

**ZIIBALOGZII AND BIBLICAL KOINONIA: COMPLEMENTARY PARADIGMS FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Interreligious dialogue remains an essential avenue for fostering peace, understanding, and cooperation in diverse religious contexts. In Nigeria, where religious pluralism presents both opportunities and challenges, finding frameworks that promote unity amidst diversity is crucial. This paper examines the potential of two paradigms—Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia—as complementary models for fostering interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. Ziibalogzii, a concept rooted in the cultural heritage of the Ogoni people of Nigeria, with its emphasis on communal relationships, interconnectedness, and mutual respect, provides an ethical foundation for dialogue. Similarly, Biblical Koinonia, grounded in Christian teachings of fellowship, mutual love, and shared participation, offers a theological basis for building bridges across religious divides. Adopting a descriptive method, the paper argues that these paradigms, though arising from distinct cultural and religious traditions, embody complementary principles that can help bridge divides between Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) in Nigeria. By addressing historical tensions and contemporary challenges to coexistence, Ziibalogzii and Koinonia together offer a holistic framework for fostering dialogue based on shared values of community, respect, and mutual flourishing. The study further demonstrates how integrating these paradigms can inspire practices that promote solidarity, reconciliation, and cooperation among Nigeria's religious communities. Furthermore, this paper highlights how these indigenous and biblical models provide context-specific solutions to conflicts while advancing universal principles of peace and coexistence. Ultimately, the synergy between African communal ethics and Christian fellowship reimagines interreligious engagement as a partnership aimed at building a harmonious and inclusive Nigerian society. This study contributes to the broader discourse on interreligious dialogue by proposing innovative approaches that align with Nigeria's unique ethico-cultural and religious landscape.

Key Words: Koinonia, Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Conflict, Religious Pluralism, Ziibalogzii

INTRODUCTION

In a world increasingly characterized by religious pluralism and cultural diversity, the need for meaningful dialogue between different faith communities is more urgent than ever. In Nigeria, a country with a rich tapestry of ethnicities, languages, and religious traditions, interreligious dialogue is not merely a theoretical aspiration but a practical necessity. With the rise of tensions and conflicts often fueled by religious differences, it becomes imperative to explore frameworks that can foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among various religious groups. In other words, interreligious dialogue in Nigeria presents a unique and complex challenge, especially considering the country's rich cultural diversity and religious plurality. With Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) coexisting alongside each other, the need for meaningful engagement between these faiths has become even more crucial in the context of ongoing social tensions, interfaith conflicts, and religious misunderstandings. For dialogue to be productive, it must seek to create a platform for mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation, transcending the divisions that often arise from doctrinal differences. This paper explores two pivotal paradigms that hold the potential to transform interreligious dialogue in Nigeria: Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia. These paradigms, deeply rooted in African and Christian traditions respectively, offer

complementary perspectives on communal living, relationship-building, and mutual respect, which are essential for fostering peaceful and constructive interaction among different religious communities.

Ziibalogzii is an African philosophy that emphasizes interconnectedness, communalism, and shared humanity. Ziibalogzii, deeply embedded in the cultural practices and spiritual outlook of the Ogoni people of Nigeria, is a worldview that emphasizes the collective good over individualism, encouraging people to work together in unity, empathy, and respect for one another. In African communities, this concept is often reflected in the daily life of people, who are encouraged to contribute to the well-being of others and build relationships based on mutual support. Ziibalogzii is not just a philosophy, but also a way of being, which can guide people to live in harmony despite differences (Deezia, 2023a). It serves as a framework for understanding the world not just through individual experience but through communal relationships with others and with the divine. On the other hand, Biblical Koinonia refers to the New Testament concept of fellowship or communion among believers. Derived from the Greek word *koinonia*, this concept emphasizes the shared life and mutual participation of individuals within the body of Christ. Koinonia is more than just fellowship; it signifies an intimate, spiritual bond among believers that transcends social, economic, and cultural divisions. It is a call to live in solidarity, reflecting Christ's love for humanity. Biblical Koinonia encourages Christians to come together in shared worship, prayer, and service, and it extends beyond the church to engage the wider world with love, compassion, and justice.

The central argument of this paper is that Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia, while originating from different cultural and religious contexts, offer powerful frameworks for promoting interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. These paradigms can foster a shared understanding between Muslims, Christians, and practitioners of indigenous African religions, creating a bridge between religious divides. Both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia call for an ethic of mutual respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility that can contribute to healing tensions, addressing religious conflicts, and promoting social justice in Nigeria. These two paradigms, when explored in tandem, offer powerful tools for reimagining the dynamics of interreligious dialogue in a multicultural and multi-faith context like Nigeria.

This exploration will demonstrate how Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia are not only complementary but can serve as a foundation for a more robust, inclusive, and peaceful interreligious discourse. By investigating their shared emphasis on community, relationality, and mutual respect, this study aims to show how these traditions can be harnessed to build bridges between people of different faiths and backgrounds. The challenge for Nigeria, and indeed for the world, is to create spaces where these diverse paradigms can converge, enriching our collective understanding and fostering a culture of peace and solidarity. As Nigeria continues to grapple with religious and ethnic tensions, this work offers a timely contribution to the conversation on how faith and culture can be sources of unity rather than division. It is my hope that this study will encourage further exploration of indigenous African concepts in interfaith dialogue, paving the way for new paradigms of peace, cooperation, and shared humanity in the 21st century.

