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Exploring the Nexus between Revealed Truths, Ideology and Religious Terrorism/Extremism: Boko Haram as a Case-study

Dr. Innocent Adejoh Oyibo

Faculty Member, Kogi State University, Ayangba, Kogi State, Nigeria

Abstract:

A core philosophical underpinning that characterizes radical groups like Al Shabaab, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram in contemporary times is their claim to a "divine mandate" to restore Islam to its pristine conditions and install an Islamic caliphate to restore perceived lost moral sanctity and as well replace secular political authority. The rise of Western economic philosophy of capitalism and democracy seems in the eyes of these radical groups to have impinged on the house of Islam as experienced in its idyllic form, most especially during the Ottoman Empire. Embarking on a delineation between "us" and "the other" or "them", these radical groups subscribe to an absolutistic, exclusivist and transcendental concept of truth in order to legitimize their actions. This has led to tragic consequences. Anyone perceived not to be in tandem with their perspective of the truth is categorized as an enemy, an apostate and becomes a target of elimination. Consequently, we are faced with a problem with a three-pronged dimension: epistemological, political as well as theological. This paper sets itself a threefold task: firstly, offer a framework of analysis for understanding of the concept of truth among Exclusivists such as Salafis; secondly, apply this model to the case of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. And thirdly, draw on observations in the first task, it will examine the inherent relationship between dogmatic contents of the so-called revealed religions vis-a-vis ideology and terrorism. The question that undergirds this paper is thus: what is the nexus between the concept of revealed truths, ideology and terrorism? How does the notion of truth among Salafi-Jihadists translate into the philosophical and theological foundation of an ideology and into acts of terrorism and violence?

Keywords: Religious Terrorism, Violence, Salafism, Boko Haram, Exclusivism

1. Introduction

Our contemporary world is characterized by a plurality of faiths but also of cultural identities. Individual freedoms today juxtapose with accommodating the presence of otherness: that which was formerly 'other' in the sense of being not-present, of being 'over-there', is now on our doorsteps and down our streets (Pratt 2013: 245). Consequently, this plurality of faiths comes with a motley of religiously influenced conflicts. Many of contemporary conflicts have in the opinion of several scholars not only economic, cultural or political backgrounds but more importantly, these conflicts bear the hallmark of religion. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993) makes sufficient allusion to this claim when it asserts that the western civilization that is influenced by Christianity, is, as it were, on a war path with Islamic civilization. However, his assumptions have been heavily disputed. Critics suggest, among other things, that he ascribes a degree of homogeneity within the Islamic world that simply does not exist. Religious extremism as I discuss it in this paper is not the sole province of any of the monotheistic religions. All three monotheistic religions have ample manifestations of violence towards 'religious others'. In Christianity, Pratt (2014) notes that arguments in support of extreme fundamentalism and even the enacting of terrorizing violence have been at play ever since Augustine called upon the force of the state to compel a theological outcome - the elimination of a rival schismatic church:

- Whether in respect to the assertion of institutional authority, or the insistence on acceptance of formularies of belief, it could be argued that, indeed, the history of Christianity - at least in the West - has been one of an exclusivist and excluding religious system until the eventual rise of free thought, the autonomy of the individual, and the secular contract that allows for the coexistence of worldview pluralities within the wide society.

Extremist groups of Christian genre abound in the United States of America (e.g. Exclusive Brethren, Phineas Priesthood). Judaism as well is not immune from its own extremists' groups. Furthermore, when we turn to the Middle East we see the traces of religion in the conflicts bedeviling the Orient. Al Qaida, ISIS, riding on the contentious Islamists' interpretation of Islam and the desire to restore the political hegemony of Islam have significantly decimated Christianity and persecuted Christians (Durie 2010). In several parts of Africa, *mujahedeens* are on a rampage: Al Shabaab in Kenya, IQM in North Africa, Boko Haram in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, etc. The religious content in these battles cannot be easily supplanted by the other factors in play such as political dominance or economic marginalization attributed to the West, as it were. The struggle among the monotheistic religions over whose version of revelation and truth is the ultimate one is obvious in these religiously motivated conflicts. Adherents of the Islamic faith consider the Sharia as divinely ordained laws of Allah. The provisions of the Sharia are adjudged to be divinely sanctioned and revealed moral truths, whose authority is beyond the purview of any human creature. Hence, there is no other truth that can exist over and above the

truths revealed in the Qur'an. In the same vein, adherents of Judaism, as well as the Christian faiths, view the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments as transcendent moral truths. Christians, drawing on the Jewish *Tanakh* hold tenaciously to the belief that the Ten Commandments were revealed by God himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. The book of Exodus contains the episode where Moses climbed up to the mountain on the instruction of Yahweh, who Himself dictated the Ten Commandments to Moses. Consequently, all three monotheistic religions subscribe to the view that the truths revealed in their sacred scriptures are transcendent in nature. These truths are binding on all its adherents.

This research interrogates the problem that issues from the truth claims of the monotheistic religions: What is the inherent connection between the truth claims of the monotheistic religions and the formation of ideology? And how does the understanding of such an ideology lead to violence? Since the focus of this paper is to the religious claims of Boko Haram, greater effort shall be placed on the truth claims of Islam and its nexus with violence.

