

The Menace of Boko Haram and the Violation of Young People's Dignity in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

The notions of dignity of a person and the rights of all have been subjects of discussion in various fields. Today, however, whether through misinterpretation or direct violation, the notion of human dignity is too often seriously obstructed and even disfigured. Hence, human dignity has proven to be a vague term in the liberal rights discourse due to its broad range. This article endeavours to provide a Christian definition of human dignity as it relates to young people in Northern Nigeria. Firstly, it will seek to address an understanding of human dignity as it ought to be considered in the public and the theological domain. Secondly, the article will consider the violation of young people's dignity by Boko Haram's violence in Northern Nigeria, and lastly, this article will suggest ways that the church, youth workers and communities can contribute to helping restore the dignity of young people, especially those affected by the Boko Haram menace.

1. Introduction

The Islamic sect Boko Haram (BH) has been a security challenge in Northern Nigeria since 2009. Boko Haram remains arguably the biggest problem confronting Nigeria today, with the consequences of this terrorist network's actions reaching far beyond security concerns into the political and socio-economic aspects of the governance of the country (Salami, 2013:40). As in the case of any form of violence, gross violations of human rights and human dignity have been reported in the key areas where Boko Haram has been operating. The focus of this article is not to enter into the terrorism and human dignity debate, but rather to highlight the violation of particularly young people's dignity through the activities of BH – Koopman (2007:177) notes that “all human beings do possess dignity, that to be human is to have dignity”. The article further intends to challenge churches and youth workers in Northern Nigeria to be fully involved in what Koopman (2007:178) describes as the “rehumanization” of (in this case) young people as a result of the “dehumanization” that they have suffered at the hands of BH. Statistics (Onuoha, 2014:6) show that a large number of BH's victims are young people ranging between the ages of 13 and 25; these are people in the prime of their lives and the prime of their development as human beings. The violation of this group's human dignity thus calls for urgent attention.

The map of Nigeria shown in Figure 1 is critical to understanding Boko Haram's presence in the country. It shows Nigeria, divided into its different states. The more red a state contains, the more violence it has seen.

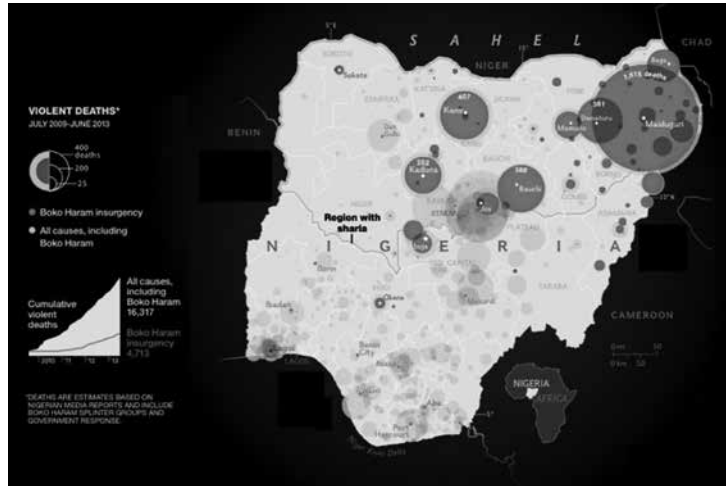


Figure 1: Map depicting Boko Haram presence and activity (Source: Beauchamp, 2014).

The article is structured into three parts. The first part will look at understanding human dignity in order to provide a conceptual framework, the second part will discuss the violation of young people's dignity by BH, and the last part will consider the implications of this violation for churches and youth workers.

It must be noted that the term 'young people' will be used in this article to refer to people in the age range of 16 to 25 years. These are the age parameters that have been covered in this study and this age bracket is also in accordance with both cultural and societal perceptions of young people in the context of the study.

2. Methodology of the Study

The research questions of this study are as follows: (i) What is the impact, if any, of BH's violence on the dignity of young people in Northern Nigeria? and (ii) How should the church, youth workers and the community at large respond effectively towards the restoration of young people's dignity as a result of the violent operations of BH?