Religion and Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Religion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can be understood from various perspectives—anthropological, sociological, psychological, philosophical, or theological (Lawrence-Hart & Deezia, 2023). At its core, religion generally refers to a system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and moral codes that connect individuals and communities to the transcendent, the divine, or ultimate reality. As noted elsewhere, religion can be seen as a personal response or an attempt to seek meaning in life and one's place in the universe. It is an organized and integrated system of beliefs, practices, morals, and symbols that emerge from experiences related to the sacred and the profane, feelings and mysteries, often resulting in self-abasement and absolute dependency upon the ultimate reality (Deezia, 2017). However, defining religion in a pluralistic society like Nigeria requires a framework that acknowledges the diversity of religious beliefs and practices,

while also addressing the shared social and ethical responsibilities that come with living in a multi-religious environment.

Nigeria's ethno-religious identities are deeply intertwined, making it difficult to separate ethnic from religious conflicts. The Hausa-Fulani in the north are predominantly Muslim, while the Igbo and Yoruba in the south are largely Christian. This alignment of ethnicity with religion often leads to group solidarity and rivalry. In Nigeria, the three most prominent religions are Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). ATR is the indigenous religion of the Nigerian people like other Africans. It is an original religion, deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the people, providing meaning and guidance in terms of their fears and aspirations. From an anthropological standpoint, it is reasonable to argue that without culture, there can be no religion. ATR represents both the experience and the way of life of the people (Awolalu, 1976; Udoh, 2017). It is a living religion that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is not a fossilized tradition but a vibrant faith embraced by Africans today, both in practice and in the sharing of its teachings. Despite lacking written scriptures, ATR is "written" in the myths, folktales, songs, dances, liturgies, proverbs, and sayings of the people. Its historical founder is unknown, and it does not rely on membership seals, yet it continues to captivate Africans of all ages.

Islam, on the other hand, first gained a foothold in West Africa, including Nigeria, because it accommodated certain traditional practices such as polygamy. By the end of the 18th century, Islam was being practiced alongside African Traditional Religion. The Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio, aimed at reviving, purifying, and spreading Islam, expanded the faith from the North to as far as Yoruba land (Western Nigeria), where it was eventually halted by British missionaries and traders. Christianity entered Nigeria through Badagry in the mid-19th century, where missionaries first established a presence. The mission spread to Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Oyo between 1852 and 1856. By 1900, both Christianity and Islam had become firmly rooted in Nigeria (Igboin, 2010).

The seeds of Nigeria's ethno-religious tensions were sown during colonial rule (Kazah-Toure, 2003). The British amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 created a state with deep ethnic and religious cleavages. The North was predominantly Muslim, with a feudal system influenced by Islamic law, while the South was more diverse, encompassing Christian and traditional African religious practices. Colonial administrative policies further deepened these divides by adopting an indirect rule system in the North, allowing Islamic institutions to thrive while sidelining Western education. In contrast, Southern regions were more exposed to Western education and Christian missionary activities. This disparity created an imbalance in access to political power and economic resources, sowing seeds of future discord.

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a fragile political structure. Regionalism and ethnic politics dominated, with political parties often aligned along ethnic and religious lines (Sangosanya and Sha, 2005; Adamolekun, 2003). The civil war (1967–1970) further underscored the deep-seated ethnic rivalries, particularly between the Igbo-dominated Southeast, the Hausa-Fulani North, and the Yoruba Southwest. Subsequent decades saw the politicization of religion and ethnicity, often used as tools to mobilize support and exclude rivals. Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, with a minority Christian population. The region has witnessed violent ethno-religious clashes, often between Muslim-majority communities and Christian minorities. Extremist groups like Boko Haram and, more recently, ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), have exacerbated these tensions.

Boko Haram's Role Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram emerged as an extremist Islamic sect advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state and the rejection of Western education. Over time, the group evolved into a violent insurgency, targeting Christians, moderate Muslims, and government institutions. Boko Haram's activities have displaced millions and claimed thousands of lives, destabilizing the region and straining inter-religious relationships (Igboin, 2012). The South is more religiously pluralistic, with significant Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious adherents. While ethno-religious conflicts are less prevalent than in the North, disputes over land, resources, and political power occasionally take on

religious overtones. For instance, clashes between Christian communities and Muslim settlers, particularly in the Middle Belt states like Benue and Plateau, have mirrored the North's ethno-religious dynamics.

The South-East region of Nigeria has been marked by significant socio-political unrest in recent years, epitomized by the controversial "Sit-at-Home" directives issued by various factions agitating for the independence of Biafra. This phenomenon has disrupted economic activities, social harmony, and governance in the affected states. While the grievances behind the Sit-at-Home protests are deeply rooted in historical and political marginalization, the unintended consequences highlight the urgent need for dialogue as a viable path to sustainable peace and progress. The Sit-at-Home protests, primarily enforced by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its affiliates, began as a symbolic act of civil disobedience to honor the memory of the Biafran war and to demand the release of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu (Okoroafor, Osuji, & Nwosu, 2023). Over time, these directives have morphed into a broader resistance against perceived injustices, including economic neglect, infrastructural decay, and political exclusion of the South-East. However, the initial voluntary nature of these protests has been overshadowed by coercion and violence. Non-compliance has often resulted in threats, destruction of property, and loss of lives. This shift has turned what was meant to be a peaceful form of expression into a divisive and fear-driven exercise, further complicating the socio-political landscape of the region. Emerging extremist influences though less organized than Northern groups, the South has witnessed the rise of radicalized factions within Christian and Islamic communities. Militant movements in the Niger Delta, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have occasionally framed their grievances in religious terms, though their core motivations remain economic and environmental.