2. Conceptualizing Salafism

The term Salafism is characterized by multiple layers of meaning; hence it defies any singular definition. This also explains the reality that Salafism is not monolithic. Etymologically, the word Salafism is derived from the Arabic word *salaf* which can be translated as pious predecessors, forebears, ancestors, or forefathers (Haykel 2009). It is a movement embedded primarily in Sunni Islam, which sets itself the goal of reforming Islam by attempting to bring Muslims back to the purity of the religion's origins in the sense of emulating its earliest forefathers (*al-salaf*). At the core of Salafism is the concept of *tawhid* (unity of God), which the Salafis understand literally (Moghadam 2008).

There are different groups within Salafism, namely: Salafi Wahhabi, Salafi Yamani, Salafi *takfiri* and Salafi Jihadi, Purists and Politicos etc. However, as Wiktorowicz (2006) remarks: "the various factions of the Salafi community are united by a common religious creed or *aqida*". Uppermost in the categorisation of the religious creed common to all groups is the concept of *tawhid* (the unity of God). This includes three components: "first, the one God is the sole creator and sovereign of the universe.... Second, God is supreme and entirely unique. He does not share characteristics or powers with humans or any of His other creations... and thirdly, God alone has the right to be worshipped" Wiktorowicz (2006). In order to defend this creed, Salafis preach that every devout Muslim must follow the Qu'ran and emulate the practices (Sunna) of the Prophet enunciated in the Hadith. Any forms of external incursions or innovations or application of human intellect and logic to the original sources must be resisted and defeated. There is one single truth, that which has been revealed by the Qu'ran and the Prophet Muhammad.

Moussalli (2009) captures their worldview thus:

- Salafis believe that the trajectory of the Islamic communities after the pious *salaf* moved rather into diverse forms of polytheism (*shirk*), reprehensible innovation (*bid'a*), and superstition (*khurafa*). Thus, neglecting 'the purist' interpretation of Islam, that of *al-salaf al-salih*, is tantamount to neglecting Islam itself. Consequently, all religious, intellectual, social, doctrinal, political conflicts have resulted from the failure to follow the method of *al-salaf al-salih*.

In the main, Salafists are critical of any form of intellectual approach to religion and choose to stay close to plain readings and the direct emulation of Muhammad and his immediate followers. They do not engage in the study of history and philosophy, and abhor the application of Western laws of logic and reasoning. Rationalism is considered as opening a gateway to human desire, distortion and deviancy.

Initial outlines of Salafism are traceable to the 9th century in the works of scholars like Ibn Hanbal (d. 855). His thoughts and ideas found renaissance in the 13th/14th century, specifically at the hands of the very influential Damascus born Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, and his chief acolyte, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1351). Ibn Taymiyya was a scholar belonging to one of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence - *fiqh* - whose religious edicts weigh heavily in today's Salafi Jihadist narratives. Others include, inter alia SayyidQutb and Al Banna of the Egyptian Brotherhood.

3. Conceptualizing Truth and Revealed Truth in Salafism

'Revealed truth' is a compound word. We cannot have an understanding of this compound term if one of the terms remains essentially elusive, in this case, the word 'truth'. Hence in order to understand the full import of its meaning, we must first of all attempt a definition of what we mean by "truth".

Broadly speaking, the problem of truth has been the subject of several definitions majorly in philosophy. Various theories and views of truth continue to be debated among scholars, philosophers, and theologians. In philosophy, three theories of truth are widely accepted [i] the Correspondence Theory; [ii] the Coherence Theory, and [iii] the Pragmatic Theory. Historically, according to the *Oxford Guide to Philosophy*(2005), the most popular theory of truth was the Correspondence Theory. First proposed in a vague form by Plato and by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, the Correspondence Theory emphasizes that true beliefs and true statements correspond to the actual state of affairs. Thus, 'truth' involves both the quality of "faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, sincerity, veracity", and that of "agreement with fact or reality.

Furthermore, Aristotle in his *Laws of Thought* while interrogating the problem of truth, espouses on the principle of non-contradiction: *a thing could not be true and not true in the same way at the same time*. Thus, Truth is defined by way of exclusion; A is A because it could be shown not to be not-A. The truth is consequently understood to be absolute, static, exclusivistically either-or. The concept of "revealed Truths" means the truths that are revealed in the authoritative sacred text or teachings of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism (Tanakh), Christianity (Bible), and Islam (Qur'an). These sacred texts are believed by the adherents of the various religious traditions to contain truths that have been revealed from a transcendent personal Being, called Yahweh, God or Allah. Their contents are hence a reflection of the mind of the Supreme Being. Judaism and Christianity both share similar beliefs that

their sacred texts were first revealed to God's messengers, who revealed them to God's people and their documentation took place over a period. However, Islam teaches that every letter in the Qur'an was dictated by Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (PMBU), who kept them in his memory and wrote them down gradually. Thus, the *Tanakh*, the Bible and the Qur'an are considered, as it were, to be sacred vessels of transcendental truths. Assmann (2010) attests: "What all of these religions have in common is an emphatic concept of truth. They all rest on a distinction between true and false religion, proclaiming a truth that does not stand in a complementary relationship to other truths, but consigns all traditional or rival truths to the realm of falsehood. This exclusive truth is something genuinely new, and its novel, exclusive and exclusionary character is reflected in the manner in which it is communicated and codified. Hence, in dealing with Revealed Truths, we are confronted with truths that are considered by the adherents of the three monotheistic religions to be exclusivist, transcendental and absolute in nature.

