



e-ISSN: 2645-9132

Cilt | Volume 8 • Sayı | Number 2

Aralık 2025 | December 2025

# The Salafî Notion of al-Walâ' wa-l- Barâ' (Loyalty and Disavowal) and its Implications on Interfaith Dialogue in Nigeria

*Selefîlerin el-Velâ' ve'l-Berâ' (Dostluk ve Düşmanlık) Kavramı ve  
Nijerya'daki Dinlerarası Diyalog Üzerindeki Etkileri*

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## Makale Bilgisi | Article Information

Makale Türü | Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

Geliş Tarihi | Received: 31.03.2025

Kabul Tarihi | Accepted: 18.10.2025

Yayın Tarihi | Published: 31.12.2025

## Atıf | Cite As

Shitu, Mujahid Hamza. "The Salafî Notion of al-Walâ' wa-l- Barâ' (Loyalty and Disavowal) and its Implications on Interfaith Dialogue in Nigeria". *ULUM Dinî Tetkikler Dergisi* 8/2 (2025), 139-172. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54659/ulum.1668525>

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**Etik Bildirim:** ulumdergisi@gmail.com

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

**Finansman:** Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

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*Review: Single anonymized - Two internal (Editorial board members) and Double anonymized - Two external double-blind peer review. It was confirmed that it did not contain plagiarism by similarity scanning (Turnitin).*

*Ethics Committee Statement: This study did not use any data that required an ethics committee statement.*

*Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and that all studies used are stated in the bibliography.*

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*Conflicts of Interest: The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.*

*Grant Support: The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding to support this research.*

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# The Salafī Notion of *al-Walā' wa-l- Barā'* (Loyalty and Disavowal) and its Implications on Interfaith Dialogue in Nigeria

*Mujahid Hamza Shitu\**

## Abstract

The Wahhābī/Salafī outreaches in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about a new dimension to Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria. Researchers who studied the phenomenon, seldom make in-depth examination of this characteristic, nonetheless, writers ascribed fundamentalism to the Izala Movement which represents the Wahhābī ideology. It is however, noteworthy that the Salafī doctrinal framework was not well articulated in Nigeria at that time to influence interreligious crisis, though it instigated intra-Muslim conflicts, since its primary aim is to purify Islam from within. The return of hundreds of Nigerian scholars from Middle Eastern universities, and more specifically from the Islamic University of Medina, popularised heated debates about the Salafī *manhaj* (methodology). One of the notions that is generating controversies is inter-faith dialogue with the Christian co-citizens of Nigeria. Many have branded participation in the encounters as *kufir* (disbelief) and have castigated Muslim dialoguers as promoters of a new religion. The bottom line is that it negates *al-Walā' wa-l- Barā'*. This research analyses the countering arguments of the Muslim exponents and opponents of inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria who based their opposition on the Salafī principle, and its implications on harmonious coexistence among Nigerians irrespective of religious affinity.

Keywords: Islamic Sects, Salafism, Inter-Faith Dialogue, Nigeria, *al-Walā' wa-l- Barā'*, Muslim-Christian Relations.

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## Selefilerin el-Velâ' ve'l-Berâ' (Dostluk ve Düşmanlık) Kavramı ve Nijerya'daki Dinlerarası Diyalog Üzerindeki Etkileri

### Özet

20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısındaki Vehhâbî/Selefi faaliyetleri, Nijerya'daki Müslüman-Hristiyan ilişkilerine yeni bir boyut getirmiştir. Bu olguyu çalışan araştırmacılar bu özelliği nadiren derinlemesine incelemiş olsalar da, literatürdeki yazarlar Vahhâbî ideolojisini temsil alan İzala Hareketi'ne köktendincilik (fundamentalizm) atfetmiştir. Ancak, Selefi doktrinal çerçevesinin o dönemde Nijerya'da dinler arası krizleri etkileyecek ölçüde belirginleşmediğini; birincil amacı İslam'ı içeriden arındırmak olduğu için daha çok Müslümanlar arası çatışmaları tetiklediğini belirtmek gerekir. Yüzlerce Nijeryalı alimin Orta Doğu'daki üniversitelerden, özellikle de Medine İslam Üniversitesi'nden mezun olup dönmesi, Selefi metodolojisi hakkındaki ateşli tartışmaları yaygınlaştırmıştır. Tartışma yaratan konulardan biri de Nijeryalı Hristiyan yurttaşlarla yürütülen dinler arası diyalogdur. Pek çok Selefi, bu tür diyalog faaliyetlerine katılımı küfür (inançsızlık) olarak nitelendirmiş ve diyalogu savunan Müslümanları yeni bir dinin destekçileri olmakla itham etmiştir. Bu karşıtlığın temelinde, diyalogun el-Velâ' ve'l-Berâ' ilkesini ihlal ettiği düşüncesi yatmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, Nijerya'da dinler arası diyalogu savunan ve buna karşı çıkan Müslümanların, birbirlerine olan karşıtlıklarını söz konusu Selefi ilkesine dayandıran argümanlarını ve bu durumun dini aidiyetleri ne olursa olsun Nijeryalılar arasında uyumlu bir şekilde bir arada yaşama üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam Mezhepleri, Selefilik, Dinlerarası Diyalog, Nijerya, el-Velâ' ve'l-Berâ', Müslüman-Hristiyan İlişkileri.

## Introduction

Nigerians are very religious people, their religiosity creeps into all facets of their lives. Rivalry and competition to dominate economy and politics of the state is a major characteristic of the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The atmosphere is characterised by suppressed animosity that ignites the flame of violence at slightest occasions over socio-political issues. Religion, in many instances, is manipulated by seekers of political and economic gains to win support or discredit opponents. This is rooted in Nigeria's composition of large Muslim and Christian enthusiasts. The Christians often claim that the Muslims have the agenda to Islamize Nigeria, which often leads to bitter debates.

Islam historically became established in the geographical entity that is now known as Nigeria in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Borno.<sup>1</sup> in Hausaland in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>2</sup> and in Yorubaland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Whereas, Christianity began to gain root in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Though, there had been some unsuccessful efforts to introduce Christianity in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Benin.<sup>5</sup> The primary aim of the Christian missions that evangelized Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to combat Islam, which they saw as an obstacle to their endeavour. They fixed their eyes on the Sokoto Caliphate, as the battleground of their offensive against Islam. <sup>6</sup> Muslims resisted the onslaught of the missionaries in different parts of Nigeria which worked hand in hand with British colonialism. The saddling of the missionaries with the provision of modern Western education by the colonialists, created abhorrence for such type of education among many Muslims, because it was used for converting Muslim children to Christianity. The zealous missionaries used different tactics to combat Islam which included public debates in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, learning of Arabic, distorted translation of the Qur'an and the production of offensive specialised literatures, especially by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), this trend among all Christian denominations continued up to date.<sup>7</sup>

- 1 Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam* (London: Edward Arnold Publisher, 1982), 67; Abdur-Rahman I. Doi, *Islam in Nigeria* (Zaria: Gaskiya Cooperation, 1984), 59.
- 2 Doi, *Islam in Nigeria*, 19; Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*, 60.
- 3 Doi, *Islam in Nigeria*, 109.
- 4 J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of New Elites* (London: Longman, 1965), 8.
- 5 Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983) 36-38.
- 6 E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842- 1914* (London: Longman, 1966), 103.
- 7 Mujahid Hamza Shitu, "A Review of the Activities of Christian Missionary, Clergy 'Experts' and Writers on Islam in Nigeria", *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 2/3 (September, 2014), 25- 29.

Efforts were made by the Catholic Church to domesticate the Second Vatican Council's document, the *Nostra Aetate*, in the 1960s and 1970s post-independent Nigeria, and therefore, initiated some dialogical encounters with some Muslims and protestant clergies. The Protestant churches launched the Islam in Africa Project in 1959, which now has its headquarters in Kenya, with the name Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA).<sup>8</sup> Other Christian denominations also organised dialogical meetings with some Muslim intellectuals, mostly from southern Nigeria. All these engagements are based on the principles of the protagonist churches.