Religious conflict in Nigeria has been a recurrent issue, contributing significantly to political instability, social unrest, and economic decline. Nigeria is a country characterized by its religious diversity, with Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions coexisting across its regions. However, this diversity has often led to tensions and violent clashes, stemming from both historical and contemporary factors. Nigeria's vast economic disparities create fertile ground for extremist ideologies. The northern region, which is predominantly Muslim, suffers from higher poverty rates, unemployment, and lack of education compared to the more developed south. These conditions make disenfranchised youth vulnerable to radicalization. Politicians in Nigeria have historically exploited religious and ethnic identities to gain power. This manipulation deepens divisions and creates an environment where extremist groups can thrive. A lack of effective governance and widespread corruption undermine efforts to address the root causes of extremism. The failure to provide security and basic services in affected regions allows extremist groups to fill the vacuum. The rise of global jihadist networks has provided financial, ideological, and operational support to groups like Boko Haram. Connections with organizations such as ISIS have further radicalized local sects.

Consequently, interreligious dialogue in Nigeria is essential for fostering peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and social harmony among the country's diverse religious communities. Interreligious dialogue is not only a means of addressing religious conflict but also an opportunity for Nigeria to build a stronger, more united society. In a nation where religion is a key component of identity, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among religious communities is essential for achieving lasting peace and social stability. Dialogue can serve as a means of breaking down barriers of suspicion, promoting mutual respect, and fostering understanding between religious communities. In this context, both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia offer valuable insights into how dialogue can be framed and practiced.

In contemporary global discourse, terms like "interreligious dialogue" and "interfaith dialogue" are often used interchangeably. However, while these concepts overlap in their pursuit of understanding and cooperation among diverse belief systems, they are distinct in their focus, methodologies, and implications. Interreligious Dialogue refers to interactions and conversations between individuals or groups representing different religious traditions. Its focus

is on exploring doctrinal, theological, and cultural dimensions of religions to promote mutual understanding and address shared challenges (Eche & Deezia, 2021). Interreligious dialogue often involves formal or institutional engagement and may center on theological debates, ethical principles, or social responsibilities rooted in religious beliefs. Interfaith Dialogue, on the other hand, emphasizes the engagement between people of various faiths or spiritual paths, often broadening the scope beyond institutionalized religions to include personal spirituality and non-theistic belief systems (Eche & Deezia, 2021). Its focus is typically more inclusive, emphasizing shared values, lived experiences, and practical cooperation on issues like social justice, environmental stewardship, and humanitarian efforts.

Understanding Ziibalogzii Philosophy

Ziibalogzii is an African philosophy that emphasizes interconnectedness, communalism, and shared humanity (Deezia, 2023a). Ziibalogzii, deeply embedded in the cultural practices and spiritual outlook of the Ogoni people of Nigeria, is a worldview that emphasizes the collective good over individualism, encouraging people to work together in unity, empathy, and respect for one another. Etymologically, the term *Ziibalogzii* derives from the Ogoni words *Zii* (one), *Ba* (hand), and *Log* (washes), symbolizing the idea that "one hand washes the other." Literally translated as "the condition of being human," Ziibalogzii embodies the concept of an interconnected web of existence, where reality is perceived as a universe of forces interlinked and in constant interplay (Deezia, 2023b; Deezia & Kilani, 2023). This theory emerges from the ancient Ogoni tradition of collaborative and reciprocal thought, emphasizing mutual reliance, interconnection, and the value of reciprocity. Ziibalogzii reflects a communal ethos and ethical principles emphasizing interconnectedness, humanity, and mutual care. Ziibalogzii is inherently relational, often expressed through proverbs and idioms such as:

1. *Doo-i-tor* ("live and let live")
2. *Bue nee kum-zoo* ("individuals make up the community")
3. *Bae gbo kpena loo, ba kpo kpue* ("hunting wild animals requires collective efforts of the dogs and the hunter").

Other expressions like "one sees the other, and the other sees the one" or "I am what I am because of others" reflect a profoundly constructivist ontology. These ideas align with John Mbiti's (1931–2019) assertion that an individual realizes their being only in relation to others: through fulfilling duties and feeling responsible both to themselves and their community. According to Mbiti (1969), individual experiences—whether suffering or joy—are communal. When a person suffers, the community suffers with them; when they rejoice, the community shares in that joy. The social formula encapsulates this philosophy: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."

In the Ogoni worldview, existence is not viewed as a collection of isolated entities but as a complex, interconnected web. This network of relationships functions like a chain, where each connection strengthens or weakens the whole, directly impacting collective well-being. Ziibalogzii represents a profound shift in understanding human existence: that to exist is to be in a relationship. Isolation is seen as "delinking" from the community, leading to the erosion of social cohesion, loss of cultural identity, disconnection from ancestral heritage, and the breakdown of social support systems. These outcomes contradict the fundamental principles of interconnectedness and interdependence intrinsic to Ziibalogzii.

In this philosophy, every existence is purposeful. Within any system or framework, all elements—no matter how seemingly insignificant—contribute to the system's definition and vitality. To maintain the system's optimal life, all components must be considered in their sufficiency. Thus, a typical human action is understood as one directed toward the collective joy and well-being of all involved. Ziibalogzii describes the interconnected web of causality that governs all phenomena. This holistic perspective posits that every event, action, and being is inextricably linked, challenging the notion of independent existence. By embracing this worldview, Ziibalogzii fosters empathy and responsibility, promotes harmony and balance, and encourages holistic understanding. It also critiques Western traditional notions of separation and individualism,

instead revealing a rich tapestry of relationships and interdependencies. Through its principles, Ziibalogzii challenges Western dominance by offering an alternative framework that prioritizes interconnectedness and collective well-being over individualism.