How do Salafis conceive truth? For several adherents of the Salafis ideology (such as groups like Al Qaida, Taliban, Al Shabaab, ISIS, Boko Haram) as this is also true for all Muslims, all truths are derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith. Hence, all truths have a transcendental dimension. Legal decisions of renowned forebears in the legal tradition, who have based such on the Qur'an as well as on the Hadith, are also categorized as immutable truths though not as absolute as those contained in the Qur'an. This explains their desire to impose Sharia, Allah's divine moral truths and jurisprudence on all and sundry. There is therefore only one true God (tawhid), one truth (Allah's revelations), one authority (Prophet Muhammed and Hadith), one authentic narrative (that of the Salafis) and one right way to be (The way of Islam).

Consequently, some scientific truths that are adjudged to stand in contradistinction to the laws of Allah are rejected. Salafis reject any attempt to apply the scientific method to interrogate the sources of truth. Thus, a literalist or direct reading of the sources of truth forms the fulcrum of their scriptural hermeneutics. For Salafis "meaning and truth can be directly read without recourse to a frame of meaning that supplies a key to understanding" (Pratt 2006).

Onuoha(2012) notes that Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram claimed not to believe in most of the tenets of Western science: "He denied that the world is round or that rain is caused by evaporated water". Whatever is not found in the scripture or in the Hadith does not have the same truth value as what can be found in the scripture. Hence, the sources of truth are considered as apodic (self-evident, self-expressive) in nature.

It can be sufficiently asserted that the concept of truth among Salafis is absolutist (superiority of knowledge, truth) and fundamentalistic. These truths are understood to be inerrant, unambiguous and universal. They contain divine sanctions for not abiding by them as well as divine rewards for abiding by them. This has some consequences on the *weltanschauung* of members that subscribe to Salafism. It leads them to develop radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and a Manichean worldview. The way and manner they carry out earthly duties are as Hoffman describes: a "divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative" (Hoffman, B., 273). In fact, it is a sacramental act.

Salafis, especially Salafi Jihadis could easily be classified as the fundamentalist's groups that would occupy the apex of Pratt seminal sequential paradigm of fundamentalism which he called 'impositional fundamentalism' (Pratt 2013; 2014). They are so-called because among other things, they appropriate absolute truth to themselves alone and negate any other forms of truth. In other words, in asserting absolute truth to themselves, they lay claim to the "relevant central position of their religious tradition and claim to proclaim its normative tradition most accurately" (Pratt 2013). Consequently, they cast the 'religious other' as an apostate, an infidel, even as "satanic". They apply "negative valuation to 'otherness' as such, with a corresponding assertion of self-superiority vis-a-vis such 'other'. Thus, for example, my God is greater than your god. My truth reigns over your ignorance. The authenticity of my faith contrasts with the feeble delusion you entertain. My laws express the divine reality directly which is infinitely superior to the laws which derive from human ideas" (Pratt 2013). *Boko Haram* adherents perceive Christians and those Muslims who do not subscribe to their *weltanschauung* as enemies, thereby making them legitimate targets of attack; which explains the incessant attacks on churches as well as mosques, particularly in northern Nigeria. Shekau in a You Tube video describes Christians as *kufir*: "You Christians should know that Jesus is a servant and prophet of God. He is not the son of God. This religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion. It is paganism. God frowns at it. What you are practicing is not religion" (Shekau, *You Tube*, January 15, 2012, cited in Ori 2013)

Furthermore, it can also be asserted that Salafists have an exclusivist understanding of truth. Their logic is akin to that of Aristotle in his *Laws of Thought*. The philosopher Aristotle is the progenitor of the principle of non-contradiction. He asserts: "a thing could not be true and not true in the same way at the same time. The truth is defined by way of exclusion; A is A; because it could be shown not to be not-A". This correctly applied to Salafists perception of truth which leads to exclusionism. Pratt (2013) remarks about religious exclusivism are insightful here: "religious exclusivism involves the assertion of a particular religion (or form of that religion) as being, in fact, the essence and substance of true universal religion as such, thereby excluding all other possibilities. Mutual tolerant coexistence of religions is simply not possible. As exclusivists, they do not accommodate any forms of otherness, or religious others, or even dissent within its very rank and file. The 'other' is categorized as inferior and the exclusivist even prefers to remain wholly apart from the other. These traits abound evidently among adherents of Boko Haram. In short, they love to ghettoize themselves and maintain an exclusive identity, as it were, of the 'pure us', to the extent that the presence of a 'religious or ideological other' is actively resisted (Onuoha 2012). In his taxonomy of exclusivists, Pratt (2013) distinguishes between three variants: open, closed, and extreme/rejectionist: "the key distinguishing feature denoting extreme/rejectionist exclusivism is the negative valorizing of the 'other' - howsoever defined - with concomitant harsh sanctions and limitations imposed". Boko Haram adherents could be seen as belonging to the closed and extreme/rejectionist category.