Muslim individuals and groups have also become advocates of dialogue due to the pluralistic nature of Nigeria and because of the unfortunate interreligious conflicts that have continuously ravaged the country. Imam Nurayn Ashafa and Pastor James Wuyep co-founded the interfaith Mediation Centre for the Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Kaduna, Nigeria. The "Abrahamic Mission" programme of the Habibiyyah Islamic Society which features Fridays and Sundays on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) channel and being anchored by Imam Fu'ad Adeyemi is noteworthy in this regard. Da'wah Institute of Nigeria under Nurudeen Lemu is a Muslim institute that has been promoting dialogue with non-Muslims for decades. Imam Muhammad Nuru Khalid identifies with Salafism, and is actively participating and promoting dialogical engagement with Christian leaders in Abuja. This act has earned him damning condemnations from the popular Salafi preachers in northern Nigeria. When he fell into controversy over his criticism of government which led to his sacking as the imam of Apo Legislators' Quarters' Central Mosque on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 2022, some followers of Salafism began to post on various platforms of social media what a late popular Salafi preacher, Muhammad Auwal Adam, known as Albani Zaria (1960- 2014) said about inter-faith dialogue and his criticism of Muslim participants such as Nuru Khalid, Nurudeen Lemu, Sani Isa and the Sultan of Sokoto.

Many other Salafi preachers followed suit in criticising the Muslim participants in inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria and branded them as destroyers of Islam. Thus, promoting stereotyping of Muslim clerics who engage in dialogue, basing their position on rulings of Saudi Arabian Permanent Committee for Research and Fatwa<sup>9</sup> and the writings of some Middle Eastern Salafi scholars. Other preachers, including some Salafis, defended the permissibility

8 Shitu, "A Review of the Activities", 28.

9 Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Uthmān al-Qāḍī attached two of such Fatwas to his work. See Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb bayn al-adyān: dirāsa naqdiyya fi daw al-'aqīda al-Islāmiyya* (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad Su'ūd, Qism al-'Aqīdawa-l- Madhāhib al-Mu'āṣira, PhD Dissertation, 1421 AH.), 1661- 1673.

of inter-faith dialogue under Islamic law. The Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN), a department of Islamic Education Trust (IET) under Lemu, produced a manual to clarify misconceptions about relating peacefully with peoples of other faiths based on the understanding of *al-walâ' wa-l- barâ'*.<sup>10</sup> The authors sought credence from various scholars of Muslim denominations, including some Salafis on the contents of the work. This article specifically looks at the trajectory of the opposing arguments strictly from the Salafi doctrinal point of view and its implication on Nigeria's peace and harmony. The research answers the questions on how much influence does the notion of *al-walâ' wa-l- barâ'* has on the views of Salafis regarding inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria, does participation in dialogue nullify the faith of the partaker as expressed by some Nigerian Salafis and is dialogue synonymous with syncretism? This research is qualitative in nature and draws on written works and video recordings of Salafi preachers in Nigeria. These sources are based on existing data. The approach adopted in this article is therefore broadly a content/textual analysis of the texts and videos addressing the controversies discussed in the article. This method describes and interprets the characteristics embedded in visual messages and texts. Specifically, it takes a conversational analysis approach by analysing spoken interactions and making inferences about them. This method is employed for microanalytic study of speeches and events.<sup>11</sup> The analysis process includes content transcription of the videos that pertained to the subject matter and a detailed comparative analysis of them.

## **1. Conceptual and Historical Underpinnings: Inter-faith Dialogue, Salafism and al-Walâ' wa-l- Barâ'**

### **1.1. Conceptualisation of Inter-faith Dialogue from Diverse Perspectives and in the Muslim Thought**

The term dialogue literally comprises two words, the Greek prefix '*dia*' which means across and the word *logos*, discussion. Thus, it literally means discussion across. It does not restrict the conversation to two parties, but encompasses two or more parties. This is due to the fact that the prefix '*dia*' in Greek is different from the Latin '*dia*' which signifies duality.<sup>12</sup> However,

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10 Da'wah Institute (DIN), *Muslim Relations with Christians, Jews, and others* (Minna: Islamic Education Trust, Nigeria, 2022).

11 For information on this method, see Esa Lehtinen, "Conversation analysis" *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg- Steven Engler (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 122.

12 Mujahid Hamza Shitu, "An Appraisal of 'Dialogue of the Truth' and Inter-Religious Dialogue in Nigeria: A Muslim View-Point", *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture (AJRPC)* 1/1 (2020), 12.

Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī used the term “Trialogue” for the title of the work he edited, to signify a conversation between three faiths, he calls it *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*.<sup>13</sup> Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli also used the same term in his keynote address of the conference that led to the compilation of the same work.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Joergen S. Nelson counts it as absurd to use the term ‘trialogue’ to denote conversation between three parties, because the prefix ‘*dia*’ in dialogue is of Greek and not of Latin origin.<sup>15</sup>

The Catholic Church’s promotion of inter-faith dialogue is the outcome of the second Vatican Council (1962- 65), it brought in a change in the position of the Church on salvation of non-Christians or salvation outside the Church. It has been the position of the Church over centuries that no salvation outside the Church. The document of the Second Vatican Council, the *Nosra Aetate*, hints that there is indeed salvation outside the Church, though, still restricted through Christ.<sup>16</sup> In *Nosra Aetate*, the Church describes its intention to engage in dialogue with followers of other religions, collaborating with them to promote spiritual, moral and cultural values found in diverse faiths. This dialogue is to be conducted with love and prudence, bearing witness to the Christian faith. Specifically, to the Muslims, the Synod acknowledged the status of Christ and Mary in Islam along with its virtues of submission to God through prayers, fasting and charity. The document thus, calls for eschewing past hostilities and to collaborate for the “benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the World Council of Churches (formed 1948), produced its *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Faiths* in 1979, after it had formed a sub unit on dialogue in 1971 and the unit has collaborated with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.<sup>18</sup> The WCC conference of 1967 at Sri Lanka was a great milestone in the Council’s interest in inter-faith engagements. The *Nosra Aetate* was part of the preparative documents for

13 Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī ed., *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

14 Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, “The Catholic Church and the Jewish and the Muslim Faiths: Trialogue of the Three Abrahamic Faiths” *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, ed. Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), 1.

15 Joegen S. Nielson, “Religious Dialogue and Academy: A Contradiction?” *The Interface between Research and Dialogue: Christian- Muslim Relations in Africa*, ed. Klaus Hock (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 165.

16 Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christians: Nosra Aetate, Holy See* (Access Date 27 November 2020).

17 Pope Paul VI, *Declaration*.

18 World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, “Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations”, *World Council of Churches* (Access Date 23 October 2022).

the meeting.<sup>19</sup> The place of evangelism became an issue of controversy, if the Church embraces dialogue in its real meaning which is devoid of evangelistic motives. A document of the WCC describes dialogue basically as encounter between people of diverse faith traditions, which does not entail giving up one's conviction, or to seek to validate one's belief system. The encounter is expected to be in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The dialoguer must be well versed and rooted in his own tradition. Shunning historical prejudices and enmity toward others is essential for creating new possibilities to work together for the common good of humanity.<sup>20</sup>

The WCC in its brochure tries to clarify a widely circulated misconception about its usage of the term "interfaith dialogue" and interreligious dialogue, and that it designates the former for dialogue with non-Christian religious ideologies, and the latter for ecumenism among Christian denominations.<sup>21</sup> The document affirms that both terms are used in the same contexts to mean Christian engagements with non-Christian religions.<sup>22</sup> Another point raised in the brochure is that if anything is to be taken as a difference, it is the peculiar English implication of how interfaith is spelled. The use of interfaith without spacing or hyphen tends to emphasise similarity and thus, dubbed by some as syncretism.<sup>23</sup> Most Muslim critics of the whole notion also share this sentiment, they describe it as *'da'wat al-taqrīb bayn al-adyān'* (a call to rapprochement of religions).<sup>24</sup> The WCC document therefore, gives preference to the hyphenated variations, as they signify inter-religious engagements which take into cognisance the differences between them.<sup>25</sup> The term inter-faith is also considered as more inclusive than interreligious, because it encompasses people with no religious identifications like humanists and secularists, and it is given acceptance in the political and social circles.<sup>26</sup>

To sum-up the world Christian bodies' conceptualisation of interfaith dialogue, the four typologies of dialogue by the Pontifical Council

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19 World Council of Churches (WCC)- the Wm. Eerdmans, "Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement Article on Interfaith Dialogue", *World Council of Churches* (Access Date 23 October 2022).