Ziibalogzii recognizes that humanity is bound up with others. It means not having grudges, but being willing to accept others as they are and being thankful for them. In this respect, Ziibalogzii plays an important role. In Africa, the older person is respected. However, people should recognize that Africans have more respect for the wisdom of an individual than for his chronological age as such. For Africans, there is a strong correlation between age and wisdom. As African culture is dominated by oral tradition, the elders are perceived as those who have the knowledge and have accumulated a lot of experience. Age is the observable referent. Respect for elders implies a reciprocal relationship. As the younger respects the elder, the latter must, in return, take care of the former, provide him with advice and help him realise his full potential. This is the relationship that is based on mutual interdependence (Msengana 2006). However, anything that undermines, hurts, threatens and destroys human beings is not accommodated in Ziibalogzii, but is frowned upon, since it affects the very foundation of society, namely the human being. A person is not a thing or a number, but something more valuable than these. Whether a person is known or not, it is expected that he/she should be accorded respect.

Ziibalogzii presumes and emphasises the human being's moral character. Morality is entailed by our communal personhood. Interpersonal interdependence is constitutive of human life and thus the development of my and others' being is obligatory, as illustrated in the discussion on collectivism and interrelatedness above. Because human life is inescapably and permanently in relation with others, social relations cannot be reduced to neutral functions or roles. Turaki (1999) states that "man is only in a relationship as he participates in family and community life". One of the most important kinship relationships of man is marriage. Turaki (1999) is of the following opinion: Marriage is more than a physical relationship. It has its own consequences. Not to marry is to cease living now and in the hereafter. Marriage establishes essentials in life and death. Begetting children guarantees eternal life. Not only do children provide for the reincarnation of the ancestors, they also sustain the ancestors through prescribed rituals such as sacrifices and offering. Turaki (1999) adds that, "because an African man believes himself to be an extension of the spirit world, the corporate family and the tribe, these must all share responsibility and blame for what he does. He is acted upon by powers he believes are beyond his control". Therefore, the spirit and mystical powers and forces which can be used for either good or bad" inhabit the world of nature. In his relationship to the natural world, behind natural phenomena, "animals, plants, rivers, rocks, mountains and heavenly bodies may all carry messages from the spirit world, which he has to decipher. Therefore, if man determines the meaning as he deems fit, man can decide what Africanism determines to his setting or circumstances.

The social character of humanity, as outlined above, expresses that man was not meant to be individualistic, and "man is not an island". A person is constitutively relational to his environment, not just an egoistic, separate, autonomous individual. This is an insight which is integral to an African understanding of identity, ontology and epistemology, although this ontological, epistemological and religious understandings are not limited to African culture only (Lenka Bula 2008). Whilst acknowledging that a person lives in a relationship and is, therefore, a sociality, a person's individuality, his/her distinct personality, has to be embraced, affirmed and not constrained. Respect for difference in others is vital for both. As such, Ziibalogzii respects individuality, whilst at the same time acknowledging that human beings are embedded in relations with others and with creation. This particular perspective is radically different from the dominant individualism which is practised by traditional Western conceptions of a human being which posits individual autonomy over and above the relatedness of people (Van der Walt 2001). The above constitutive elements of what it means to be human embrace both the rational and emotive aspects, including what religious phenomenology describes as the soul. An individual is one who balances both his/her rational and emotional aspects and accepts his/her decisions as self-sufficient, yet is conscious of and bound by the awareness of his/her relatedness to other humans

and creation, and is considerate toward their plight and that of creation (Lenka Bula 2008). While the independence of an individual is encouraged by Ziibalogzii, social and/or ecological consciousness is also affirmed and not scoffed at, as happens in capitalism. This is to acknowledge that one's ontology is tied up to that of the earth and humanity. One does not only use self-interest as the criterion for a moral agency and decision-making process in one's life, but one has to balance one's self-interest with the common good of the earth and the web of life in general.

African culture is collectivistic in nature (Dia 1991:10; Deezia, 2024). The group has more importance than the individual and group success is more valued than individual success. Group activities have always characterised traditional African societies. Traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, harvesting and celebrations were performed through various groups. The average African feels more comfortable when he/she is in a group than when he/she is alone (Ahiazu 1989:6). The pre-eminence of the group requires consensus in decision making and in forging relationships as a collective. In supplementing the above, Obodoegbulam, (2019) maintain that consensus is based on people as a family and as such they are expected to be in solidarity with one another, especially during the hour of need. It is during times such as distress and crisis that the need for Ziibalogzii becomes acute. A person in need should be able to count on the support of those around him/her. It is at times like these that one has to contribute to the good of others and society, which is primarily communalism in action. In communalism, travellers or strangers were served with food unreservedly. Their presence was seen as more of a blessing than a burden. This was a corollary that brought further joy to children, since they knew that the best meals would be served.

Giving food to strangers was more than just satisfying their physical hunger, but was a "barometer of social relations and a powerful mechanism for both creating sociability and, alternatively, for destroying it". It was a challenge to the host to open his/her boundaries, and be receptive and generous to the stranger (Obodoegbulam, 2019). This notion of the abovementioned hospitality is based on Africans' obligation to sustain one another as a form of their existence, which is a moral obligation (Christians 2004). Idowu (2008) asserts that this communitarian worldview involves the community collectively. This type of collectivist paradigm integrates human beings into the social organism, with the latter being the integrating norm. The core of socialism from an African worldview is that African societies are founded on kinship relations, which begin in the households and expand to lineage and clan proportions (Wiredu 2007). What is paramount in the African traditional societies is the sense of bonding, from early childhood, with large groups of relatives at home and outside it. This evolving sense of bonding is a learning process in which the individual comes to see himself/herself more and more as the centre of obligations and rights. At that level of lineage, one is already engaged with quite a substantial population. From the above, one can deduce that in Ziibalogzii, a person's freedom depends on personal relationships with others for its exercise and fulfilment. Freedom is not exclusively an individual right, but "freedom of expression means a community is able to freely articulate its questions and concerns" (Blankenberg 1999). Mutuality and reciprocity are the features of genuine community; freedom in the full sense requires, therefore, that these conditions are realised in a society as a whole. In Ziibalogzii, humans depend completely on one another for their development. This communicable hospitality breeds integral conformable spirituality.