It is pertinent to highlight here that Salafists' understanding of truth foregrounds and underpins all their beliefs, actions, ideologies, endeavors, their self-understanding (identity) and others.

4. Conceptualizing Boko Haram

In recent times, there has been an explosion in the literature available on beginnings, nature and ideology as well as aims of this organization that calls itself *Boko Haram*. Etymologically, the word *Boko Haram* is situated in both Hausa and Arabic languages, which means "Western education is forbidden/a sin." *Boko* is the Hausa word for 'book' while *Haram* is the Arabic term for 'sinful' or 'ungodly.' As its name suggests, the group is adamantly opposed to what it sees as a Western-based incursion that threatens traditional values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria (Forest 2012). Blanquart (2012) discusses *Boko Haram* solely from the perspective of a terrorist organization. Arguing from the perspective of a motley harmful actions that the group has carried out (such as series of suicide bombings, attack on civilians, kidnap of the Chibok girls etc), he posits that *Boko Haram* fits into every definition of (religious) terrorism despite the fact that defining terrorism is a matter of perspective (32). However, many other scholars such as Adesoji (2011) and Onuoha (2012) view *Boko Haram* as a militant Islamic sect with religious as well as political agenda. Ekanemet al (2012) define *Boko Haram* as "a group of Islamic fundamentalists that are committed to carrying out Holy War (*Jihad*) and Islamize northern states of Nigeria and probably the entire country through Jihad." *Boko Haram*'s ideology and rhetoric indicate that the group aims to effect a political change, which it believes is in the interests of a Muslim constituency. This is reflected in the group's name, *Jama'atu AhlisLadda'awatiwal-Jihad* (people committed to the propagation of the *Sunnah* and Jihad). Jihad translates as "struggle," and *Boko Haram*'s rhetoric uses the interpretation of jihad preferred by Islamist groups as meaning "holy war." Consequently, Boko Haram ideology can be summarized thus: Western Civilization is Forbidden, Western Education is Sin, and Western Education is Sacrilege. The Nigerian society, most especially its elites, have become incredibly corrupted as a result of Western influences and Islam is not given its rightful place. The panacea its adherents argue is to engage in a jihad to dislodge Western incursions of every kind and establish the sharia as the single source of jurisprudence to ensure a much saner society.

The beginnings of *Boko Haram* are mired in controversy. However, there is general consensus among scholars that the group came to the fore in late 2002 under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf, who was a very charismatic speaker. He denounced democracy, in the sense that it encouraged man-made laws which usurped that efficacy of the divine laws enshrined in the Qur'an and Hadith. He established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighboring countries enrolled their children. Although the schools provide cheap education, they also imbue young boys with a radical interpretation of Islam, and promote a worldview that divides the world between true believers and infidels (Brinkelet al, 2012). Thus, members of *Boko Haram* are adherents of exclusivism, as it were. Exclusivism essentially is the view that one's religion is the purest and only way to worship God truly and every other way is corrupted and does not provide a locus for salvation. Accordingly, exclusivists hold that salvation can be achieved only in one's religion. Yusuf and his followers believe in the salvific supremacy of Islam. Diana Eck (2003) describes exclusivists' posture saying, "Our community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth to all others."

4.1. The Relationship between Revealed Truths, Ideology, and Religious Terrorism: Exploring Three Hermeneutical Frameworks

4.1.1. Douglas Pratt

In the view of Pratt, no religion *per se* espouses terrorism. The teachings of all religions highlight the importance of peace. However, he opines that religion in its extreme forms and religious ideology fueled by fundamentalism, is arguably the point of connectivity between religion and terrorism. Pratt (2014) core assertion lies in his thesis that "the cumulative dynamic of fundamentalism is at the root of religious extremism and terrorism".

Pratt begins outlining his major idea by delineating extremism/extremist. He thus notes that extremists basically take "their own wider group identity - their religion or tradition - to an extreme; not by a move away from the centre, but rather by intensifying its self-understanding and self-proclamation as representing, or being, the centre" (Pratt 2014). In essence, the identity of extremists lies in their appropriation of the centre, of orthodoxy to themselves. In fact, they appropriate to themselves the definition of what truth and falsehood are. Pratt also rightly notes that extremists do not exist in a vacuum. They always belong to a tradition, and have vested interests in the preservation and proliferation of that tradition. Hence they always require a specific religious identity or tradition as "the primary reference for self-legitimization" (Pratt 2014). One can, therefore, infer, that extremists exist in the three monotheistic religions, each one laying claim on true orthodoxy, on being the centre.