20 WCC and the Wm. Eerdmans, "Dictionary".

21 World Council of Churches (WCC), *Called to Dialogue Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide* (PDF: Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2016), 5.

22 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, 10.

23 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, 11.

24 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*.

25 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, 11.

26 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, 11.

for Interreligious Dialogue<sup>27</sup> is essential and worth mentioning here. The WCC also gave credence to it. <sup>28</sup>It is called “traditional four-fold model” of interreligious dialogue. The first is dialogue of life, which means interaction of people of different religious persuasions in all facets of life. They share happiness and situations of grief together. The second is dialogue of action, it is a situation in which Christians collaborate with others to agitate for a common course such as freedom, human right and peace. The third is dialogue of theological exchange, it occurs when experts seek to enrich each other on their diverse theological doctrines to correct misconceptions and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values and points of view. The fourth form of dialogue is that of religious experience, this is viewed by many as problematic, as it is seen as compromising one’s religious conviction by participating in the spiritual traditions of the other faith. There are instances of this whereby the Pope invited people of other faiths to a joint prayer with Christians. On the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1986, Pope John Paul II invited Christian denominations, and world religions to Assisi to pray for peace.<sup>29</sup> The Nigerian Shiites known as Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) have made it an annual tradition to attend Christmas services at different evangelical churches in northern Nigeria.

Muslim thinkers generally opposed to Christian use of dialogue solely for evangelistic purposes or subtle way for it. Nonetheless, Muslims have called for dialogue with adherents of Christianity and Judaism since the rise of Islam, though the encounters were mostly apologetic. It started during the period of Prophet Muhammad. An example is the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra’s delegation of sixty Christians of Najrān who visited Medina for theological discussion with the Prophet.<sup>30</sup> During the Umayyad reign, there were series of apologetic debates with John of Damascus (676- 749) and Theodore Abū Qurra (740-825). Also, during the Abbasid period, Nestorian Catholicus Timothy I in the year 782 held lengthy debates with Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775- 785). This was the situation during the Abbasid age, and it continued for centuries.<sup>31</sup>

In the modern time, there are ambiguities in the conception of inter-faith dialogue by the Salafis, especially scholars like Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh Abū Zayd

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27 Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”, *Holy See* (Access Date 23 October 2022).

28 World Council of Churches (WCC), “Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies”, *World Council of Churches*, (Access Date 23 October 2022).

29 Lillian J. Sison, “The Church in Dialogue: from ‘Nostra Aetate’ to ‘Fratelli Tutti’” *Faithful Peace: Why the Journey to Build Resilience is multi-Religious* 1 (2022), 17.

30 See Ismail Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 1/452-455.

31 William Montgomery Watt, *Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1973), 184.

(d. 2008) and Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qāḍī. They equated different terms with dialogue which include, syncretism (*al-khalaṭ bayn al-adyān*,<sup>32</sup> or *al-indimāj*),<sup>33</sup> they do not mince words referring to it as the outcome of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965.<sup>34</sup> Abū Zayd mentions the World Day of Prayer for peace which was called to by Pope John Paul II on the 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1986,<sup>35</sup> as an event that exemplifies what he refers to as *al-khalaṭ*. Other terminologies used also include *da'wat ilā taqrīb bayn al-adyān* (A call to bringing religions close), *taqarrub bayn al-Adyān* (rapprochement between religions), *ikhā al-dīnī* (Religious brotherliness), *waḥdat al-adyān* (unity of religions), *tawḥīd al-adyān* (unification of religions), *al-Milla al-Ibrāhimiyya* (Abrahamic religion), *ta'ayush bayn al-adyān* (religious coexistence), among other terminologies<sup>36</sup> including dialogue<sup>37</sup> among religions. Al-Qāḍī on the other hand, defines *taqrīb bayn al-adyān* as international, local and territorial efforts to create connection and relations between diverse faiths and religions, it is characterised by acknowledgement of the other, ignoring rightness and wrongness by making effort to find common grounds, as well as recognition and respect for the believe system of the other. Its principles include call to recognition of the other as one wants to be recognized, discarding discussions about controversial religious doctrines, discarding and forgetting the hostile and bitter experiences of the past, emphasizing on areas of commonalities and dismissal of factors that lead to differences and disunity. It also entails collaboration for the achievement of shared values, as well as exchange of congratulatory messages and visits during religious festivals.<sup>38</sup>

Another dimension of *taqrīb* according to al-Qāḍī is *al-ḥiwār bayn al-adyān*, (inter-faith or interreligious dialogue), which has come to be the most acceptable among its advocates.<sup>39</sup> The Arabic equivalent of dialogue is *al-ḥiwār*, which *Lisān al-Arab* dictionary describes as having *ḥawr* as its article, meaning *mujāwaba* replying and repeating things in a discussion.<sup>40</sup> It is in harmony with it is the Qur'anic usage of the term and equating it

32 Bakr b. 'Abd Allāh Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li-naẓariyyat al-khalaṭ bayna dīn al-Islām wa-ghayrihi min al-adyān* (Riyadh: al-Ri'āsa al-'Āmma li-al-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyya wa-al-Ifṭā', 2011).

33 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*, 335.

34 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*; Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li-naẓariyyat al-khalaṭ*, 22.

35 Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li-naẓariyyat al-khalaṭ*, 24.

36 Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li-naẓariyyat al-khalaṭ*, 22- 25.

37 Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li-naẓariyyat al-khalaṭ*, 32.

38 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*, 335.

39 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*, 348.

40 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrīb*, 347; cf. Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-Arab*, ed. Amīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Waḥhāb- Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-'Ubayḍī (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1996), 3/383- 384.

with *mujādala* (debate) in al-Mujādila 58/1. Other uses of the term in the Quran can be seen in verses such as al-Kahf 18/34; 37. al-Hilālī and Khān translated it as mutual talk.<sup>41</sup> al-Qāḍī explains that the literal meaning agrees with its technical sense. It means deliberation between two parties or more and a revision of ideas with the sole aim of achieving agreement and a united point of view.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.2. Salafism

Salafism<sup>43</sup> as a movement in the present context holds that it alone embodies the practices and dogma of the early righteous generation of the Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Salafism in the real context is often equated with Wahhābism, they are advocates of elimination of innovations in religious practices and strict adherence to the model of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>45</sup> The Salafis are united by a common creed, which entails principles and methodology of putting religious beliefs into practice to address contemporary problems. The movement promotes *tawhīd* (monotheism) and ardently rejects human reason, logic and desire. The movement does not accommodate diversity in religious matters, thus, there is only one legitimate interpretation of religious scripture. It does not give room for interpretative difference. In line with this, Islamic pluralism does not exist.<sup>46</sup> Though Salafism is not monolithic in nature it has more than one coherent understanding,<sup>47</sup> what unites Salafism is emphasis on *tawhīd*, rejection of human desire, intellect and other elements of creed.<sup>48</sup> Salafis count themselves as the *firqa al-nājiya* (the saved group) which follows the prophetic model as understood by the *Ṣaḥāba* (companions of the Prophet).<sup>49</sup> Joas Wagemakers describes Salafism as an outgrowth of Wahhābism, it aims

41 *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Muḥammad Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī - Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for Printing of the Holy Qur'an, n.d.), 390.

42 al-Qāḍī, *Da'wat al-taqrib*, 348.

43 A movement that initially called itself Salafi in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was entirely different from the current Salafism. The advocates of Salafism at that time were Jamāl al-dīn al-Afghānī, his student, Muḥammad 'Abduh and the latter's student Rashīd Riḍā. This group is a contrast of modern Salafism, because the group counts human reason as superior to the scripture, thus, they are sometimes rationalists and secularists. See Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 41-44; cf. Muḥammad al-Baḥī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-ḥadīth wa ṣilatubū bi al-isti'mār al-Gharbi* (Cairo: Maktabatu Wahba, 1981), 175-177.

44 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 5-11.

45 Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism* 29 (2006), 207.

46 Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", 207.

47 Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 2-3.

48 Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", 214.