The spirit in African religion is one's total being or soul. It represents the inner self of the total being. The spirit is who people are. It is the people's values and culture in terms of community; it is the climate and values of that particular community. African spirit is used as a metaphor to describe certain prevailing values in particular communities and situations (Mbigi and Maree 1995). Due to the above, Msengana (2006) maintains that the ancestral spirit will constantly come back to look after the living relatives as an invisible energy centre. The ancestral spirit may enter and occupy people, places, animals and trees. Ancestors are always alive, without bodies, and still play a major part in people's social life. People have to venerate them, because they can act for their good or evil on behalf of those who are still living in bodies. This belief in the

spirit and ancestorism is central to the African way of life. The social and religious systems are strongly interrelated, so it is difficult to discuss one without the other. As earlier mentioned, both ontology is embedded in creation and the 'Supreme Being' (Lenka Bula, 2008); this is demonstrated on many instances in the religious rituals of many Africans who affirm their connectedness to the earth, other people, a Supreme Being and ancestors. These rituals demonstrate symbolically the understanding of many communities of their ontology as ties, specifically to plants, land animals or marine creatures. Relevant examples are the Bua Luawii and Sii of Ogoni in Nigeria, who normally associate their being to *inter alia* lions, crocodiles, buffaloes, pythons, and elephants. They narrate and chant to totems which describe this connectedness to assert their centeredness to that of creation (Nwideede, 2024 oral interview). Besides being associated with creation, communalism embraces relationship with creatures on earth and their existence; therefore, Ziibalogzii is against human conduct that results in ecological degradation. If the earth or creation is us, and part of us, its destruction is our own destruction. In other words, if we kill or destroy the natural environment, we will all perish (Deezia & Hart, 2024).

Another significant dimension of communal relationships as spiritual value is the development of African humanism, which gives a new application and dynamism to the human values of the ancient village world of Africa, particularly the ideas of cooperative living and sharing life together. Africans believe in sharing and acknowledgement of others as human beings and part of creation who deserve to be treated humanely. In support of the above, Idowu (2008) asserts that Africa seems to have entrenched a humanist ideology in its cultural life which elevates the generic essence of human existence. Humanism is a philosophy with an existential character. As a philosophy, it may be regarded ideological in nature. Therefore, the implications are that humanism, from an existential point of view, is a reflection of that which holds man in society. The author agrees with Idowu's viewpoint that humanism mutually excludes some extreme measures that are often adopted in interpreting, and in understanding man and his place in the universe. A purely humanist society cannot but be understood in the holistic sense. This is what is meant when the worldview inherent in such a culture is described as all-encompassing. Ziibalogzii and communalism have shown how influential they are in African philosophy.

Biblical Koinonia and its Theological Basis

The concept of Koinonia, derived from the Greek word *κοινωνία*, is generally translated as 'fellowship' (Greek-English Lexicon 2005). It describes the state of 'association' or 'joint participation'. Koinonia belongs to a family of words that are used in the New Testament to describe 'joint participation'. Other words in this family are the verb *koinoneo*, translated as 'to fellowship'; the noun *koinonos*, translated as 'one who fellowships'; the adjective *koinonikos*, translated as 'the willingness to fellowship'; and the adjective *koinos*, translated as 'common' (Davidson, 2000). If one is in *koinoneo* (fellowship), that person is in a personal relationship with God. The one who is in fellowship with God is thus in fellowship with all others who are truly in fellowship with God (1 John 1:3). 1 Corinthians 1:9 refers to this as "fellowship (koinonia) with his Son" and 2 Corinthians 13:14 refers to "the fellowship (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit". Those in Christ are said to "participate (koinoneo) in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The early Christian community saw this as a relationship with the Holy Spirit (Thornton, 1941). In this context, koinonia highlights a higher purpose or mission that benefits the greater good of the members as a whole. The term *enthusiasm* is connected to this meaning of koinonia, for it signifies "to be imbued with the Spirit of God in us" (Act 18:25). In complementing the above definition, Fitzgerald (2007) states that the Greek word *koinonia* describes a close fellowship and sharing of life, frequently including the sharing of resources. The corresponding verb either means 'to participate' or 'to enable other to participate'. In profane language, the adjective *koinos* pertains to something that is held in common, in contrast to that which belongs to the individual. Greek thinkers often used words from the *koinonia* word family in their discussions on whether and how far communal property should be the basis of the political, social and economic order, and in how far scope should be given to private property.

The concept *koinonia* is found especially in the Pauline letters from whom the early church has also inherited the special meaning that is given to the word *koinonia* in the context of the Christian faith. In support of August, Fitzgerald (2007), as well as Hirsch and Ford (2011), refers to the Pauline letter to the Philippians in which *koinonia* is described as an acknowledgement of gifts (Philippians 1:5). They further add that among the various terms in the *friendship* linkage group, the most important is *reconciliation*, for this is the theological basis for Paul's understanding of friendship, meaning 'the restoration of friendship'. When friendship is restored, *koinonia* relationships are evident. The reconciliation stance which is part and particle of *koinonia* is explained by Flett (2009) as follows: Because God is a missionary God, life in fellowship with him takes the objective form of active participation in reconciled and reconciling communities. The life of the community, as such, is not external to the message, but it exists in the act of reconciliation. Reconciliation is real as it takes place and, as it takes place, it reveals and declares itself to be true. That is, a community formed in the act of reconciliation exists in the movement of reconciliation toward those who live as enemies of God. Reconciliation generally and as such does not merely take place for itself in a special sphere closed off by the resistance and contradiction which it encounters. On the contrary, it takes place as it establishes Christian knowledge in the world and in and among the people who are reconciled in its occurrence. Therefore, reconciliation is Trinitarian in value, because God lives in a reconciled community which has *koinonia*, incepted since creation, embedded in it.