In deriving data for the study, both secondary and primary sources were relied on. The secondary data sources were journals, newspapers, magazines, reports and the internet. For the primary data, a survey questionnaire was utilised. The survey questionnaires were administered to young people, youth workers, parents and pastors in three northern state capitals, namely Damaturu in Yobe State; Bauchi in Bauchi State; and Maiduguri in Borno State. BH's violent campaign has been more fierce in these cities than anywhere else in the North at the time of the study (see map in Figure 1 above).

Due to security and logistical limitations, a snowball sampling technique was

adopted.¹ Although conversations about BH have become a popular discourse in Nigeria in recent times, the topic remains sensitive and carries high security risks. The sample size amounted to 60 respondents (male and female), 20 respondents from each state capital. Data for this research was analysed using thematic analysis. The responses revealed that the activities of BH have greatly violated the dignity of young people in educational, psychological, social, religious and economic areas. Those key areas will be the focus of this article. Appropriate ethical procedures were followed to ensure the safety and protection of the young people involved in this study, they asked to complete consent forms and, to secure their anonymity, their real names were not used.

3. Understanding Human Dignity

The fundamental struggle for dignity has been a driving force in all of human history. As stated earlier, it is not within the scope of this article to enter into the whole debate on human dignity; rather it will focus on the main areas of agreement that enhance the goal of this article, which is to look at the violation of young people's dignity by BH. Claassens (2011:34) humbly warns that "[t]o use the term human dignity haphazardly without attention to the context ... is to water down the meaning to the point where it can no longer speak with much force". The setting in which this term is used in this article is that of upholding human worth in a context of dehumanisation. Human dignity will be considered from a biblical perspective.

Human dignity is a multi-faceted concept. The word 'dignity' stems from a Greek and Roman (Latin) background and conveys the idea of 'worthiness of honour and esteem'. According to Lebech (2003:59), human dignity is the fundamental value of a human being. The biblical teaching of human beings created in the image of God provides the kernel of the view of human persons and, consequently, the dignity of the human person and the intrinsic value of human life. Bosman (2013:51) notes that "the 'image of God' positions humankind in the liminal space between fragility and greatness, rooted in the potential to reflect and to resemble his likeness". The human person is created by God in His own image and likeness (Gn 1:26-27). Anderson (1982:54) puts it succinctly that "the concept of *imago Dei* is the foundational concept for understanding the biblical teaching concerning the nature and value of the human personhood". The fact that human beings are created in the image of God is what makes them distinct in the plan of creation. Thus the value of human life must be understood in its full depth when the human person is seen as the image and child of God. Hence, Hilpert (1997:6) contends that the image of human persons created in the image of God applies to all persons, without any difference in the quality of human beings in the cultural, ethical or societal background from which they originate. The words of Musa (2015:5) are appropriate at this stage; he rightly notes that human dignity is a God-given life quality of being human, derived from God's own nature in terms of God's image and the likeness of God's communicable

attributes that constitute wholeness, from God toward one another and with one another in God's presence.

It must be understood that, from God's perspective, human dignity is more than just a worth or value. De Lange (2013:9) points out that "dignity is not a 'value' understood as an abstract idea, but the moral qualification of concrete practices of social recognition". Human persons are ontologically endowed with a dignity of transcendent values. Koopman (2007:181) understood this concept very well when he proposed that:

Human dignity is an inalienable dignity. It is indelible. It is a mark put on us by the love of God that permeates our being to the core. This dignity does not have to be earned. It cannot be lost. It is intimately mine and it is far more enduring than any of my characteristics.

Mitchell (2013:14) adds that, insofar as this dignity comes from God alone, it cannot be taken away by other human beings. Thus dignity belongs to the definition of being human. Human dignity is the fundamental value of the human being and, as such, every human being must be treated with such dignity that God has bestowed on him/her. The gift of God's image is present and active in every person because God created humans in His image. God Himself has bestowed this dignity, and it has its roots in the persona being the image of God.

Human dignity from a biblical concept carries the notion of relatedness. Claassens (2011:39) notes that "human dignity is inherently relational rather than individualistic in its orientation". It can be argued that the dignity of every human being is concretised in the relationship between people as a relation of equality (Webster, 2007:23). True dignity can only be realised when it is understood in relation to others. The richness of human dignity lies in the relationships of humankind – the relation with God, with each other and with creation (Vorster, 2010:211). Koopman (2007:183) stresses that true humanity is not defined by independence and rationality, but by the willingness to enter into a relationship with others, which shows not only our dependability on others, but also our vulnerability.