49 Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", 209.

at cleansing evil innovations that are entailed in the dogma (*‘aḳīda*) and the methodology (*manhaj*) which is the method of operationalizing the sacred texts in worship and mundane activities.<sup>50</sup>

Salafism rejects speculative theology and metaphorical interpretation of God's attributes; thus, literal meanings take preference without anthropomorphism. Philosophy is a no-go area in Salafism. The *aḥādīth* (Prophetic traditions) are given preference after the Qur'an as the only source of law.<sup>51</sup> Alexander Thurston made some vital clarifications on the gulf between Salafism and Wahhābism which are often counted by many as one, especially in West Africa, Salafism rejects adherence to legal schools (*madhbāhib*), while Wahhābis of Saudi Arabia are followers of the Ḥanbalite school of law though they share the same creed with Salafism.<sup>52</sup>

Quintan Wiktorowicz, an expert on Salafism, noted that Salafis' interpretation of politics led to their classification into three categories, namely one, the quietists or purists, they focus on peaceful propagation of the Salafi thoughts through education, purification and dissemination. They do not venture into politics, they see it as a distraction. Two, the politicians who are also non-violent, but they are activists who seek for application of Salafi ideals in the political arena. Thus, they comment on political issues to ensure social justice and the implementation of the sharia. Three, the jihadis who employ violence with the aim of bring about a revolution that will bring about a Salafi social order and the imposition of its creed.<sup>53</sup> In spite of these differences, they share the same creed. Thurston argues that this classification is being challenged by more recent scholarship, and giving distinction to the groups through engagement in politics and violence may not stand.<sup>54</sup> Lauziere concentrated on two major subcategories of Salafism, the quietist scholarly (*al-Salafiyya al-‘Ilmiyya*) and the jihadist Salafism (*al-Salafiyya al-Jihādīyya*).<sup>55</sup> Since this categorisation is done by outsiders, the Salafis do not accept them, and they hold that there is only one Salafism.

Salafism promotes isolationism, thus, interaction with non-Muslims and heterodox Muslims is seen as a means of allowing non-believers and heretics to infect Muslims. Therefore, purist Salafis do not subscribe to inter-faith dialogue

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50 Joas Wagemakers, "Framing the "Threat to Islam": *al-Wala' wa al-Bara'* in Salafi Discus", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30/4 (2008), 3.

51 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 6.

52 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 7.

53 Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", 208; cf. Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 10.

54 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 10.

55 Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 9.

and often want to separate themselves from the non-Muslims. They encourage their followers to leave non-Muslim countries. The policy of isolation is also applied to non-Salafi Muslims to avoid their corrupting tendencies. This notion led some Salafis in Europe and America to develop enclave communities for its adherents,<sup>56</sup> to boycott the influences of the larger Western society on its adherents. This brings us to the notion of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'*.

### 1.3. al-Walā' wa-l- Barā' (Loyalty and Disavowal)

In his work, *Salafism in America*, Alexander Meleagrou- Hitchens, reviewed the views of the American born Salafi activist, Ali al-Tamimi, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2005. His view particularly on inter-faith dialogue and the notion of loyalty and disavowal were examined. He holds that the West used it call to inter-faith dialogue to strip Muslims of their belief and the principle of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'*.<sup>57</sup> Another American Salafi, Ahmad Musa Jibril, counted inter-faith dialogue as a principle of disbelief, and that it negates the principle of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* which requires the love of Muslims and disavowal of disbelievers.<sup>58</sup>

The phrase *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* was said to be used together in this format for the first time by the Saudi Arabian Scholar, Muhammad b. Sa'īd al-Qaḥṭānī (b. 1956) in his MA dissertation which he completed at Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca, in 1401A.H. /1980.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the expression can be traced to the precursors of Salafism like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 A.H./ 1328 C.E). The purpose of his *Iqtiḍā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li mukhālafati aṣḥāb al-jahīm* (the necessity of adhering to the straight path, for the purpose of dissenting from the companions of hellfire), is to identify dissimilarities between the Muslims and non-Muslims, and to prevent Muslims from imitating the disbelievers in their festivities, and to explain what is entailed in the sharia about dissociation from the people of scripture (i.e. Christians and Jews) and the barbarians. This act is counted by him as a significant principle of the sharia.<sup>60</sup> The book shows the familiarity of Ibn Taymiyya with the phenomenon. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206 A.H./ 1792 C.E.), whom the Wahhābi school

56 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Salafism in America: History, Evolution, Radicalization* (The George Washington University, 2018), 26; 50- 54.

57 Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Salafism in America*, 72.

58 Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Salafism in America*, 115.

59 Muhammad bin Sa'īd al-Qaḥṭānī, *al- Walā' wa-l- barā' fī al-Islām* (Cairo: al-Faṭḥ li-l- Fīlām al-'Arabī, 1417 A.H), 4; cf. Mohamed Bin Ali, *The Islamic Doctrine of Al-Walā' wal Barā'* (Loyalty and Disavowal) in *Modern Salafism* (Exeter: University of Exeter, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, PhD Dissertation, 2012), 208.

60 Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm b. 'Abd al-Salām Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtiḍā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li mukhālafati aṣḥābi-l- jahīm* (Riyadh: Dār Ishbīliyyā, 2. Edition, 1998), 60-61.

is attributed to, also taught the same view. This could be seen in the works of his followers and progenies. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhâb's grandson, Sulaymân b. 'Abd Allâh (1200- 1233 A.H.) wrote on the phenomenon in his *al-Dalâ'ül fi Hukm Muwâlât ahl al-Isbrâk*<sup>61</sup> (evidences of law concerning befriending the polytheists). The work is about adducing legal evidence to his claim of anathematising any Muslim who claims alliance with non-Muslims, even if he dislikes their religion, and only relates with them out of fear of being harmed by them or to allow peace reign.<sup>62</sup> The author also has other works with similar teachings, such as *Fatyâ fi Hukm al-Safar ilâ Bilâd al-Shirk* (Verdicts about the position of the law concerning travelling to the lands of polytheism) he delved on the permissibility or otherwise of going to the land of non-Muslims for commercial activities, he rules on the acceptability of that as far as a Muslim will be able to openly express his religion and will not befriend the non-believers.<sup>63</sup> He opines that it is not permissible for a Muslim to visit any land which is not possible to outwardly show the symbols of Islam. In another work, *Awthaq 'Urâ al-Îmân* (the most trustworthy hand-hold of faith), he addresses the question of a Muslim who is in the camp or land of the enemies and is trying to prevent the Muslim attacks against them. He fervently condemns such act.<sup>64</sup>

Thurston describes Hamd b. 'Atîq (d 1301 A.H./1883 C.E.) as the developer of the principle of *al-walâ' wa-l- barâ'*,<sup>65</sup> this is reference to 'Atîq's work, *Sabîl al- najât wa-l- fikâk min muwâlât al-murtaddîn wa ahl al-isbrâk* (the way to salvation and emancipation against befriending apostates and the polytheist). The author's polemics is against the Ottomans, whom he referred to as apostates.<sup>66</sup> The work is about warning believers against allaying with non-Muslims, and that it may be counted as apostasy and disbelief for whosoever engages in that.<sup>67</sup> 'Atîq relied much on the above-mentioned work of Ibn Taymiyya.

In the Salafî thought, *al-walâ' wa-l- barâ'* is counted as a pillar of dogma, a prerequisite of faith and a litmus test that separates a true Muslim from

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61 Sulaymân b. 'Abd Allâh b. 'Abd al-Wahhâb. *Awthaq al-'Urâ al-Îmân wa al-Dalâ'ül fi Hukm Muwâlât ahl al-Isbrâk wa Fatyâ fi Hukm al-Safar ilâ Bilâd al-Shirk* (PDF: Riyadh: Dâr al-Qâsim, 2002), 69, Fn. 168.

62 'Abd al-Wahhâb. *Awthaq al-'Urâ*, 5- 21.

63 'Abd al-Wahhâb. *Awthaq al-'Urâ*, 25

64 'Abd al-Wahhâb. *Awthaq al-'Urâ*, 33- 40.

65 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 211.

66 Hamad bin 'Alî bin Muḥammad bin 'Atîq. *Sabîl al-naât wa-I-fikâk* (PDF: Riyadh, np, 1415 A.H.), 35; 24-30.

67 'Atîq. *Sabîl al-najât wa-I-fikâk*, 31-46.

others.<sup>68</sup> The Qur'anic verses quoted for buttressing the notion include al-Mā'idā 5/51, where Allah warns believers against taking Jews and Christians as friends and helpers, and that anyone that does so has become like them. In al-Mumtaḥana 60/1 Allah warns believers not to befriend His enemies, while al-Mumtaḥana 60/4 gives the good example of Ibrāhīm and those with him, who disavowed their people and the false gods they are worshiping, and declared enmity and hostility against them, until they accept to believe in Allah.