Koinonia reflects a relational ontology, where human existence is understood in the context of interconnectedness. Philosophically, it challenges individualistic paradigms, presenting a model of community that prioritizes collective flourishing over personal autonomy. At its core, *Koinonia* posits that human identity is defined by relationships. This resonates with existential and communal philosophies that argue for the primacy of relationality in human existence. In *Koinonia*, relationships are not merely horizontal (between individuals) but also vertical, involving communion with God. *Koinonia* envisions a unity that transcends differences in ethnicity, social status, and personal background. As articulated in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Philosophically, this aligns with egalitarian theories that advocate for the inherent dignity and equality of all persons. The practice of *Koinonia* entails mutual care, accountability, and generosity. This ethic of reciprocity challenges utilitarian notions of relationships as transactional, instead fostering a community where each person contributes to and benefits from the collective good.

Complementarity of Ziibalogzii and Koinonia

The complementarity between Ziibalogzii and *Koinonia* lies in their shared emphasis on the relational nature of human existence and the pursuit of communal flourishing. While Ziibalogzii provides a culturally rooted framework for fostering communal values and social justice, *Koinonia* offers a theological foundation that integrates these principles into a spiritual narrative of divine love and reconciliation. Together, they form a robust paradigm for addressing societal challenges such as alienation, conflict, and inequality, particularly in contexts like Africa, where the synthesis of cultural heritage and Christian faith is pivotal.

While Ziibalogzii and *Koinonia* emerge from different cultural and theological contexts, their core principles are complementary in promoting interfaith dialogue. Both emphasize communal relationships, mutual respect, and the recognition of the inherent worth of others. By integrating these concepts into interfaith dialogue, individuals and religious communities can build bridges of understanding and cooperation, rather than walls of division. In other words, at the core of both Ziibalogzii and *koinonia* is the principle of interconnectedness. Both philosophies call for a worldview that prioritizes relationships over individualism, and community over division.

Both Ziibalogzii and *koinonia* stress that human beings are inherently interconnected. Ziibalogzii teaches that our identity and dignity are only realized in relation to others—"I am because we are." Similarly, *koinonia* speaks of the communion or fellowship of believers, a shared unity that transcends individualistic or sectarian distinctions. In the context of interfaith dialogue in

Nigeria, these concepts remind people of different faiths that their humanity is bound together, despite religious differences. Ziibalogzii teaches that every individual's worth is intertwined with the community's well-being. Similarly, Koinonia emphasizes the importance of love and respect for others within the body of Christ. These teachings call for genuine listening and understanding in interfaith encounters, where the goal is not merely to tolerate others but to embrace them as valuable members of a shared human family.

Central to both concepts is empathy and respect for others. Ziibalogzii emphasizes understanding others' pain and joy as one's own, while koinonia encourages Christians to bear one another's burdens and to practice compassion. These values can inspire Muslims and Christians in Nigeria to see each other not as threats or rivals but as fellow human beings with shared aspirations for peace and justice. Both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia recognize the need for healing in the face of division and conflict. In Nigeria, where religious tensions sometimes lead to violence and distrust, these concepts can offer a pathway to reconciliation. Ziibalogzii calls for restorative justice and communal healing, while Koinonia encourages forgiveness and the mending of broken relationships through the love of Christ.

In collective responsibility for peace and justice, both philosophies emphasize that individuals bear collective responsibility for the welfare of the community. In Nigeria, this can translate into a shared commitment among Muslims, Christians, and other religious groups to address common challenges, such as poverty, insecurity, and education. By focusing on common goals, Ziibalogzii and koinonia promote collaboration and social action that transcends sectarian boundaries. Ziibalogzii stresses the importance of collective responsibility for the well-being of others. Biblical Koinonia, similarly, teaches that the Church is called to care for one another, sharing in each other's joys and burdens. In the interfaith dialogue context, this shared responsibility can extend beyond religious boundaries, encouraging cooperation on social justice issues, peacebuilding, and the promotion of human dignity. Ziibalogzii encourages the celebration of diversity while maintaining a sense of unity. In the same way, Koinonia calls for the unity of believers in Christ, despite their differences. In the context of interfaith dialogue, both concepts promote the idea that religious diversity can be a strength, rather than a source of division.

The religious divide between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is often a source of violence and social unrest. Discriminatory practices, political manipulation of religious identities, and religious extremism have deepened mistrust and created physical and psychological barriers between the communities. However, both Ziibalogzii and koinonia offered a counter-narrative, emphasizing the shared humanity of all people, regardless of religious identity. Theologians and scholars of interfaith dialogue argue that koinonia calls for deep, empathetic engagement across religious lines. In Nigeria, this could manifest in collaborative efforts for social justice, peacebuilding, and mutual support in times of crisis. For example, in the aftermath of religious violence or natural disasters, faith-based communities can come together to provide aid, foster reconciliation, and support the healing of communal wounds. This collective action rooted in the principles of koinonia provides a model for sustained interfaith cooperation.

