

Ethical Analysis of Religious Violence in the Contemporary Debates on Terrorism

By

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This essay attempts to analyse and demonstrate the axiomatic underpinnings and implications of violence in religion against the backdrop of debates on contemporary terrorism. It lends voice to the numerous discussions and intellectual inquiries on the complex relationship between religion and violence which has been common experience in the history of the world's religious traditions. The research is very critical and important in this post 9/11 era of terror, when the surge of extremism and violence in the name of God has become a central topic in political, religious and philosophical debates. Hence, it is the task of this essay to critically respond to the questions about what motivates, characterises, and justifies the violence we see in religion in contemporary times.

The Contemporary debates on terrorism bother on many complex questions about ideological violence such as: is there something religious about violence? Is there anything uniquely violent about religion? What are the moral implications of religion's relationship with violence? Many theorists of religion, sociology, phenomenology, philosophy, and political science have committed trails of unending resources to this end, yet one thing that remains common among them is that life is threatened, hurt or lost on behalf of God. Some of these scholars like Hannah Arendt, Zigmunt Bauman, Dietrich von Hildebrand and Jonathan Sacks have attempted moral responses to these critical questions. They are of the view that the malicious insensitivity that is expressed in such acts of extreme violence and terror are not necessarily engendered by hate or ideology, they are also products of dehumanising attitudes common to human behaviour. Arendt speaks of this when she uses the phrase "banality of evil" to describe the holocaust, Bauman refers to it as the "moral blindness" that reflects the insensitivity of liquid modernity, von Hildebrand considers it as "value blindness" that is caused by satanic pride and concupiscence, and Sacks says it is a "pathological dualism" that leads to "altruistic evil".

This essay is structured in three parts with five chapters. Part One presents the first two chapters, with Chapter One focusing on the challenges of defining and describing what religious violence is by tracing the historical experiences of violence among various religious traditions. Chapter two highlights the issues arising from the debates on whether religion is

inherently violent or not. The Part Two of this essay comprises chapters three which analyses religion's role in contemporary terrorism with special reference to the Nigerian experience, and chapter four, which makes a case for the various justifications of religious terrorism and for the various counterterrorism measures employed to avert them.

The third part and Chapter Five of the essay presents the moral implications and provocations of this religious predicament by highlighting the positions of various theorists on this special nuance of the ethics of violence. The insights from Hannah Arendt's notion of "banality of evil", Dietrich von Hildebrand's view on "value blindness", Zigmunt Bauman's concept of "moral blindness", and Jonathan Sacks' idea of "pathological dualism" in all, show that monstrous violence can be perpetrated by "frighteningly normal" individuals. This idea is better expressed in this analysis as "heartless otherization" which reveals the centrality of "person" in the ethics of violence and recognizes the danger of neglecting the personalistic norm in interpersonal relationships. The result of this whole inquiry is that violence begins with one's very conceptualization of the "other" in the context of the "mimetic rivalry" of "Us vs them" as against the axiomoral understanding of the "other" in the intersubjectivity of "One-an[d]-Other". By identifying the golden rule as a point of moral convergence for religious non-violence, this essay calls for the rejuvenation of the personalist morality in religious beliefs and practices which would help provide viable antidotes to the conceptual and practical challenges of violence in religion.