Furthermore, Pratt (2014) holds therefore that religious terrorism "is the end result of a fundamentalist ideological trajectory". Fundamentalism (a more or less a religio-political category that is found in almost all the major religions in the world) in its pejorative meaning is used to describe anyone who is regarded as "having a closed mind with regard to any particular issue". However, in its religious usage, it has a much broader meaning. It can mean as Pratt opines, "an imagined 'golden age', believed to have pertained at the religion's foundation, is held up as the model or reference point for contemporary reality". Pratt (2014) defines it thus: Religious fundamentalism can imply a narrow, strict and limited metaphysics and set of doctrines, which to a greater or lesser degree hardly impinge on the wider life of a society; it can also mean a worldview perspective that engenders, if not demands, the advocacy of a socio-political ordering and action to achieve an intended outcome.

In building his framework of arguments to elucidate how fundamentalism in its extreme form can give rise to violence and terrorism Pratt deploys twenty factors into a progression of ten sets – or 'features' – of paired factors. These features are further sub divided into three 'phases' so as to yield a paradigm typology involving a sequence of a) passive, b) assertive, and c) impositional forms of fundamentalism. Thus, in his explication, the trajectory to violence leads from passive fundamentalism which to all intents and purposes minds its own business so far as the rest of the society is concern via an assertive fundamentalism, which does not mind its own business as such (maybe as a result of being minority), to impositional fundamentalism which in the main, seeks to see "things

change to fit its view of how things should be, and will take steps to make its views known and, if need be, act imposingly to bring about change - by covert or overt interventions, including fomenting revolution or enacting terrorism" (Pratt 2014).

He thus identifies ten key features within this trajectory from passive fundamentalism to impositional fundamentalism which "collectively and cumulatively ... move a fundamentalist mindset from the quirky to the critical, from atavism to aggression, from benign eccentricity to socially endangering activity... it is the particular sequential combination which is important, not just the factors themselves" (Pratt 2006).

Once there is in place a sense of transcendent sanction for programmatic action, the way to the legitimizing of extreme behaviors in order to achieve the requisite outcomes, is eased.

Pratt attempt at explain the nexus between revealed truths and violence in my view does not conclusively elucidate those factors that occasion the migration from one of the stage of fundamentalism to another. Is it likely that some are born into a particular stage? Or are they radicalized into it by some form of the wrong hermeneutics of the sacred texts by the clergy? Is the mobility caused by some socio-economic and well as political factors, such as colonization and globalization? However, it is positive to note that Pratt discourse on the various stages that give rise to extremism is of immense depth.

4.1.2. Richard Sherlock

Sherlock (2013) posits that the monotheistic transcendent structure of rewards and punishments provides a motivation and justification for violence against 'religious others'. The religious terrorist, he says "would be less likely to be deterred by threats or torture because what awaits him or her for failure is far worse than any earthly punishment, and the reward for obedience is far greater than what any temporal power can offer".

These so-called nonnegotiable demands or duties on the believers (which includes inter alia, dietary rules, personal prayer, stipulations about marriage, or sexual restraint) provide cannon fodder for violence. They are seen as sacred commands in the interpretation of the adherents.

In the main, it is the belief in a transcendent God who defines duties for a man in His revelations in the sacred texts of the three monotheistic religions as well as the prospects of reward and the threat of eternal perdition that provide the template for religious terrorism against religious others. This is in contradistinction to non-monotheistic religions who do not possess similar sacred texts. Terrorists that engage in religious violence have a firm belief in afterlife bliss. This is the element that makes them to override the moral and psychological restraints against the mass killing of innocent human beings under the pretext of a religious obligation. These sacred texts, notes Sherlock (2013) "tell of a goal that so strong that it makes earthly, temporal goals seem small and weak... The revealed reward is so wonderful that survival in this wicked world is viewed as almost blasphemous when compared to what God offers for obedience to His commands".

4.1.3. Jan Assmann

The ideas of one of the world's foremost Egyptologist Assmann with regard to monotheism were formulated in his early work *Moses the Egyptian* (1997). Sequel on a plethora of both critical and friendly reactions, he published yet another work *The Price of Monotheism* (2008), in which he responded to the critiques at his thesis. Broadly conceived, Assmann divides religions into two types: primary and secondary religions. The primary religions were the religions of the ancients; religions which had room for the idea of numerous god; religions hinged on cult practices. These are primary in the sense that they were at the preceding phase of man's search for the sacred within his existence. Some of the practices from these cultic religions were to structure out the nature of the religious aura in the succeeding phases of man's quest for the divine. On the other hand, there are secondary religions: religions that did away with the idea of numerous gods and stuck strictly to the One-God disposition. These are the religions of the book. Assmann deals with this issue quite well under the sub-heading 'from the cult to the book'. The cult here refers to primary religions and secondary religions referred to religions of the book. These religions are secondary because they came after the primary and owed a lot in their essence to primary religions. While the numerous cult religions of the ancient East were primary religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are secondary religions. Also, we can classify the numerous religions within the African Traditional setting as belonging to the realm of the primary religions so described.