A discussion on understanding human dignity can best be summed up from the Trinitarian understanding of human dignity, as argued by Koopman (2007:18):

We have dignity because we are created in God's image; we have dignity because God became human in Jesus Christ and redeems us; we have dignity because the Holy Spirit, as God at work in the world, is actualizing in and through us the new humanity that is a reality in Jesus Christ.

This article expresses the belief that the basis for the Christian affirmation of human dignity lies in the following faith convictions, which will serve as

a conceptual framework for understanding human dignity as discussed in this article. Firstly, that all human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and all humans are the mirror of God's divine glory. Secondly, every human life is intricately interrelated with the rest of God's creation. As Bosman (2013:51) argues, as the image of God the whole of humankind is related to God and connected to creation. Hence, the human relationship with God is experienced and lived out in mutually interdependent relationships. Thirdly, human beings are called upon to uphold the integrity of God's creation; and life is a gift of God and from God and therefore it should not be abused in any way or in any form. Barth (1961:344) contends that the purpose of human conduct is to preserve and protect life and everything it entails, such as humaneness, compassion, caring and social concern.

4. The Violation of Young People's Dignity by Boko Haram's Violence in Northern Nigeria

Human dignity is violated when one individual deprives another individual or community of both the means and capacities necessary to live with dignity and freedom. This section will look at the violation of young people's dignity as a result of BH's violence in Northern Nigeria. However, to put it in a better context, we will first look at a profile of BH and its activities.

4.1 The Boko Haram Movement

BH is a militant sect driven by the ideology of a fanatical Islamic practice. The sect is currently executing violent attacks in the North of the Nigerian state, with threats of extending its attacks to the South. The phrase 'Boko Haram' means 'Western education is evil' in the Hausa language². Like its grievances, the origin of BH is controversial. Onuoha (2010:54-67) believes that the existence of BH can be traced to the mid-1990s. It then existed under the name 'Ahlulsunna wai'jama'ah hijra', and later thrived under various names such as the 'Nigerian Taliban' and 'Yusufiyyah' sect. The sect claims to have over 40 000 members in Nigeria and some neighbouring African countries, such as the republics of Chad and Benin, and the Niger Republic, as well as in faraway Somalia and Mauritania. In August 2011 the commander of the US Africa Command, General Carter Ham, held that BH had ties with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Somalia's al-Shabaab.

According to Aghedo and Osuma (2012:853), BH appears to represent a unique problem in several respects compared with other insurgent groups in the country. First, the group is more sophisticated, coordinated, menacingly daring and seemingly genocidal in its campaigns. Unlike the earlier rebel groups, it deploys violence against public and private enterprises, as well as against public figures and innocent, ordinary citizens, especially non-indigenes and Christians in the North. More strikingly, it uses suicide bombers, hitherto unknown in the country. Second, BH has strong links with foreign actors who assist it in the areas of

sponsorship and training. Third, unlike the past insurgent groups, BH's goals, demands and grievances are controversial. They have not yet been articulated clearly in any known document.

The violent activities of BH have become a serious national, regional and international concern. The group attracted worldwide attention in July 2009, when it staged a violent anti-government uprising that killed over eight hundred people, including civilians, group members and security personnel. According to Onuoha (2012:5), the revolt attracted one of the heaviest security crackdowns in Nigerian history. The five-day confrontation ended on 30 July, when the police captured and executed Boko Haram's charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf. In May 2014, the group again drew international attention when it kidnapped over two hundred schoolgirls in an attempt to broker a prisoner exchange. The group's methods have evolved from poorly planned and open confrontations with state security forces, to increasing use of improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations, ambushes, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings and kidnappings (Komolafe, 2014:56). There is no exact figure on casualties from Boko Haram attacks, though the former president of the country, Goodluck Jonathan, has stated that the group has "so far claimed over 12 000 lives, with more than 8 000 persons injured or maimed, not to mention the displacement of thousands of innocent Nigerians" (Wakili & Igidi, 2014). According to Onuoha (2014:1), BH lures its members mainly from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children, mostly from but not limited to Northern Nigeria. Isa (2010:245) adds that it is also alleged that its membership includes some wealthy, educated and influential people. The group is known to support its operations through diverse sources of funding, including membership dues, donations from politicians, financial assistance from foreign terrorist groups, raiding of banks, and ransoms from kidnappings. It also has extorted money from residents of areas it has controlled, as well as from wealthy persons whom they have intimidated into paying protection fees to avoid being attacked by them.

