion of the other at a deep level, and as articulated by qualified and well prepared representatives of the other religious traditions. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Association for the Study of Religions (NASR) was formed to achieve this goal.[31]

The Dialogue of Religious Experience

[29] Forde, *A Journey Together*, *8*
[30] Forde, *A Journey Together*, 14
[31] S.O.D. Awokoya, "Inter Religious Dialogue as a Tool for Sustaining Peace and Unity in Nigeria," 48-9

This involves interfaith prayer and also occasions when spirituality and religious texts are studied by members of both faiths. This kind of dialogue also requires a level of expertise. Great care needs to be taken when preparing a Muslim Christian prayer service (or any interfaith event). It is important that there is a real reason or need for the shared prayer: for example, when something significant happens in local communities calling for people to come together in prayer. It is difficult to find forms of joint prayer that respect the sensibilities of both Muslims and Christians. One Prayer that is acceptable and often used is the Prayer of St Francis. Interfaith Prayer events often take the form of each participant listening respectfully to the prayer of the other. Silent reflection is also a powerful symbol. When preparing an interfaith prayer event the guiding principle should be that of respecting the beliefs of the other.[32]

All preparation should be done jointly with texts, words, symbols, actions and music discussed and agreed. Having a practice "dry run" of the planned event is a good idea as it will give all those organizing the event a clear idea of what will happen, thus avoiding unforeseen and avoidable causes of offence or embarrassment. Once a format and Order of Service has been agreed, stick to it. Forde citing the Committee for Christian Unity and the Bishops of the Church of Ireland:

> Without dialogue between people of faith, the vacuum in communication and understanding can quickly and easily be filled by gossip, mistrust, prejudice, bigotry and racism. Bigotry is fed by fear and ignorance. Without dialogue and mutual respect, extremism and hatred can grow. A proper approach will embrace learning about what adherents of a particular world faith say about their own faith rather than relying on what is alleged by others on their behalf. When interfaith co-operation works well, all of our lives are enriched. The knowledge and understanding of others enhances our lives, helps us to understand difference, gives substance to our belief and points us towards lives rooted and grounded in love.[33]

The Dialogue of Common Action

Christians and Muslims can work together to promote and preserve peace, liberty, social justice and moral values. Both faiths place a strong emphasis on justice and peace and on respect for human dignity. Both religions see human beings as stewards of God's creation, entrusted with the care of the earth. We

[32] Gerard MA Forde, *A Journey Together: A Resource for Christian Muslim Dialogue,* 14.
[33] Forde, *A Journey Together* 15

share common concern for humanitarian values, the environment and for the proper use of the world's resources. We should, therefore, collaborate in addressing social concerns based on these common religious motives and values. On a local level, we can work together to build better communities, and to provide voluntary services and facilities. Issues of social concern such as housing, drug abuse, street violence, unemployment, refugees and education are areas where Muslims and Christians can cooperate.

The Dialogue of Life

This is where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, the ordinary everyday business of getting on with each other, of being good neighbors and living in peace and harmony. This can be hard enough for a people of a common background but, where religious and cultural differences exist, more effort is needed. Note, the word "strive" is used above. There will be a need to make an effort to reach out, to understand, to break down our own prejudices and to overcome the barriers, stereotypes and suspicions that are in us all. This will not be easy and it will require perseverance. We will have to be patient, be willing to listen and to accept that people are different, or have a world-view different from our own. To live in peace as our faith requires demands this effort.

We can all engage in the Dialogue of Life and the Dialogue of Common Action. These require no special expertise, but they do require an openness to interact with the other in a spirit of respect and cooperation. These kinds of dialogue are important because they have a direct bearing on our daily lives and on how Muslims and Christians live together in the now multicultural and multi-religious Nigeria. The Dialogue of Life and of Common Action can take place in both formal and informal settings. Informally, dialogue can take place through involvement in residents' associations, parent-teacher meetings, and youth groups and sports clubs. It can happen between individuals, neighbors, friends and people we work with. All of these are occasions where mutual understanding and an appreciation of the other can grow. Faith may not even be discussed in these situations, but it can be witnessed to through action, respect and mutual support. Individually our involvement in the Dialogue of Life is very much about our attitude to each other and our disposition towards engaging with each other.[34] This form of dialogue promotes mutual trust and harmonious living. It is a demonstration of religious accommodation and empathy; it breeds acceptance, which is a major ingredient of genuine dialogue.