Ziibalogzii and Koinonia: A Model for Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria

The application of Ziibalogzii and koinonia as models for interfaith dialogue in Nigeria has the potential to reshape the nation's religious dynamics. By focusing on shared values rather than differences, these concepts provide practical ways for religious communities to engage in cooperative action. In building trust and healing divisions, Interreligious dialogue in Nigeria is often hindered by mistrust and historical tensions. However, the emphasis on shared human dignity and collective responsibility in both Ziibalogzii and koinonia provides a basis for healing these divides. Through dialogue rooted in empathy and understanding, religious communities can begin to rebuild trust. These values challenge communities to put aside old grievances and seek common ground for reconciliation.

Another effective ways to apply Ziibalogzii and koinonia in Nigeria is through joint community service projects that address the social and economic needs of all citizens. By working

together on issues such as healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, Muslims and Christians can demonstrate the practical outworking of these philosophies. In regions where interfaith tensions are high, collaborative projects can create spaces for religious groups to engage in meaningful cooperation, offering tangible expressions of peacebuilding.

In promoting peaceful coexistence through shared values, Ziibalogzii and koinonia teach that peace and harmony are not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of active relationships built on mutual respect and care. In Nigeria, where religious violence is sometimes politicized, the principles of Ziibalogzii and koinonia can encourage communities to focus on what they have in common, particularly their shared desire for peace, justice, and prosperity. Interreligious peace initiatives grounded in these values can serve as platforms for reducing tensions and fostering mutual respect between religious groups.

Ziibalogzii challenges the often divisive narrative of religious competition by emphasizing that every person's humanity is affirmed through their relationships with others. In Nigeria, this can inspire Muslims and Christians to see each other as part of a larger, interconnected community. Rather than focusing on religious differences, Ziibalogzii advocates for shared responsibility for one another's well-being. This can encourage collaborative efforts to address social issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare, transcending religious boundaries. Koinonia, with its emphasis on fellowship and communion, provides a theological framework for interfaith collaboration. While traditionally associated with Christian communities, koinonia can be understood as the shared participation in a common purpose. In Nigeria, the application of koinonia could mean recognizing that Muslims and Christians share a common desire for peace, justice, and human dignity. By focusing on shared ethical values—such as love, justice, and respect for human life—koinonia can help foster a spirit of collaboration rather than competition.

One of the most practical ways to implement Ziibalogzii and koinonia in Nigeria is through collaborative community service projects. Both Muslims and Christians can join forces to address shared societal challenges such as poverty, healthcare, and education. By working together on these common goals, religious communities can demonstrate that their differences are secondary to their shared humanity. Initiatives like building schools, providing healthcare services, or promoting environmental sustainability can serve as concrete expressions of the principles of Ziibalogzii and koinonia.

Religious leaders and community groups can engage in dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and respect. In Nigeria, interfaith forums that emphasize Ziibalogzii and koinonia can provide a platform for Muslims and Christians to come together, share their experiences, and discuss common values. By focusing on what unites them—such as the desire for peace and justice—these dialogues can break down stereotypes and reduce prejudice. Religious leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative, offering teachings that underscore the importance of cooperation, empathy, and shared responsibility. Religious leaders from both the Christian and Muslim communities can use the principles of Ziibalogzii and koinonia to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue. By stressing the importance of shared values and common humanity, religious leaders can help reduce suspicion and foster an environment of cooperation. Their ability to model Ziibalogzii and koinonia in their own actions, through acts of service and community engagement, can set a powerful example for their followers. Beyond religious leaders, grassroots initiatives grounded in Ziibalogzii and koinonia are also essential for fostering interfaith dialogue. Local communities in Nigeria have often demonstrated remarkable resilience and cooperation despite religious divisions. Whether through joint community service projects, interfaith social events, or educational programs, these initiatives can reflect the spirit of Ziibalogzii and koinonia. For example, shared community events such as interfaith prayers, public dialogues, and joint advocacy for social justice issues can serve as platforms for fostering mutual understanding.

In communities where Christian-Muslim relations have been strained, Ziibalogzii can serve as a foundation for empathy, mutual understanding, and solidarity. For instance, during times of communal violence or natural disasters, religious groups can come together to support one another, demonstrating that they are united by a common humanity. By promoting collective

responsibility, Ziibalogzii encourages cooperation between different religious communities to address social challenges such as poverty, health care, and education. Koinonia, while rooted in Christian theology, can also be adapted as a model for interfaith dialogue in Nigeria. The concept of shared participation and communal responsibility can resonate across religious boundaries, as it emphasizes values of unity and solidarity. In Nigeria, koinonia could inspire collaboration between Christian and Muslim communities in common social projects, such as interfaith schools, healthcare initiatives, and peacebuilding activities.

Both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia provide frameworks for creating inclusive environments in interreligious dialogue. Ziibalogzii's emphasis on interdependence encourages participants to see each other as equals, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation. Similarly, Koinonia calls for a sense of shared participation in a broader community, inviting all to engage in dialogue without fear of exclusion or marginalization. Interreligious dialogue initiatives can create spaces where participants actively listen to one another, acknowledging the humanity and dignity of each person, irrespective of their religious affiliation. These spaces allow for the sharing of religious experiences, which enrich the dialogue by highlighting common values and differences in a spirit of mutual respect.

Both concepts emphasize the importance of shared ethical values. Ziibalogzii advocates for respect, compassion, and social justice, while Koinonia emphasizes love, service, and reconciliation. By focusing on these common values, interreligious dialogue can bridge divides and promote collaboration on issues of mutual concern, such as poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and peace-building. In regions like Nigeria, where religious tensions often arise from political and socio-economic inequalities, dialogue based on Ziibalogzii and Koinonia can focus on joint efforts to address common challenges. Religious communities can work together on social justice initiatives, such as advocating for the rights of the underprivileged or engaging in peace-building efforts that transcend religious differences.