4.2 Impact of Boko Haram's Violence on Young People's Dignity

Since the July 2009 revolt, the sect has evolved into a more dynamic and decentralised organisation, capable of changing and combining tactics as well as expanding or reordering target selection. Boko Haram has attacked a variety of groups, including security agents, Christians, traditional rulers, politicians, schoolchildren and teachers, public servants, traders, and, lately, anyone who is not a member of the group. However, this article will focus on the four areas in which the BH violence has infringed on young people's dignity.

4.2.1 Educational Impact

As indicated above, BH's name and ideology indicate antipathy towards Western educational norms. Falola (2014:204) reports that, in 2012, BH targeted schools

on a regular basis, with 47 attacks that year resulting in 77 fatalities. While attacks on schools decreased in 2013, perhaps due to frequent school closures in its areas of operation, Boko Haram carried out 14 attacks on schools in which 119 people died. In February 2014, Boko Haram attacked a boarding school in Yobe state, killing 29 male students but sending the female students away with admonitions to get married.

Education is important not just for the individual, but also for the individual's community. The constant attacks on schools by BH have disrupted education in many parts of Northern Nigeria. Many young people are too afraid to go school for fear of being attacked, as narrated by one of the respondents:

I am too afraid to go school, after we heard about the abduction of the Chibok girls; nobody in our community wants to go to school again. We are too afraid to go to school even though we know that school is the key to our future development, but we are more concerned with our lives than school at the moment (L, 19-year-old woman).

Similarly, even in the areas where young people are managing to go to school, many have confessed that the fear of BH has affected their educational achievements negatively:

I went from a straight 'A' student to failing every class because I was concentrating on what will happen next, when BH will attack again, I was more concerned about the safety of my life than my educational future. I will often take my books to read, but I keep picturing what has happened to my fellow classmates, how they were killed, how blood was flowing; I then lose concentration (M, 20-year-old man).

International longitudinal studies by Frederick and Goddard (2007:323) show that early "psychosocial risk experiences" (such as violence) affect the ability of children and young people to function effectively, both at school and later in the labour market, increasing the likelihood of problems in adolescence and adulthood. The right to education for every child, youth and adult is fundamental. Education counts more than ever in the contemporary world, which is characterised by rapid change and technological advances. Hence, the direct attacks on young people and schools by BH are an infringement of a vital part of young people's dignity. As stated earlier, education does not only benefit the individual, but it also benefits their families, communities and the wider nation. The activities of BH are making educational activities almost impossible in most parts of Northern Nigeria. Atkinson (2004:155) categorically states that "every young person has the human right to a quality education and to learn in a safe, respectful school environment". Furthermore, Bushnell (2013:785) asserts that:

There are inherent rights and responsibilities that proceed from human

dignity and demand recognition. These include respect for human life from conception until natural death, the right to make free decisions, the right to choose a state in life, the right to food, to religious freedom, to meaningful work, education and shelter.

The destruction of schools and the abduction of school children by BH is a clear violation of young people's dignity and right to education in Northern Nigeria, and it calls for urgent attention.

4.2.2 Psychological Impact

Closely related to the educational impact of BH's violence on young people is the psychological impact. Berman, Silverman and Kurtines (2000:8) support the idea that the psychological impact of violence on young people is highly diverse and complex. Psychologists believe that, while a broad range of factors, including features of the violence experienced and those of the young person and his or her environment, will influence his or her attempts to manage the violent event, a traumatic experience will have a significant impact on the majority of young people (Murphy, 2003:27). Moreover, the link between exposure to violence and distress symptoms in young people has been clearly documented in the literature (Berman et al, 2000:10). The immediate psychological impact of Boko Haram's violence on young people includes feelings of fear, anger, hostility, anxiety and depression, as is shown in this excerpt of feedback from the survey:

Since the tragedy of BH in my area I am always afraid, afraid for my life, afraid for my future, and it is like I am even afraid of my shadow. I keep have the feeling that BH will attack me; any money and my life is no longer. I always felt that I wanted somebody to speak to, to help me unload some of the fears off myself. I couldn't really talk to any of the adults because I am also afraid of them (K, 17-year-old girl).