[34] Forde, *A Journey Together* 17.

The Concept of Religious Tolerance

What is Tolerance? Tolerance is willingness to allow people to do, say or believe what they want without criticizing them. To criticize them means to express your disapproval of someone or something or to talk about someone's faults. It is also to express judgments about the good and bad qualities of someone or something. Therefore, criticism is the acts of giving your opinion or judgment about the good and bad qualities of someone or something. Criticism is also written or spoken remarks that express your disapproval or bad opinion of someone or something. Furthermore, criticism is the activity of forming and expressing judgments about the good or bad qualities of books, films and music among other things. On the other hand, literary criticism refers to the written works that result from the activity. Apart from negative criticism, there is a constructive criticism. Constructive criticism facilitates religious tolerance in inter-faith relations, interactions and dialogue.[35] Dzurgba further opines:

> Religious tolerance is characterized by the absence of religious parochialism, particularism, chauvinism, bigotry and fanaticism. Parochialism means a tendency, in which a person is only interested in the things that are his and his local area, but not interested in more important matters. Thus, parochialism means narrow-mindedness. In this context, religious parochialism or narrow-mindedness leads to isolation, exclusiveness and sectarianism. This leads to sectarian violence, conflict, murder or destruction of life and property which arises from the strong feelings between the people of different religious groups. Particularism is the tendency in which an individual pays attention to the details of the scriptures, doctrines, sacraments, rituals forms of worship, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the will of God and the church traditions. In a number of situations, theological teachings either contradict one another or it is impossible to translate them into practical actions. Therefore, the doctrinal and scriptural contradictions and impracticability are open to various and contradictory interpretations. These have often led to religious disputation, dispute or violence. This is the situation that is referred to as religious intolerance.[36]

[35] Akpenpun Dzurgba, "Religious Tolerance: A Tool for Effective Development in Nigeria." *A Lecture Delivered at the Graduation Ceremony of Reformed Theological Seminary,* Mkar, Benue State, Nigeria 28 May, 2010 (Ibadan: John Archers, 2010), 15-6.

[36] Forde, *A Journey Together,* 16.

Religious chauvinism means a strong belief that one's religion is better than any other religion. Thus, a religious chauvinist treats other people's religions with mockery, scorn, derision, contempt and disdain. A chauvinist may tarnish, obscure, distort or spoil the name and image of any other religion through libelous written or printed untrue statements so that other people should have a bad opinion about such a religion. For example, a religion may be said to have been founded on superstitions and ignorance. Religious chauvinism has also been a tendency that has often led to religious disputes, conflict or violence in society. Religious bigotry is another tendency in which someone has such a strong opinion about one's religion that one is unwilling to listen to anyone else's opinion. Religious bigotry is a bigoted religious behaviour or belief. Thus, a religious bigot is intransigent in his religious opinion and that it is very difficult to get him engaged in an interactive dialogue which is intended to achieve peaceful settlement of disputes or reconciliation of the parties involved in a conflict. This leads to fanaticism which means extreme religious beliefs. Fanatics are the people who have extreme religious ideas or beliefs that are often dangerous. They represent a real danger to religious mutual goodwill, understanding and tolerance. In sum, religious parochialism, particularism, chauvinism, bigotry and fanaticism are all human sources of religious intolerance. These are the facilitators of religious disagreements, disputes, strives or violence. [37]

The Need for Inter-Faiths Mutual Respect in Africa

In Africa generally, there are two major agents handling inter-faiths conflicts viz: religious organizations and security organization. For example, the first one consists of Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (Kenya), whose members include: Christians Association, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the Hindu Council; Christians and Muslim Relations (in Malawi). In Nigeria such organizations include: the Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC), The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Project for Christians and Muslims in Africa (PROCUMURA) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The NIREC which is co-chaired by two eminent Nigerians: the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, and the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Dr. John Onaiyekan, was established in 1999 as a non-governmental organization to serve as platform for high level dialogue between the leaders of Christians and Muslims

[37] Akpenpun Dzurgba, *God and Caesar: A Study in the Sociology of Religion.* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, Ltd. 2000), 16-7.

and to promote the inculcation of Muslim and Christian morals, ethical and cultural values for the re-birth and rebuilding of a better society.[38] According to Ayantayo,