From the foregoing, the secondary religions are monotheistic and it is these religions that are engulfed in the crises Assmann identifies. For Assmann, the crisis at the heart of monotheism begins at the point of the *Mosaic distinction*. This distinction resides in the difference Moses drew between 'true' and 'false religions' (Assmann 2010). This process begins from when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness and climaxes with the banning of graven images. Assmann (2010) still notes that, "with this ban on images, the distinction between true and false in the divine world, and with it the distinction between reason and madness enters religion for the first time". Thus, all religions in which images are worshipped were considered as illusions. The one and true God could not be adequately captured in images. Anyone who tried to do so was violating His (God's) essence and engaging in false religion. Little wonder the second commandment says "Thou shall worship no other god but me."

Following from the above, this religion of the Jews which was developed by Moses sticks to the idea of one God (monotheism) and by so doing renders the religious practice of numerous gods, a false religion. For this reason, Assmann considers this first experiment in monotheism (the religion of the exiled Jews from Egypt) as having a huge stockpile of negating potentials inside it. Though this new religion (Judaism) abolished some forms of violence as practiced within primary religions, it did bring new forms of hatred into the world; "hatred for pagans, heretics, idolater and their temple, rites and gods" (Assmann 2010). Various shades of this form of hatred have been manifested by each of the secondary monotheistic religions in the world leading to a situation of exclusion among them. Wolin (2013) in his review of the seminal work of Assmann notes:

- "By introducing the 'Mosaic distinction', Assmann argues, the Old Testament established the foundations of religious intolerance, as epitomized by the theological watchwords: "No other gods!" "No god but God!" After that, the pre-monotheistic deities were denigrated as "idols." As Assmann explains: Ancient Judaism "sharply distinguishes itself from the religions of its environment by demanding that its One God be worshiped to the exclusion of all others, by banning the production of images, and by making divine favor depend on less on sacrificial offerings and rites than on the righteous conduct of the individual and the observance of God-given, scripturally fixed laws. These measures and techniques infused monotheistic religious practice with a new stringency—an element of fideistic absolutism—that differed qualitatively from the more diffuse cult practices of its polytheistic predecessors. Moreover, by introducing the idea of a transcendent and omnipotent deity, monotheism was guilty of estranging its adherents from the natural world—a tendency that stood in marked contrast with the world-affirming and life-enhancing orientation of pagan belief systems. In *Of God and Gods*, Assmann goes so far as to suggest that the "religion of the book" was proto-totalitarian. "The Torah with its commandments and prohibitions ... served as a script for leading one's life, running one's business, performing the rituals, ruling the community, in short regulating every aspect of individual and collective existence," he argues. "This was a new phenomenon in the history of writing as well as that of religion and civilization. Never before had writing served such comprehensive functions." (<http://www.saloforum.com/index.php?threads/is-the-egyptologist-jan-assmann-fueling-anti-semitism.2939/>) (Accessed on the 27.09.15)

"For the Jews, their belief that they are God's chosen people require them to exclude themselves. The Christian obligation to evangelize and the Muslim claim to the finality of revelation require that they both exclude the other. In the case of the former, the Israelites left (excluded themselves) Egypt as God's chosen people; for the latter, the Christians and Muslims expelled (excluded others) heretics and infidels from their midst. Assmann (2010) further maintains that, "in choosing Israel to be his people, God marks it out from other people and forbids it to adopt the customs of the environment. By commanding Christians and Muslims to spread the truth to all four corners of the earth, God ensures that those who close their minds to this truth will be shut out". Given this injunction, the intolerance of monotheism takes on a violent turn he thinks.

Within the context of Judaism and Old Testament Christianity, the story of monotheism unfolds like a history of violence punctuated by a series of massacres. In this regard Assmann writes that, "I have in mind the massacre following the scene with the Golden Calf (Ex. 32, 1-34), the slaughter of the priests of Baal after the sacrificial contest with Elijah (1 Kgs. 18), the bloody implementation of the reforms of Joash (2Kgs. 23: 1-27), and the forced termination of mixed marriages (Ez. 9:1-4; 10:1-17)..." (Assmann 2010). All these are instances from the Bible; the Scriptures for the Jews and the Old Testament for the Christian Scriptures. Though, within the Christian faith and following the injunctions of New Testament theology, some of these positions seem to have been enormously moderated with the teachings of Christ about 'loving the enemy and praying for those that hates you'. But the phase of human history when heretics were violently attended to, and even the crusade signals the manifestation of the suppressed tendency to violence, intolerance, and exclusion within Christianity.

However, despite the charge of stoking anti-Semitism levelled against Assmann (for instance, his one-sided depiction of Judaism as legitimizing violence over against passages that dwell on harmony with strangers as we read in Leviticus (19:33-34) or for idealizing the pre-monotheistic times (cf. Wolin 2013), his main line of argument that biblical monotheism, as codified by the Pentateuch, disrupted the political and cultural stability of the ancient world by introducing the concept of "religious exclusivity": that is, by claiming, as no belief system had previously, that *its* God was the one true God, and that, correspondingly, all other gods were false cannot be ignored. By introducing the idea of the "one true God," Assmann suggests that monotheism upended one of the basic precepts of ancient polytheism: the principle of "divine translatability." This notion meant that, in ancient Mesopotamia, the various competing deities and idols possessed a fundamental equivalence. This equivalence provided the basis for a constructive *modus vivendi* among the major empires and polities that predominated in the ancient world.