Similarly, some of the young people have resorted to anger as a result of BH's violence affecting them:

I am angry with everyone, with God, adults, government, police, you name them. How can they not protect us, how they can they just allow some few individuals to ruin my future? I am tired of everything; I wish I belong to another country. I can't wait to see the day that this ordeal will be over and life is back to normal. If I have my way, I will also take a gun and protect myself (B, 21-year-old man).

Haruna (2013:92) notes that many young people in Northern Nigeria are full of anger and they are seeking revenge. The resulting psychological impact of Boko Haram's violence in Northern Nigeria is reflected particularly in relation to community violence. This psychological impact may include self-hatred, a deep distrust of the community and society as a whole, a lack of a sense of safety and a damaged internalised sense of morality and notions of caring for others. There is

deep hurt among many young people in Northern Nigeria that is affecting them psychologically and that needs to be addressed.

4.2.3 Social Impact

A respectful, supportive environment free from violence supports the realisation of young people's individual personalities and fosters the development of social, responsible and actively contributing citizens in the local community and larger society. Research (Berman et al., 2000:8) show that young people who have not experienced violence and who develop in a healthy manner are less likely to act violently, both in childhood and when they become adults. Preventing violence in one generation reduces its likelihood in the next. Boko Haram's violence has affected the social strata in Northern Nigeria enormously, making young people enemies of each other instead of friends, and social functions are now dictated by religion.

I remember growing up in Northern Nigeria and how peacefully and harmoniously we used to live. There was no ethnic or religious hatred or tension between young people – Christians and Muslims alike. We very closely shared almost everything around us. Unfortunately, things have now changed drastically, with young people no longer celebrating things together; neighbourhoods are now separated according to religion, I have no trust for people who are not from my faith. Many of us are now made to believe that Muslims are our enemies, and I know that not all Muslims are bad (J, 22-year-old woman).

BH's violence has contributed to the breakdown of social cohesion that used to be part and parcel of young people in Northern Nigeria, and has caused the disruption of local governance systems; this, in turn, has resulted in established safety nets becoming almost unavailable. One of the young people interviewed laments as follows:

I am totally confused, I don't know what to make of what is happening to us regarding BH, we are faced with various conflicting messages from adults, on the one hand we are told that we belong to one country and we are one people, on the other hand, we see what BH has done to many of us, especially to us Christians, they kill us, they bomb us and destroy our churches, how can we then say we are brothers and sisters? There will be a time that everyone of us will end taking up arms to fight each other, it not was so before, but why is it happening now? (F, 18-year-old boy).

Stavrou (1993:6) warns that young people's repeated exposure to violence may lead to the reinforcement of a "culture of violence", with young people believing that violent behaviour is acceptable and normal. The concept of dignity involves the social strata of all humans. In ancient Rome, according to Pöschl (1989:25), Dignitas was a social concept describing the particular social role of a person. The bearers of the role and the people around them had to pay duty to this social

role in their behaviour. Young people need to have the feeling that the society to which they belong recognises them as equal human beings with self-respect. The activities of BH are not only dehumanising young people socially, but their social identity also is being humiliated. This is because their identity is not respected in the society they belong to through the activities of BH.

4.2.4 Economic Impact

Boko Haram's violent activities in Northern Nigeria continue to have a huge economic impact on young people. Umar and Saulawa (2012:2) acknowledge that many observers have linked the Boko Haram problem to the economic backwardness of Northern Nigeria, which has continued to be impacted negatively by the ongoing crisis caused by BH. Similarly, Shehu (2013:18) affirms that Boko Haram's violence has affected young people's social welfare and economic development in Northern Nigeria, and that it has aggravated unemployment. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the survey:

I was the breadwinner in my family doing achaba business (local transport with motor bike), but since the coming of BH, they have stopped us from doing that and I don't have a job to feed my younger ones, not to talk of taking care of my parents. I cannot depend on the government to give me job, now I don't know what to do. They claim that BH people are using achaba as means to throw bombs in public places, but how can we then survive? (S, 25-year-old young man).