Ziibalogzii and Koinonia emphasize personal transformation within the context of community. In Ziibalogzii, this transformation occurs through a recognition of the shared humanity of others, leading individuals to act with greater empathy and respect. In Koinonia, personal transformation is rooted in a deep sense of communion with others, leading individuals to pursue reconciliation and unity. Interreligious dialogue based on these principles can facilitate personal growth by challenging participants to reconsider their prejudices, biases, and assumptions. Through sustained engagement, individuals are encouraged to develop empathy and understanding toward people of different faiths, leading to a transformation of both individuals and communities.

Both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia emphasize the importance of building strong, supportive communities. Ziibalogzii's focus on communal well-being aligns with the Christian idea of fellowship, where believers form a community bound by mutual love and care. In interreligious dialogue, these concepts encourage the building of a community that transcends religious boundaries and focuses on shared goals. Interreligious dialogue can lead to the establishment of interfaith networks that work toward the common good. These networks might involve joint educational programs, collaborative social projects, or community events that celebrate shared human experiences while respecting religious diversity.

In societies marked by conflict, such as Nigeria, Ziibalogzii and Koinonia can play a pivotal role in reconciliation. Ziibalogzii teaches the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation as part of the healing process, while Koinonia emphasizes the Christian calling to restore relationships and build peace. Together, these concepts offer a powerful framework for overcoming historical grievances and fostering long-term peace. Interreligious dialogue can be used as a platform for addressing past wrongs and promoting forgiveness. This might involve dialogue sessions where religious leaders and community members openly discuss past conflicts and work toward mutual healing, acknowledging the pain caused by religious intolerance and violence while striving for peace.

By creating spaces for people of different faiths to come together, share their stories, and learn from each other, interfaith dialogue can be deepened. Collaborative projects that address common social concerns, such as poverty, environmental degradation, or education, can embody the principles of Ziibalogzii and Koinonia by encouraging collective responsibility for the common good. Promoting awareness of both Ziibalogzii and Koinonia through educational programs can help challenge misconceptions and prejudices about other religious groups. Workshops, seminars, and community events can be organized to explore these concepts and their relevance to interfaith engagement. Local communities can embody the principles of Ziibalogzii and Koinonia by establishing support systems that include members of all faiths. For instance, joint religious efforts to provide care for the marginalized, such as the sick, orphans, and the elderly, can reflect the shared commitment to human dignity that both concepts emphasize. The Nigerian government and civil society organizations should support initiatives that foster interfaith dialogue and collaboration. Funding interfaith peace projects, supporting cross-cultural exchanges, and creating platforms for religious leaders to engage in dialogue can help create a more inclusive society.

Concluding Remarks

Interreligious dialogue remains a pressing necessity in Nigeria, a nation characterized by its rich tapestry of ethnicities, cultures, and religious affiliations. The challenges of religious intolerance, suspicion, and conflict underscore the urgent need for frameworks that promote understanding, respect, and peaceful coexistence. Within this context, the paradigms of Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia offer valuable insights and practical pathways for fostering interreligious dialogue and harmony. Ziibalogzii, a concept deeply rooted in African communalism, embodies the essence of togetherness, shared responsibility, and mutual respect. Its emphasis on relationality aligns with the African worldview that prioritizes the community over the individual. Ziibalogzii fosters inclusivity and mutual understanding by encouraging individuals to view others as integral to their own well-being. This paradigm provides a culturally resonant foundation for interreligious dialogue, especially in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, where communal values often transcend individual religious affiliations. On the other hand, Biblical Koinonia, grounded in the Christian tradition, emphasizes fellowship, shared life, and unity among believers. While its primary context is ecclesial, its principles of love, reconciliation, and mutual edification can be extended to interreligious engagement. Koinonia calls for a recognition of the intrinsic dignity of every human being as created in the image of God. This recognition fosters a spirit of openness, humility, and solidarity, which are essential for meaningful dialogue across religious divides.

The complementarities between Ziibalogzii and Koinonia are striking. Both paradigms underscore the centrality of relationships, the necessity of mutual respect, and the importance of communal well-being. Ziibalogzii's cultural grounding provides a familiar and accessible entry point for dialogue in the Nigerian context, while Koinonia's theological depth offers a transcendent dimension that appeals to the shared spiritual aspirations of religious communities. Together, these paradigms provide a holistic approach that addresses both the cultural and spiritual dimensions of interreligious dialogue.

Practically, the integration of Ziibalogzii and Koinonia into interreligious dialogue initiatives in Nigeria could involve several strategies. First, educational programs should emphasize the values of communal living and mutual respect inherent in both paradigms. Second, religious leaders and community stakeholders should model these values in their interactions, fostering an environment of trust and cooperation. Third, interfaith forums and community development projects can serve as platforms for embodying the principles of Ziibalogzii and Koinonia, demonstrating their practical relevance in addressing shared societal challenges. Furthermore, the success of this complementary approach hinges on the willingness of individuals and communities to transcend prejudices and engage in genuine dialogue. It requires a commitment to listening, learning, and collaborating for the common good. By embracing Ziibalogzii and Koinonia, Nigerians can move beyond mere tolerance to a deeper appreciation of their shared humanity and diverse religious heritages.

In conclusion, Ziibalogzii and Biblical Koinonia offer robust paradigms for fostering interreligious dialogue in Nigeria. Their integration into the cultural and religious fabric of the nation can help bridge divides, promote peace, and build a society where diversity is celebrated rather than feared. As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of its pluralistic identity, these paradigms provide a beacon of hope, reminding us that unity is possible amidst diversity when guided by the principles of love, respect, and communal solidarity.

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