5. The Way Out: Contemplating Three Models

This research argues that there is an inherent relationship between revealed truths and religious terrorism. The fundamental question always at the center of the discourse is: Where does the truth lie? In whose narrative? Whose version of the revelation bears the truth? Assmann (2010) alludes to this when he opines:

- What all of these religions have in common is an emphatic concept of truth. They all rest on a distinction between true and false religion, proclaiming a truth that does not stand in a complementary relationship to other truths, but consigns all traditional or rival truths to the realm of falsehood. This exclusive truth is something genuinely new, and its novel, exclusive and exclusionary character is clearly reflected in the manner in which it is communicated and codified.

At bottom, the notion of truth operative in the three monotheistic religions is based exclusively on the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction: a thing could not be true and not true in the same way at the same time. The truth is defined by way of exclusion; A is A because it could be shown not to be not-A. The truth is thus understood to be absolute, static, exclusivistically either-or. This is a *classicist* or *absolutist* view of truth.

However, in the face of today's crisis, where the sacred texts of the monotheistic religions are being hijacked in support of unjustifiable violence, how can these revealed truths be relevant *sui generis*, without leading to forms of fundamentalism that can lead to extremism and violence? Beyond the opinion of Pizzuto (2007) that "any effective response in favor of peace must itself be theological", there are other perspectives to be brought into relief. Marco Aurelius can be considered to be the inadvertent father of secular humanism's perspective on truth when he opines several hundreds of years ago that we can only perceive a perspective of the

truth. Consequently, exclusivists such as Salafi Jihadis can only represent one aspect of the truth. Every form of hermeneutics can only be an attempt to understand truth.

5.1. Exegetical

Hans Gadamer has deepened this discourse in several of his research works. In *Truth and Method* (1960), he tries to clarify the phenomenon of 'understanding', and argues that understanding (and the methodology used) of any given text is conditioned by historical factors. We must also take account of the context in which a statement is made, its intended audience, and the question which it is designed to answer. This is certainly a word of caution against any forms of literalism and any attempt to rejecting the historical-critical method of exegesis. Salafis are advocates of literalism and reject any attempts at understanding sacred scriptures using scientific tools. Pizzuto (2007) thus rightly observes: "A brief examination of a hermeneutic shared between radical Islam and fundamentalist Christianity demonstrates that an uncritical use of their respective scriptures has led both factors to a dangerously politicized faith. The result has been a distorted and unjustified conviction that God has taken sides, and moreover that God condones and sanctifies acts of violence against the 'other'" Consequently, he makes a strong advocacy that the Bible (and implicitly the Qur'an) should no longer be looked upon as static deposit of truth, devoid of human and cultural limitations. Biblical truth, rather must be sought with the help of the historical critical methodologies which can uncover the historical context of the sacred texts (i.e., the original intention and purpose, audience, language, meaning and theology, etc.). Distance in time, language, culture, geography, and world-view make any straightforward readings of the biblical books impossible. The roles of sacred texts exegetes and religious leaders in the fight against religious extremism cannot be overemphasized. Hence, it is pertinent that the true meaning of the sacred scriptures are constantly brought to light while wrong interpretations and applications must be vehemently rejected.

5.2. Pluriversality

Pluriversality is the philosophy that argues that there is no one single exclusivity in matters of knowledge and truth. Given the immense contact between cultures in recent times, the universal perspective holds that one culture can no longer speak and others should just listen and not raise their voices. Walter Mignolo, the *de facto* progenitor of the concept of Pluriversality, argues that "Pluriversality is not cultural relativism, but the entanglement of several cosmologies connected today in a power differential. That power differential is the logic of coloniality covered up by the rhetorical narrative of modernity. Modernity is a fiction that carries in it the seed of Western pretense to universality" (<http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/>). It is clear that monotheistic religions went as far claiming that their positions are most appropriate and hence should be adopted by all and sundry in order to attain salvation. They claim to have an exclusive reserve to the truth and whoever does not file in is considered to be on the trajectory of falsehood. Each of the monotheistic religions tends to be very certain that it alone has the complete explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live and attain salvation.

However, the pluriversal perspective as espoused by Mignolo rethinks this attitude predominantly. The essence of the pluriversal perspective is in the rise of the global consciousness. We now live in a multi/pluri-verse and the visions/cosmologies from all these universes challenge and call to question the one-dimensional truth base for universality because a voice or position cannot be universal when it has left other voices behind and out of the dialogue. The task of a new universal or understanding of universality has to be 'pluriversality as a universal project'. Thus, the need for 'pluritopic hermeneutics'. Thinking pluritopically means, therefore to dwell in the border. By dwelling on the border, there is an easy interfacing with otherness.

This pluriversal consciousness is speedily generating the mounting consensus that cultures can no longer operate in isolation. With this consciousness, also, the limitedness of all statements about the meaning of things began to dawn on isolated thinkers, and then increasingly on the middle and even grass-roots levels of humankind. Now it is more and more understood that the Muslim, Christian, secularist, Buddhist, etc. perception of the meaning of things is necessarily limited. The disposition now can no longer be the drive to replace, or at least dominate, all other religions, ideologies, cultures, but to be drawn to enter into dialogue with them, so as to expand, deepen, and enrich each of their necessarily limited perceptions of the meaning of things (Swidler 2010).