There is no denying that economic activities have been seriously hampered by the scourge of Boko Haram's activities in Northern Nigeria. Kabir (2014:78) laments that many young people have lost their lives, others have lost their properties, while many have completely lost their sources of livelihood, thereby increasing the pressure on the already saturated labour market and contributing to unemployment. Many resources that were meant for development projects have been diverted to relief services and the deployment of security personnel.

The UN world report on violence and health (UN, 2014:42) summarises the economic impact of violence succinctly:

In calculating the costs of violence to a nation's economy, a wide range of factors needs to be taken into consideration. Indirect costs may include, for example: the provision of shelter or other places of safety and long-term care; lost productivity as a result of premature death, injury, absenteeism, long-term disability and lost potential; diminished quality of life and decreased ability to care for oneself or others; damage to public property and infrastructure leading to disruption of services such as health care, transport and food distribution; disruption of daily life as a result of fears for personal safety; disincentives to

investment and tourism that hamper economic development.

The economic impact of BH's violence on young people has put Northern Nigeria backwards economically. The rate of poverty is higher in the northern part than in the southern part of the country. Average poverty rates for the North-East and North-West are 59.7 and 58% respectively, while the North Central region has an average rate of 48.8%. In contrast, the average rates in the South-West, South-East and South-South are 30.6, 39 and 37.6% respectively (World Bank, 2013:10).

5. Implications for Church and Youth Workers

For many centuries, the quest to protect human dignity has remained a matter of high urgency. As seen above, the activities of BH in Northern Nigeria have had a considerable negative impact on the lives of young people. When the rights due to young people are meted out to them, human dignity has been acknowledged, but in the case where these rights are denied or trampled upon, it calls for immediate attention. Hansen, Koopman & Vosloo (2011:505) note that any violation of rights shows dehumanisation and that we need not accept inhumanity as a normal pattern of interaction on the African continent. This section will look at the implications of the BH violation of young people's dignity for both the church and youth workers.

It should be recognised from the outset that there are no quick fixes for the challenge of the menace of BH in Northern Nigeria. However, the churches, as an agent of God's redemption, and the channel of re-humanisation, have a great role to play in the restoration of young people's human dignity in Northern Nigeria. Schwobel (2006:44-58) captures it well when he says:

The church of Christ is committed to sharing the situation of those who have lost their dignity in human eyes and to communicating to them the message that their dignity is re-created by the one who first bestowed it upon them. In communicating this promise in speech and action, the church is called to become the witness of the recovery of human dignity because humans are dignified by God.

The church in Nigeria (especially in Northern Nigeria) needs to journey with young people in their state of dehumanisation through the activities of BH. Bryson (2001:270) rightly notes that any form of Christianity that does not accompany people on their journey of life will not fully grasp their pain or problems. The church and youth workers can journey with young people in several ways in order to facilitate the restoration of their dignity.

First, the church and youth workers in Northern Nigeria must strive to affirm the human dignity of young people. The role of the church and youth workers in relation to healing and affirming the human dignity of young people in this

context implies being prophetic – to denounce injustice, to tell the truth and to provide space where young people can speak the truth and share their stories of humiliation, exclusion and all forms of impact. Bryson (2001:34) comments that “[t]he affirmation of human dignity is the theological basis for the Christian commitment to human rights”. Hence, to affirm the dignity of young people, the church must assume a role that will bring healing and peace to young people. The church in Northern Nigeria can heal the wounds of young people that have experienced the impact of BH’s violence; the church can be a safe place for young people to tell their stories, to be comforted by others, to understand deeply that none of the violations of dignity that they have experienced can destroy the infinite worth of every human being created in the image of God.

Second, the church and youth workers must engage the government and BH in a dialogue in order to end the gross violation of young people’s dignity by BH. The church should condemn the abuse of human rights that has become commonplace in Northern Nigeria and speak out on behalf of the victims of injustice and abuse – in this context, young people. According to Ackley (1993:78), in situations in which the human dignity of young people is violated, it is not enough only to dress the wounds of the victims, but rather one needs to take vigorous action to change the contexts and ideologies that create these wounds.

Third, the church must continue to remain the salt and the light of the world in contexts of violation of human dignity. The church is called to be “the salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mt 15:13-14), to also be “in the world but not of the world” (Jn 17:15-18). Memoire’s (2005:14) comments are appropriate at this juncture:

In listening to this call, the church can generate a dynamic from hostility to hospitality in the whole society. Such movement from hostility to hospitality may be the most powerful witness of engaging for life and of bringing back life where death has appeared to reign, and thus of the hope that, one day, all violence will be overcome.