The two parts of the phrase *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* are antonyms of each other. *Al-walā'* literally means love, friendship, loyalty, closeness, support and guardianship. *Al-barā'* literally means hatred, enmity, distance, disagreement and non-conformity. The technical meaning of the theory is consistent with its literal sense. It means loving Allah, His Messenger, the religion of Islam and the Muslims, while simultaneously abhorring and displaying enmity towards false gods, disbelief and the disbelievers.<sup>69</sup>

Wagemakers, in accordance with the thesis of his article, holds that Salafis of Saudi Arabia use the term *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* to “frame a threat to Islam” and thus, warn Muslims against giving their loyalty to non-Muslims in anyway, these include participating in non-Muslim festivals such as Christmas, which is counted as an insult to Islam and belittling of Muslim’s dignity. Other actions counted as loyalty to non-Muslims include greeting them first, having pleasurable meetings with them, unnecessary visit to their country, wearing their types of clothing, bearing their names and “engaging in religious dialogue with Jews and Christians.”<sup>70</sup> Some of the Salafī ‘ulamā’ also emphasised that the doctrine of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* does not mean treating non-Muslims unjustly, it only aims at severing religious loyalty.<sup>71</sup>

Mohamed Bin Ali’s PhD research<sup>72</sup> identifies four contemporary Salafi approaches to the concept of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'*, as revealed through a comparative study of the writings of present-day Salafi thinkers of different persuasions, with special focus on four notable ones. Šālīḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān (b. 1935)<sup>73</sup> for the quietist-purists; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Khālīq (d.

68 Wagemakers, “Framing the “Threat to Islam”, 4-6.

69 Cf. al-Qaḥṭānī, *al- Walā' wa-l- Barā' fī al-Islām*, 87-92.

70 Wagemakers, “Framing the “Threat to Islam”, 5-6.

71 Wagemakers, “Framing the “Threat to Islam”, 7.

72 Ali, *The Islamic Doctrine of Al-Walā' wal Barā'*, 77-80; 30-36; 194-224.

73 Šālīḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān, *al- Walā' wa-l- Barā' fī al-Islām* (Gaza: Markaz al-Baḥṭh al-'Ilmī, Jam'iyat al-Kitāb wa Sunnah, nd).

2020)<sup>74</sup> for the *politicos*; Ayman al-Zawāhirī (d. 2022)<sup>75</sup> for the *jihadis*; and al-Qaḥṭānī,<sup>76</sup> whose work is the most comprehensive on the subject. The first dimension of the interpretative usage of the concept is its creedal approach. there is agreement among the Salafis on this level of the phenomenon, because it entails manifestation of the *shahāda*, which is loyalty to Allah and His Messenger and disavowal of false gods. It also connotes fighting religious innovations.

The second dimension is the social level, it implies portraying non-Muslims as potential enemies of the Islam and its pristine practices and culture. Enemies of Allah must be disavowed because their practices could threaten the purity of Islam. The social level of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* is the most stressed in Salafism, it forbids Muslim from befriending non-Muslims especially the Jews and Christians, and that Muslim must refrain from activities involving them such as imitating their languages, dressing, names and culture. This level of the concept also prohibits living in the lands of non-Muslims and seeking assistance from them.<sup>77</sup> This social level of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* forecloses the possibility of dialoguing, since it bars interactions, living together and promotes isolation from non-Muslims and un-Islamic societies.

The third level of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* is the political dimension, it seeks that loyalty is to be given only to Muslim rulers who adhere and rule by the sharia. Those who use secular, un-Islamic laws and pollical systems such as democracy should be disavowed. It is linked with the thought which stipulates that those Muslim leaders who do not rule by the sharia are disbelievers and should be overthrown. This leads to the fourth level of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'*: the jihadi level. It specifies that Muslim leaders who have failed to uphold the political aspects of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'*, have become apostates and should be rejected. Violence must then be launched against them in order to establish an Islamic order.

The Boko Haram of Nigeria, a Jihadist Salafi movement capitalises on *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* to anathematise, and justify attacks on Muslims who accept and align with the secular authority in Nigeria<sup>78</sup> and also promotes isolation from the corrupt society. This is not peculiar with Boko Haram, it

74 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abd al-Khālīq, *al- Walā' wa-I- Barā'* (PDF: Kuwait, 1407 AH).

75 Ayman al-Zawāhirī, *al- Walā' wa-I- Barā': Aqīda Manqūla wa Wāqī' Maḥjūd* (PDF: Iṣḍārāt Ghurfat al-Fajr, nd).

76 al-Qaḥṭānī, *al- Walā' wa-I- Barā' fī al-Islām*.

77 Ali, *The Islamic Doctrine of Al-Wāla' wal Barā'*, 77-78.

78 Mujahid Hamza Shitu, "Allegiance to Non-Islamic Government, the Question of Infidelity, and the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: An Analysis", *ULUM* 4/2 (2021), 267-8.

is the doctrine of the global Jihadist-Salafi movements, loyalty to a political system other than that of Allah, is counted as leaving Islam.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. Salafism in Nigeria and the Current Debates on Inter-faith Dialogue.

Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d. 1992) can be described as the foremost preacher against Sufism in Nigeria,<sup>80</sup> his preaching from late 1960s resulted in the formation of the Izala movement,<sup>81</sup> which was officially launched in 1978 by his student Ismāʿīl Idrīs. Izala which later factionalised into two has its ideology rooted in Salafism and Wahhābism. The movement did not have a deep knowledge of the Salafi doctrines at the beginning, this along with other leadership and organisational problems form part of the reasons for its internal dissention and breakup into the Jos and Kaduna factions.<sup>82</sup> A later movement which calls itself Salafiyya distinct from the two factions of Izala arose in the early 1990s. These are the Salafis referred to in the context of this article, though, a faction of Izala (Kaduna faction) has much affinity with Salafiyya group. All the groups nonetheless, claim affinity with Abubakar Gumi.

Thurston rightly observed that the transmission of Salafism to Nigeria can be directly linked to the Islamic University of Medina (est. 1961), just as he counts the university as instrumental in the further formation of Salafism in the world.<sup>83</sup> The focus of Thurston's book is on five persons that became leaders of Salafiyya in Kano and their proselytization activities. These are Jaʿfar Maḥmūd Ādam (d. 2007), ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAbdullah (b.1953), Bashīr ʿAliyu ʿUmar (b. 1961), Abdullah Ṣāliḥ Pakistan (b. 1953) (He is the Kano State Chairman of the Kaduna faction of Izala) and Muhammad Sani Umar Rijjiyar Lemo (b. 1970).<sup>84</sup> The third and fifth are directly related to the debates of this article. Though, Thurston acknowledged the presence of Salafis and

79 Cf. Wagemakers, "Framing the "Threat to Islam", 7.

80 Larger portion of Nigerian Muslims belong to Sufism.

81 Jamāʿatu Izālatul Bidʿa wa Iqāmat al-Sunna (JIBWIS) (Community for the removal of innovation and the establishment of tradition). For information on Izala, see Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); Ramzi Ben Amara, *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Genesis, Fragmentation and Revival* (Gottingen: Gottingen University Press, 2020). Adem Arikan's article about Salafis in Nigeria discussed the Izala movement, the study however, in some places did not accurately capture the situation in Nigeria due to sole reliance on written materials and lack of field knowledge. See Adem Arikan, "Nijerya'da Selefiye/ Salafis in Nigeria / إيريجين بيف تيفيلسلا" *Theological Academy* 1-2 (October 2015), 283-302.

82 Amara, *The Izala Movement in Nigeria*, 141- 165.

83 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 17.

84 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 17.

graduates of Islamic University of Medina in other parts of Nigeria in the 1970s, particularly in the South West, he however, holds that their activities are less significant in comparison with the activities of the people of Northern Nigeria, from whom the University began to encounter successes in recruiting students from the 1980s.<sup>85</sup> There are presently flourishing Salafi centres in Southern Nigeria, led by graduates of Medina some of whom obtained PhDs before returning to Nigeria to spread the teachings. The issue of dialogue is one of the controversial issues in the region. Despite its pluralistic nature, Salafis have continuously preach against felicitating with the Christians during Christmas or to accept their gifts.