5.3. Particularism

Gavin D'Costa in *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (2000) defines Particularism as a 'concept that depicts 'tradition-specific'. Particularism is a category that bears several hallmarks of postmodernism. Hedges (2008) however acknowledging that there is no scholarly consensus on its usage, notes: "particularism (sic) is a post-modern theological approach to other faiths. It rejects the idea that such things as 'religion', 'reason', or 'religious experience' exist as cross-cultural and universal categories. Rather, each culture has its particular structure, discourse and expression, for which these terms may not be valid. It rejects pluralism, which it sees as speaking for universals...".

Particularism, as already noted, is a corollary of postmodernism in so far as it interrogates essentialism (which seeks to define the true and unchanging nature of things) and the grand-narratives which had become commonplace in Western discourse since Immanuel Kant. Jean-Francois Lyotard, for instance, is an example of a Postmodernist, who is particularly suspicious of meta-narratives - totalizing theories, which sought to encapsulate all reality into a common framework. The consequence of this is that Postmodernism denies any forms of absolutism, universalism, etc.: what therefore is truth and valid in one culture or tradition, may not be seen as such in another culture or tradition. In religious parlance this means: truths in one religion are only valid within the ambit of that particular religion and its application is limited to its adherents. Hence, one of the core philosophies of Particularism is its respect for Otherness, (Other).

Particularism consequently interrogates the absolutist claims of the monotheistic religions and argues that (religious) truths are valid only within the boundaries of a particular religion, a particular revelation. In short, D'Costa asserts that "when we come to 'revelation' we are dealing with a *sui generis* reality which therefore admits no comparison" (Hedges 2008). It asserts that every religion must be seen in its terms and each religion must hang on to its claim to truth, without seeking to superintend over other religions or superimpose its categories and epistemic frames over others. This has the implication that Salafis Jihadis such as Boko Haram cannot seek to extend their understanding of truth beyond the boundaries of their culture.

6. Some Comments on Nigerian Government's Fight against Boko Haram

Since the advent of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government has adopted several approaches: 1) militarily, by her military engagement with members of the group who had hitherto taken over some territories from the Nigerian government. Though appreciable success has been recorded thus far; 2) diplomatically, by working hand in hand with global partners, especially with the neighboring countries of Niger, Cameroun and Mali, 3) by developing a counter ideological strategy and intensifying her dialogue with moderate religious leaders. However, more still needs to be done, especially in the development of a counter ideology and the provision of good governance, creating jobs, improving the infrastructure, especially in the aspect of building of more schools. Aguwa rightly advises that "to counter radical Islamism, the role of education should never be minimized (2017: 20).

The Nigerian Government cannot make any serious breakthrough without the effort of prominent Islamic scholars who can counter extremist ideologies and extreme forms of exclusivism. Leaders of the Islamic religion must be engaged to emphasize the fact that the Boko Haram ideology is an aberration of true Islam. They must also correct the falsehood that the adoption of the Sharia necessarily leads to economic prosperity and social justice" (Aguwa 2017). To achieve this, they must be empowered with all requisite tools so that they can advocate the true teachings of the Islamic religion. Mainstream scholars should also be urged to write books to counter deviant ideologies. Furthermore, the Nigerian government should engage the youth, especially those that are susceptible to the ideology of Boko Haram, in dialogue and counseling sessions in the attempt to bring them to mainstream Islamic teachings. A purposeful synergy between these three approaches will definitely decimate the military as well as ideological strength of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to show firstly, that one basic feature of truth is its exclusivity. Truth by its very nature excludes everything else contrary to it. Thus, every statement in order to be meaningful must exclude all its opposites. Secondly, the exclusive nature of truth was highlighted using the example of Salafi-Jihadism with a particular eye on Boko Haram, a group this paper considers it subscribes to the religious ideology of Salafism. This is because there abounds ample evidence of Muslim rhetoric that fires up fears of a threatening West (Western Education is haram) and antipathy to religious 'others' as damned infidels. Furthermore, I have also espoused the fact that the pursuit of truth exclusively while asserting the superiority of one's perspective of so-called revealed truths can lead to extremism and violent exclusion of religious others. I have also shown that extremism is founded on a dualist worldview: the realm of truth and the sacred (dar al-Islam) set in opposition to the realm of falsehood, chaos and war (dar al harb). Finally, I have argued that in order for religions to engage themselves, a meaningfully and peaceful appraisal of the epistemic frames that grounds the conception of truth is immensely vital. There must be a genuine openness to study the truth claims of others and subject one's truths to critical interrogation. Every religion has its own rights to its own absolute truths. However, every religion must be willing to de-absolutize its view of truth, in order to accommodate other versions of truth (pluralistic Inclusivism). Various forms of universalization of truth claims in these 'pluriversal times' need to be moderated. Concluding, it was also noted that despite legitimate criticisms against particularism (Hedges 2008: 120ff), "it rightly criticizes theories which seek to impose a foreign and alien agenda upon other faiths by stealth (Hedges 2008: 130).

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