The twofold role of the church needs to be emphasised; at times the church will be like salt, helping to preserve what is good in society or making life more pleasant and enjoyable. At other times it will be like light, exposing injustice and untruth and sectional interests, setting free from various forms of bondage and injustice, drawing attention to forgotten people, pointing to a better way, showing how it is possible to be peacemakers and to do justice and be concerned for the wider world, pointing to new life in Christ.

Fourth, the church and youth workers must promote interfaith dialogue among young people. The experience of interfaith dialogue among young people will help them to humanise the other religions. In discussing the involvement of young people in interfaith dialogue, it may be instructive to understand that such

dialogue comes in different forms. Hence, Haney's (2009:23-45) framework for interfaith dialogue is worth considering for youth workers in Northern Nigeria. His framework entails the following: (1) "living dialogue", or that which consists of building positive relationships with people from other faith traditions, as they are neighbours and fellow human beings; (2) the "dialogue of cooperation", an interfaith collaboration for a unifying cause, such as that of promoting peace and justice in the world; (3) the "dialogue of religious experience", which opens a person to respect what the other deems sacred: how one experiences God in one's life; and (4) "theological dialogue", discussions on the knowledge and interpretations of God. All these forms of interfaith dialogue will help young people to learn from rather than just about other religions. The participation of youth in interfaith efforts shows that they have the capacity to both learn and contribute to interreligious understanding and community-building. Through interfaith dialogue, groups of young people can make their unique contribution to the common cause of creative co-existence and would be able to unite and face the common enemy. However, this is far easier said than done, and to do it well, interfaith dialogue programmes must be evaluated so that lessons, good and bad, can be learned for future application.

6. Conclusion

Violence of any sort against young people is a fundamental violation of human dignity. This article has discussed the understanding of Christian human dignity in the light of the violation of young people's dignity through the activities of BH in Northern Nigeria. The article contends that all human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and that all humans reflect God's divine glory. Every human life is intricately interrelated with the rest of God's creation. Human beings are called upon to uphold the integrity of God's creation because life is a gift of and from God and therefore it should not be abused in any way or any form.

This article further has revealed that the menace of BH in Northern Nigeria has contributed to the dehumanisation of young people – educationally, economically, socially and psychologically. It proposes that the church, as God's agent, has an enormous role to play in the re-humanisation of young people in Northern Nigeria who have been affected by the activities of BH. The church in Northern Nigeria must endeavour to affirm the human dignity of young people in various ways. The church must engage the government and BH in a meaningful and sustainable dialogue in order to end the gross violation of young people's dignity by BH. The church must continue to remain the salt and the light of the world in the context of the violation of human dignity.

Finally, the church must promote an engagement in interfaith dialogue among young people. Because they are human and made in the image of God, young people in Northern Nigeria, irrespective of their sex, profession, religion,

culture or family, have an inviolable, intrinsic worth that must be recognised and respected. This worth cannot be lost, taken away or damaged, but can be disrespected and assaulted, and, therefore, is subject to being defended and protected by human rights.

7. Notes

1. Snowball or chain referral sampling is a method that has been used widely in qualitative sociological research. The method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest. The method is well suited for a number of research purposes and was particularly applicable because of the sensitive nature of this study.

2. The term 'Boko Haram' implies a sense of rejection and "resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organization, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the jihadist state" Aghedo and Osuma (2012:853). Further, according to Isa (2010), Islamic scholars and clerics who once held sway in the caliphate state and courts assigned the name boko to northern elites who spoke, acted, ruled and operated the state like their Western colonial masters. It is not uncommon to hear in discussions among Islamist scholars and average northerners that poverty and collapsed governance – the bane of the region – can be blamed on the failures and corrupt attitudes of yan boko (modern elites trained at secular schools) who have acquired a Western education and are currently in positions of power. As such, the system represented by the yan boko is unjust, secular and has no divine origin. It therefore is un-Islamic, which in turn accounts for its ineptitude and corruptness.

8. Bibliography

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Author's Declaration

The author declares that there is no financial or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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