Muhammad Awwal Adam (Albani Zaria) (1960- 2014) was a prominent disseminator of Salafism in northern Nigeria, Thurston did not lay much emphasis on his activities the way he did with the above mentioned five Kano Salafis, he however, made reference to his teachings in some passages of the book.<sup>86</sup> Not giving much concern to his thoughts forms a major lacuna in Thurston's work. Albani Zaria is the genesis of the controversy that this article addresses.

Albani Zaria was at the forefront in condemning Muslim participation in inter-faith dialogue. There are several recordings of its criticism, as negating the teachings of Islam. His lecture which sparked up debates in 2022, was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 2013. He was teaching the book of Muhyi al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Khuṭūṭ al-Arīḍa li Usus allati Qāma 'alayhā Dīn al-Shī'a al-Imāmiyya al-Itmā Ashariyya* (broad lines on the foundations which the religion of the Twelver Shia stands upon). Albani Zaria commented that:

You find some inviting people to inter-faith dialogue, such people like Nurayn Ashafa, he is a product of Yan Brother (a group that became Shiites in Nigeria), they end up joining inter-faith, others include our friend Malam Abubakar Deedat in Abuja, then Nurudeen Lemu of Niger, they are the leaders in promoting inter-faith dialogue. If you are part of such groups, America, France and Germany will support you. Two years ago, Ashafa was honoured in France and was given a lot of money.....it is America that is promoting such doctrine, that Muslims and Christians unite, a Muslim should avoid saying what provokes Christians and the Christians should do the same by avoiding what provokes Muslims.... This is also the doctrine being promoted by Malam Nura Nyanya (Nuru Khalid) who is a member of Izala.... We have to be careful and we have to say it clearly... Pastor Onayekan who is an ardent hater of Islam goes about with Nura Nyanya, Abubakar Deedat,

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85 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 88-89.

86 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 119; 128-29; 134-35.

Nurayn Ashafa and Zakzaky to attend conferences, claiming to be leaders of unity in the country. There is no such doctrine of *taqrīb* (coming close i.e. dialogue) in Islam. That disbelief should be reduced by 30% and Islam by 30% and then the adherents meet at the centre.<sup>87</sup>

He further made an allegation against the Sultan of Sokoto, who is the Supreme head of the Nigerian Muslims, that the Sultan claimed that Christians should not be criticised, and that only in the hereafter that the person on the right path would be known. He further alleges that the Sultan is in the promotion of dialogue for the financial benefits that it entails.<sup>88</sup>

It is inferable from the lecture of Albani Zaria that he is creating an impression on his listeners that all the Muslim partakers in dialogue in Nigeria, are involved for material gains only, and that it is an ideology that originated from the Western enemies of Islam, who are out to destroy Islam, that is why they provide funding for it. He holds that the process of inter-faith dialogue necessitates compromising a percentage of a partaker's faith, while the adherents of other faiths do same, this according to him enables a unification of the religions. These assertions do not accurately represent the meaning of inter-faith dialogue, even the "dialogue of religious experience" which includes attendance of the spiritual activities of the other faith, does not require forsaking one's faith or reducing the percentage of belief in it.

In another lecture, Albani Zaria referred to inter-faith dialogue as an act of disbelief that it does not exist in Islam. There is no need for a Christian to stand and tell Muslims about Christianity and a Muslim standing to tell Christians about Islam, the way it is done in the "dialogue of theological exchange". He argues that all that is needed to be known has been said about religions in the Qur'an. He argues that there is no good thing that a Jewish Rabbi will share with Muslims, the same thing applies to Christianity. He counts the whole exercise as compromising Islam. He categorically mentioned that Muslim participants in inter-faith dialogue will go to hell when they die without repentance. He holds that accepting that there is element of truth in any faith other than Islam is tantamount to going astray. This particular lecture is important because he mentions the Salafis of Saudi Arabia who allowed dialogue with the people of world living faiths, on the premise that in their own Salafism, disobedience to the political authority is not acceptable even if they erred. He declared that his own Salafism is not of such type. He noted what King Abdullah (d. 2015) of Saudi Arabia did in assembling

87 Daarul Tauheedis Salafiyah, "Hatsarin Yan Interfaith: Sheikh Albaniy Zaria (Rahimahullaah)", *YouTube* (14 February 2024), 00:00:01 – 00:03:42.

88 Daarul Tauheedis Salafiyah, "Hatsarin Yan Interfaith", 00:03:42-00:04:22.

leaders of faiths for dialogue as negating the teaching of Islam. He describes King Abdullah b. Abdulaziz as a representative of disbelief in the world, this is because inter-faith dialogue is disbelief and should be rejected.<sup>89</sup> Passing a judgement of disbelief and entrance of hell fire on Muslim dialoguers may be counted as too extreme and harsh, as they did not in any way renounce their faith.

The lectures of Albani Zaria did not generate controversy while he was alive, the controversy came up in April 2022, eight years after he was assassinated. The debates arouse due to the circulation of the clips of the lectures on the social media by the adversaries of Nuru Khalid, to dissuade people from empathising with him over his removal from office as an imam. His critics show much abhorrence for his participation in dialogue and for rallying with Christian religious leaders on social and political issues. Even Salafis who rebutted the claims of Albani Zaria on the subject, still show abhorrence to Khalid's style of participation. They also nursed some reservations about him for his intra-Muslim dialogical efforts, as he attends the gatherings of the Sufis and the Shiites, in spite of claiming to be a Salafi.

The circulation of Albani Zaria's clips led to counter reactions from Salafis who had embraced dialogue and from those that are averse to it, who hold the same view with Albani Zaria. Some of the Salafis found themselves in dialogical engagements due to their closeness to the government officials who are interested in dialogue, and not because they are really comfortable engaging in it.

Abdullahi Abubakar Lamido, a Salafi, wrote an article to make clarifications on the assertions of Albani Zaria.<sup>90</sup> He recounted how two of his mentors, Bashîr 'Umar and Salisu Shehu (b. 1966), had directed him to write a piece on interfaith dialogue to be presented at a roundtable discussion. This was when the former, 'Umar, had been appointed director of the newly established Centre for Islamic Civilisation and Interfaith Dialogue (CICID) at Bayero University Kano in 2017. The essence of the assignment was to come up with a framework on how Muslims should participate in dialogue. This shows at least a sense of dissatisfaction with what is on ground before the establishment of CICID. Lamido categorised the Nigeria Muslim position on the question of dialogue into three. One, those who accept dialogue wholeheartedly. He accused this category of falling into compromise, and that the participants

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89 Annasiha TV, "Kafurci Shine Ma'anar Interfaith: Sheikh Albaniy Zaria Rahimahullah", *YouTube* (17 April 2022), 00:00:01-00:12:19.

90 Abdullahi Abubakar Lamido, "Muslims and Interfaith Dialogue in Nigeria: Between Rejection, Extremism and Moderation", *Issues In Northern Nigeria* (Access Date 23 October 2022).

are only interested in the financial benefits of “the inter-faith business”. Two, the group that rejects dialogue entirely, that it is a Christian agenda to make Muslims forsake their faith. He counted Albani Zaria as an example of this category. He acknowledged Albani Zaria’s deep knowledge, but counts his criticism of the Sultan and other Muslim participants as an error emanating from human weakness. He went further to mention that Albani Zaria was misled by his reliance on sources from the Arab world which count dialogue as an effort to unify religions and merge them. It is worth noting that contrary to Lamido’s submission, Albani Zaria’s position is not out of ignorance of what obtains in Nigeria, he understood what is meant by dialogue and its modalities, his explanations give credence to that, only that he adhered strictly to the position of his Salafi patrons.