> The CAN was founded in 1976 to among other objectives promotes understanding, peace, and unity among the various people and strata of society in Nigeria, through the propagation of the gospel and acts as a liaison committee, by means of which its member churches can consult together and when necessary, make common statements and take common actions for the common good. The NSCIA is the umbrella to all Islamic organization in Nigeria and oversees all Islamic affairs. Of interest among this is, calling to order Muslims whenever there were inter-religious conflicts between them and religious practitioners of other faiths. The PROCUMURA is an international organization with branches in many countries especially where religious conflicts are very common. Through the organization, the present attitudes between Muslims and Christians are reshaped to achieve inter-religious understanding and mutual respect for the sake of the construction of a harmonious society. The second agent handling inter-religious crisis is the security organization. This comprises the Police, the Army, Civil Defense Officers and Intelligent Security Officers popularly called SS in Nigeria. They are national bodies with members spread over local, state and national territories in Nigeria.[39]

Religious dialogue promotes peace. The aim of engaging people of other faiths in dialogue is to forge peace and mutual respect which people need. Muslims, Christians and Traditionalist want peace and equally preach it. Thus, all hands must be on deck for peace to reign supreme in Nigeria. Most religions share common concerns that call for dialogue; the common concerns are human development, social justice, equality, peace, and basic necessity of life. Awokoya asserts, "Religious Dialogue will help to prevent values from degenerating: all religions, particularly Islam and Christianity uphold high moral standards as

[38] Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo, "An Examination of the Handling Styles of Preventing, Managing and Resolving Inter-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria" *UMCATC Ilorin Journal of Theological Studies. Vol. 8 October, 2*011: 7-8.

[39] Ayantayo, "An Examination of the Handling Styles…," 18

fundamentals of true spirituality; adherent of these faiths can achieve great strides together if they are all united in condemning social and moral vices in Nigeria."[40]

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the definitions given to Inter-Faith Dialogue, one can deduce its applicability in solving different kinds of conflicts and violence among the citizens since: Religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs and draw them together in common goal of life. This goal may be ''life'' in the most literal sense since religions are the earliest protective systems people know that enable them to have children and raise them to adulthood. Religion therefore, bind people together and supply the means through which their lives can be lived with truth and purpose.[41] Onah posits,

> For us in Nigeria, there is an added reason why Christians and Muslims should study each other's religion. The adherents of the two religions live side by side and interact in various spheres of Nigeria life. To interact well, there is a need for a deep understanding of each other's religion and the right attitude of accommodating different point of view. Above all, it will enable each religious group to have a correct image of the other and to understand that Christians and Muslims can be friends and while respecting each other's religion, live peacefully in Nigeria.[42]

This is the only realistic stance to adopt in Nigeria in the twenty-first century. It is unrealistic for either the Muslims or the Christians to thinks that they can convert all Nigerians to their faith. Nigeria, by divine providence is a multi-religious country and the Nigeria 1999 constitution ensure religious freedom. It is hoped that, all Nigerians will accept this position and begin to respect one another, despite our obvious religio-cultural and historical differences.[43] Therefore; the need for peace towards religious mutual respect in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The writer recommends the following ways to handle Inter-Faith Dialogue (conflict) in Nigeria and Africa in general:

1. Make learning of peace culture and education mandatory.

[40] S.O.D. Awokoya, "Inter Religious Dialogue as a Tool for Sustaining Peace and Unity in Nigeria," 51.

[41] Yisa Segun Zubairu, & Tenin Victoria Audu. "Inter-Religious Harmony: A Panacea for Good Governance in Nigeria" *KWASU Journal of Religious Studies Volume 2, No. 1,* 2018: 90-1.

[42] Augustine Odey Onah, "Utilization of Christianity and Islam for Unity in Nigeria" *Issues in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria. Edited by M.T. Yahya.* Jos: Nigeria Association for the Study of Religion (NASR), 2006: 92.

[43] Onah, "Utilization of Christianity and Islam for Unity in Nigeria," 93.

2. Design and execute policies geared towards prevention, management and conflict resolution at all levels of government and in primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions.
3. Train and deploy "Peace Ambassadors" from religious groups and send them out as change agents to all nooks and crannies of the country.
4. Encourage Religious leaders to acquire skills in consensus to building effective, communication reconciliation and reintegration.
5. Engage in capacity building for religious organizations to enable them embark on peace and confidence building measures through constant inter faith dialogues.
6. Grant compensation to victims of religious disturbances to mitigate the effects of human and material losses caused by the unwholesome activities of a few misguided elements.
7. Institute clear cut sanctions against violators of inter religious codes in the general society.