One of Albani Zaria’s successors, Dawud Ibrahim Azzahiri, explains in a video reacting to those who attributed ignorance to Albani Zaria about dialogue, he affirms that Zaria had deep knowledge about it as it negates *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*. He cited sources read by Albani Zaria to include the earlier mentioned Bakr b. Abī Zayd’s work.<sup>91</sup>

Three, Lamido went further to explain a third category which he called the centralists, moderate and balanced group, they accept dialogue as a means of sharing Islam, and hold that it is in accordance with its teachings, he adduced evidence to support this. This group to which Lamido claims to belong is different from the first group, because according to him, it has people he counted as qualified, who could understand some ulterior motives of non-Muslims.<sup>92</sup> By this, he meant that only people certified by Salafis are intelligent enough or qualified to be in dialogical engagements, and can do it properly in accordance with the dictates of Islam. He listed some personages he counted as qualified, including some of the people condemned by Albani Zaria, such as Nurudeen Lemu and Abubakar Siddiq Deedat. He thus, suggested the formation of a framework on how to engage in inter-faith dialogue with the Christians in Nigeria, and that manuals should be developed for that.<sup>93</sup>

One of the Salafis who responded to the controversy was Mansur Ibrahim Sokoto (b. 1969),<sup>94</sup> a professor at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, who graduated from the Islamic University of Medina in 1994. Sokoto holds

91 Salafiyah Global Network Nigeria, “Raddi Zuwa ga Prof Dogarawa kan Rubutunsa na interfaith. Sheikh Dawud Azzahiri Hafizahul-laah”, *YouTube*, (14 April 2022), 00:00:01-00:07:17.

92 Lamido, ‘Muslims and Interfaith Dialogue’.

93 Lamido, ‘Muslims and Interfaith Dialogue’.

94 BBC News Hausa, “Ku san Malamanku tare da Sheikh Farfesa Mansur Sokoto”, (19 February 2021).

that Albani Zaria erred in his submission about inter-faith dialogue and that he confused it with the notion of unification of religions or their amalgamation as one. He also erred in ascribing the notion to great personages like the Sultan. Sokoto rebuked Zaria's allegations against the Sultan, he emphatically mentioned that Sultan has never said that it is only in the hereafter that the people on the right path would be known, and there is no evidence that the Sultan has ever said so. He argues further by citing the establishment of King Abdullah International Centre for Inter-faith Dialogue (KAICID) by the Saudi Arabian monarch, and asked if it is possible for the king to open a centre that will amalgamate Islam with other religions? He nonetheless, showed his lack of commitment to dialogue, as he mentioned that he was made a member of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), though he has never participated in its activities or attended its meeting. He further condemns Nuru Khalid for his activities of coalescing with Christians, and having joint activities with them.<sup>95</sup>

Another Salafi who runs controversy against non-Salafis in northern Nigeria, Idris Abdulaziz (d. 2025) of Bauchi shares the same view with Zaria, he therefore, gave a rejoinder lecture to Mansur Sokoto on his ascription of error to Albani Zaria, in a Friday sermon of 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. He holds that all what Albani Zaria said cannot be refuted. He believes that the whole exercise of dialogue is a futility and un-Islamic. He accused the leaders of Izala who visited the Vatican of going against the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad by not doing what the Prophet did in his letter to Heraclius which was to invite him to Islam and nothing more.<sup>96</sup> Abdulaziz went further to give the meaning of 'inter-faith' which he erroneously interpreted the term as the entrance of one faith into the other. He confused the term 'enter' due to his own pronunciation with the prefix 'inter' (between) to mean "*shigan wani abu cikin wani abu*" (the entrance of a thing into another), therefore, according to him, inter-faith means the entrance of one religion into the other.<sup>97</sup> This is due to his defect in the understanding of English.

In a lecture held on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2022,<sup>98</sup> Idris Abdulaziz extensively refuted inter-faith dialogue and particularly the activities of Nuru Khalid who has

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95 Karatuttukan Malaman Musulunci, "Prof. Mansur Sokoto yayi jawabin raba gardama kan Maganar Albani ta 'Inter-Faith' akan Nura Khalid", *YouTube*, (14 April 2022), 00:00:01-00:17:02.

96 Azaahiri TV, "Raddin Dr. Idris Abdulaziz ga Prof Mansur Sokoto a kan kuskurantar da Sheikh Albani cikin Interfaith", *YouTube*, (16 April 2022), 00:38:41- 00:49:06.

97 Azaahiri TV, "Raddin Dr. Idris Abdulaziz", 00:50:49- 00:51:23.

98 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta tare da Sheikh Idris Abdulkarim (sic.) Dutsen Tenshi Hafizahulla", *YouTube*, (13 April 2022).

been defending his participation in it. Abdulaziz made an analysis of *al-walā' wa-l- barā'* reading from page 116 of an essay which he wrote four to five years earlier. He began by defining the term from the literal sense which is that *al-walā'* means *al-Qurbu* (coming near), while *al-barā'* means dissociation, disavowal and being far from something. He defines the expression technically by relying on verses of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, He mentioned that '*al-walā'* means the love of Allah, His Messenger, the religion of Islam and the Muslims, while *al-barā'* means disavowing false gods that are worshiped instead of Allah, such as material and incorporeal idols, ideologies and false beliefs. It entails boycotting all types of disbelief and disbeliever, as well as expressing hatred toward them...'”<sup>99</sup> He then cited verses of the Qur'an such as Tawba 9/114, which hints about Abraham's dissociation from his father over the latter's disbelief. Other verses include Mumtaḥana 60/1; al-Imrān 3/28; al-Nisā 4:89; al-Mā'ida 5/80-81; 51; Mumtaḥana 60:9. In his interpretation of each of the verses, commentary is given to reflect prohibition of association with the non-believers as it is done in inter-faith dialogue.<sup>100</sup>

He then turn to the Ḥadīth citing six (6) of such discouraging believers from associating with disbelievers.<sup>101</sup> These include the Ḥadīth of Jarīr b. 'Abd Allāh, who took oath of allegiance before Prophet Muhammad to "... to separate from polytheists".<sup>102</sup> Another Ḥadīth cited by Abdulaziz is that of 'Amr b. Shuaib, that the Messenger of Allah said "whosoever imitates others is not part of us, do not imitate the Jews and the Christians, for greeting the Jews is by pointing the fingers, while greeting the Christians is through waving with the hand".<sup>103</sup> Upon this Abdulaziz condemned the practices of Khalid whom he claims to be hugging Christians, he further alleges that he used to hang the cross on his body due to his alliance with Christians.<sup>104</sup>

After reading all the prophetic traditions, he remarked that the belief system of a person will not be complete until he becomes loyal to the believers and have enmity for disbelievers, hypocrites, polytheists, and all branches of disbelief, those that are openly and covertly plotting against Islam. He further mentioned that it is foolishness on the part of people who verbally claim Islam

99 Azzaahiriy TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:03:26-00:20:56.

100 Azzaahiriy TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:30:05-00:38:05.

101 Azzaahiriy TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:38:06-00:44:49.

102 Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī, *al-Mujtabā min al-sunan al-mashhūr bi Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār, 1999) "al-Bay'a", 16 (no. 4177).

103 Abū 'Isā Muḥammad b. 'Isā b. Sawra al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-mukhtaṣar min al-sunan 'an al-Nabī ṣallā Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam, wa ma'rifat al-ṣaḥīḥ wa-l- ma'lūl wa mā 'alayhi al-'amal, al-ma'rūf bi Jāmi'al-Tirmidhī*, (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār, 1999) "al-Isti'dhān" 7 (no. 2695).

104 Azzaahiriy TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:40:27-00:40:41.

and *īmān* to express love for disbelievers among the Jews and the Christians in the name of tolerance and religious rapprochement in an assumption that such act will lead to peace, they therefore, openly show love to disbelievers despite the abundance of evidence from the Qur'an and Ḥadīth commanding Muslims to boycott and disavow disbelievers and express hatred toward them and what they worship other than Allah such as idols, cross and other deities.<sup>105</sup>

Abdulaziz condemns Muslim participants in dialogue as assembling with the enemies of Allah and His religion, this according to him is congruent with the ordinances of the Qur'an and Sunnah that believers should be loyal to fellow believers and to disavow the enemies of Allah and His Messenger. He further describes dialogue organizations as *aḥzāb kufrīyya* (parties of disbelief) in the Muslim lands including Saudi Arabia. He counts among the dangers of such organizations to include corrupting the faith of Muslims and the possibility of removing religious zeal from the minds of young Muslims, because they will grow and see all religions as one.<sup>106</sup>

It is worthy to examine Abdulaziz's use of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth in warning Muslim against relating with Christians. The verses he relied upon were mostly revealed in the context of those who have declared war against Islam and the Muslims and not in reference to peace loving non-Muslims, whom the Prophet has related kindly and peacefully with. The immediate environment of the scholar, in Bauchi State, Nigeria, and the hostility that is happening between Muslims and Christians therein, influenced his categorisation of all Christians as enemies of Islam that Muslims should not befriend. The prophetic traditions quoted by the imam do not also imply perpetual unfriendliness with the non-Muslims.

Abdulaziz also rebutted the defence of Muslim participation in inter-faith dialogue by Salisu Shehu, a Salafi and professor who was appointed director of CICID after Umar in the Friday sermon of 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2022.<sup>107</sup> Shehu is the Assistant Secretary of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), he is also a member of the Nigeria's government supported dialogue organization, NIREC. Abdulaziz's rebuttal examines the Qur'anic verses often referenced by the Muslim participants to justify their actions and concluded

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105 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:44:51-00:50:40.

106 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Interfaith da Masu Kira gare ta", 00:50:4-00:55:41.

107 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Prof Salisu Shehu a kan Interfaith tare da Dr. Idris Abdulaziz Dutsen Tanshi Bauchi", *YouTube* (22 April 2022), 00:11:58-01:21:34.

that the arguments are baseless.<sup>108</sup> He then cited the verses of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* to condemn Muslim participation in dialogue.<sup>109</sup>

In spite of the scepticism shown by the Salafis to inter-faith dialogue, after Shehu left the directorship of CICID, another Salafi, who is considered as one of the most prominent in northern Nigeria, Rijiyar Lemo, was appointed as the third director. His training and area of specialization is Hadith Studies, just like the first director, Umar. He also responded to the controversy in his 2022 *tafsīr* programme at Gwallaga Mosque, Bauchi. He condemns inter-faith dialogue as a Christian evangelistic approach to stop Muslim proselytization. He traces the history of dialogue to the Catholic Church, and how it determined its terminologies and produced its literature. He stresses that inter-faith dialogue is not beneficial to Muslims and that Islam cannot be shared through inter-faith dialogue. He however, warns that it does not mean joining faiths together, and that participants should not be anathematized. Though, he counted the whole exercise as a futility and a waste of time. He argues that the only inter-faith dialogue acceptable is the one done for the purpose of establishing the truth of Islam while dialogues over socio-political issues should not be counted as religious.<sup>110</sup> Idris Abdulaziz upon listening to this message of Rijiyar Lemo challenged him to resign from the directorship of CICID and repent if he really meant what his message signifies.<sup>111</sup>

One of the most criticised participants in interfaith dialogue in Nigeria is Muhammad Nurudeen Lemu, his parents Sheikh Ahmad Lemu and Aisha Beatrice Lemu, were the founders of Islamic Education Trust (IET), Minna, in 1969 alongside Sani Ashafa.<sup>112</sup> This organization is prominent in promoting dialogue and peace through its literatures and other activities. Sheikh Ahmed Lemu (d.2020) mentioned to this researcher the challenges he faced with the Salafis due to the approach of IET in promoting dialogue and in correcting misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Islam. Some people began to brand the organization as an Ahmadi (Qādiyānī) group. He mentioned that they were only able to correct such negative propaganda by including the views of Salafi authorities, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya in their books and publications.<sup>113</sup>

108 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Prof Salisu Shehu", 00:33:58-00:42:00

109 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Prof Salisu Shehu", 00:42:00-01:21:34.

110 Hausa Online Media, "Cikakken Bayani Akan Interfaith Daga Prof. Muhammad Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo" *YouTube* (17 April 2022), 00:00:01-00:14:08.

111 Azaahiri TV, "Raddi ga Prof Salisu Shehu", 00:13:29-00:16:56.

112 "About the Islamic Education Trust", (Access Date 23 June 2024).

113 Sheikh Ahmed Lemu, interview with the author, 11 November 2012, Islamic Education Trust Minna.

IET has been engaged in dialogue before the rise of Salafism in Nigeria, therefore, its research department known as Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN), has produced many literature on relations with non-Muslims, these include, *Sharing Islam through Dialogue*,<sup>114</sup> *Relations with Non-Muslims*,<sup>115</sup> *Salam to Non-Muslims*<sup>116</sup> etc. the work which addresses this controversy is a two volumed book mentioned earlier in this article, *Muslim Relations with Christians Jews and others: Association, Dissociation, kindness, Justice, and Compassion*.<sup>117</sup> The book title has the concepts used in the Qur'an to describe the relations with the peoples of other faiths. The authors did not in any way indicated that the book is a response to the debates in Nigeria, but an outcome of survey conducted in different parts of the world concerning arguments that are adduced by some Muslims against befriending people of other faiths.<sup>118</sup> The authors sought for the endorsement of the contents from Nigeria scholars of different denominational persuasions.

The book of DIN and its position is strongly aligned with the medieval jurist, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya's opinion, who wrote in his *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin* (educating those who endorse on behalf of the lord of the worlds), that the foundational intent of the sharia is wisdom and guarantee of people's welfare, justice, mercy and goodness. Any rule that directs the opposite of this, is congruent to the sharia.<sup>119</sup> The book responds to fifty (50) faith-based questions used to argue against peaceful coexistence with people of other faith. Therefore, the book submits that there is no harm whatsoever, in peaceful interactions including dialogue with people of other faiths and it does not amount to disbelief.

## Conclusion

Nigeria has high number of enthusiastic Muslims and Christians, the relationship between the functionaries and sometimes adherents of the two faiths is characterised by rivalry in economic, political and social spheres. This trait started from the introduction of Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after Islam has spent centuries of establishment in the regions of Nigeria.

At global level, there has been a long history of relations between Muslim and Christians which has been in many cases characterised by hostility and

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114 DIN, *Sharing Islam through Dialogue* (Minna: IET, 2008).

115 DIN, *Relations with Non-Muslims*, (Minna: IET, 2009).

116 DIN, *Salam to Non-Muslims*, (Minna: IET, 2011).

117 DIN, *Muslim Relations*.

118 DIN, *Muslim Relations*, I/xvi.

119 DIN, *Muslim Relations*, I/xviii.

conflicts. There are also moments of friendliness in some times and regions. Some Muslim thinkers made efforts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century to promote dialogue between Muslims and the Christian West. The Catholic Church's *Nostra Aetate* was a catalyst in the promotion of dialogue between the Church and the peoples of living faiths. Though it is deeply rooted in the effort of the Church to evangelize the people of the world. The call to dialogue was received with scepticism and sometimes outright rejection in parts of the Muslim world. The same thing happened in Nigeria, though, many Muslim thinkers participated in dialogical engagement with Christians since the domestication of *Nostra Aetate* in Nigeria from as early as 1962.

The dimension of debates about inter-faith dialogue changed in Nigeria after the proper establishment of Salafism in the 1990s upwards. It became an issue of serious theological debate because of the Salafi notion of loyalty (association) and dissociation from the people of disbelief. The understanding brought to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia about dialogue is that it is an effort of rapprochement between Islam and Christianity, thus, an act of disbelief. Some prominent Salafis found themselves in the field of dialogue due to their closeness to the people in political authority, yet they participated with scepticism. Mansur Sokoto who tried to correct the misconceptions of some Salafis about inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria, mentioned that he hasn't attended any meeting of NIREC since he was made a member.

Muhammad Sani Rijiyar Lemu, one of the most prominent Salafis in northern Nigeria, who was appointed the third director of a research centre for dialogue at Bayero University Kano, CICID, categorically informed his students that the whole exercise is not beneficial to Islam, and that it is a programme of the Catholic Church, which was responsible for formulation of its modalities, principles and literature. He posits that the only dialogue that is acceptable is the one done for purpose of establishing the truth of Islam. In summary, the position of Salafis in Nigeria on inter-faith dialogue, based on true Salafi *manhaj*, is that they are not favourably disposed to it. They nonetheless, differ on its consideration as an act of disbelief. The members of Izala who participate in dialogue, especially those who did not study in Saudi Arabia or have it influences do not hold that the Salafi principles should bar Muslims from inter-faith dialogue.

Other Muslims also believe that dialogue is beneficial, especially in the maintenance of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria due to its pluralistic nature. They also believe that inter-faith dialogue is a very good means of spreading the good message of Islam to the people of other faiths. This category of

people has continuously engaged in dialogical activities, notwithstanding the criticism and condemnations they receive from some Salafis who count their activities as contrast to Islam and sometimes betrayal of faith and disbelief.

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