INTERLOCK OF COMMUNICATION AND THEOLOGY IN MANAGING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract

In Africa, especially in Nigeria, Somalia, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, the resurgence of Islamic terrorist groups like Shiites, Shaba'ab, Seleka, Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen recently described as the third most dangerous terrorist group in the world appear to exacerbate already existing religious crisis in the continent leading to sporadic violence, loss of lives and properties, civil unrest and abject poverty. These overt religious conflicts perpetuated for political, economic, social and psychological needs of some selected few have turned the African Continent into a giant tinderbox of religious and ethnic conflict zones. Consequently, authentic African religious values have been extinct by the odour of religious violence built on principles that are not very connected with authentic religious belief systems entrenched in the two predominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in the continent. The paper therefore argues that in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the two universalistic exclusive religions — Christianity and Islam from the "family root therapy" if fine — tuned by theologians through the use of effective means of communication can promote justice and peace in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The article draws paradigm from

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Jesus Christ to create enabling atmosphere where fundamental human rights are esteemed and freedom of religion practised in a pluralistic society without violence. It equally proposes new experimental approaches that seek to co-relate the significance of Jesus in his time with his continuing significance in the African context today.

Introduction

Sub-Saharan African countries are gradually turning into a giant tinderbox of religious conflict zones where lives and properties are destroyed by the least provocation. Hostile religious sentiments and propaganda are contributing to the persistent violence in Africa. However, walking within the parameters of this religious conundrum, a conscious effort is made to seek to redress religious violence by joining the global campaign for tracing the family roots solution, though, the "family root therapy" might take different shapes and contour depending on the culture of the people. In the West, the search for family roots has a scientific perspective while in Sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Mali, Malawi, Ghana, etc., it has a spiritual colouration. This worldview may not be unconnected to the fact that, the Africans "are notoriously religious." Indeed, this path-finding mission of "family root" has played into the strengths of the modern day "healers" and thus gained the popular phrase, "healing the family roots." Nevertheless, in this paper, "family root" metaphor refers to a return to the basic understanding of the concept of "theology" and the emphasis on common grounds made by the theologian(s) through the media for the promotion of interreligious harmony and peaceful coexistence in the Sub-Saharan African.

Africa a continent with varied religious background is currently facing persistent religious violence especially in countries like Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Malawi, etc. where Islam as a religion seems to be predominant. Take Nigeria for instance: "Islam has a longer history in Nigeria than does Christianity. At the beginning, Islam was a minority religion, but it spread gradually and became the dominant faith in the north during the nineteenth century; the present country has witnessed phenomenal growth in Nigerian Islam."[1]

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[1]T. Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998, 24.

This growth of Islam in Nigeria like in other African countries has in many ways infringed on the fundamental human rights of the Christians. This is especially true of those living in Islamic states. Most times in the process of exercising their fundamental human rights like freedom of religion and worship, violence, riots and conflicts erupt. As a matter of fact, some of the violence are results of extremist's position held by the adherents of the two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in the country. Recurrently such eruptions stem from the fact that, some Christian and Islamic fundamentalists would persistently defend their faith so much so that, little or no opportunity is given to others to practice their religion as an aspect of their fundamental human rights as well. The interpretations sometimes have come from a dogmatic position or the interpretation of the sacred books (Bible and Koran) from an individualistic position where other religious sects are perceived to be heretical and thus should either be eliminated or condemned. This eruption as a matter of fact is not without loss of lives and properties. Political leaders taking the advantage of religion have traded human rights for violence and the media with their reportage have consistently contributed in heightening religious tension and violence in the African continent as a whole.

Conceptual Understanding of Communication, Theology and Religious Violence

Many scholars over the years have defined the term communication in different ways.[2] Its eclectic and varied nature in the field of sciences has made it to be understood in different ways by different people who are engaged in it. Every human being communicates. People spend time communicating in various forms and manner. The diverse means of communication makes it a complex subject where definition is difficult.[3] This difficulty stems from different backgrounds, persuasions and school of thoughts found among writers on communication. John Fiske, while faced

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[2]M.L. Litwin, *The ABCs of Strategic Communications: Thousands of Terms, Tips and Techniques*, Bloomington: Author House, 2008, 24 ff.; J.M. Radtike, *Strategic Communications For Non-profit Organizations: Seven Steps for Creating a Successful Planning*, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998; D. O'Hair, G.W. Friedrich & L.D. Dixon, *Strategic Communication in Business and Professions*, 6th ed., Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008; C. Caywood, *The Handbook of Strategic Relations and Integrated Communications*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997; L.J. Wilson & O. Joseph, *Strategic Communications Planning for Effective Public Relations and Marketing*, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2004.

[3]V. Sogaard, *Media in Church and Mission*, California: William Carey Library, 1993, 29.

with the challenge of understanding of communication, describes two separate approaches such as the "process school and the school of semiotics." From the perspective of the process school, communication is seen as the transmission of messages from sender to receiver. It concerns with efficiency and accuracy. While on the other hand, the semiotic school defines it in terms of the production and exchange of meanings, with the main emphasis on how messages and or texts interact with people in order to produce meaning.[4] Nevertheless, communication is in itself a dynamic process that involves both the sender and the receiver.

From the perspective of violence, anytime the term is analysed, so vast a multitude of meanings come to mind that is quite impossible to master them. However, there is a notion of the utmost simplicity to which that bewildering variety can be reduced. Violence means an intent to hurt or kill. It is part of human condition and it is absolutely impossible to find a human society that is bereft of violence after the fall of the human being. Yet, violence is so central in human life that its eclectic breadth cuts across all spheres of life. This perhaps twigs from the fact people would have varied perceptions about things especially those that cannot be scientifically proved in the laboratories. Sometimes, even facts that have scientific proofs are still subject to debate. Religious violence refers to the use of physical force with the intent to hurt, damage and even kill someone else in the name of religion.

Nevertheless, discussion about theology in the context of managing religious violence will take a descriptive and generic form. Theology will of course not be put in a particular religious box or better still be defined according to a particular belief system or structure. This is because they are different kinds of theology since the interpretation of faith varies on pedestals of the faith-community in which, and for which, that interpretation is carried out. In addition to the Christian theology, there are Jewish theology, Muslim theology and of course other kinds of theology stemming from other religious traditions.

Theology is therefore to be understood from the perspective of faith seeking understanding, *fides quaerens intellectum* as described by St Anselm of Canterbury. Faith in this context could be that of a Muslim, Hindu, Christian, etc., seeking understanding. The description of theology by McBrien, as "that process by which we bring our knowledge and understanding of God to the level of

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[4]J. Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, New York: Methuen, 1982, 2.

reflection and expression"[5] is crucial to our conceptual understating of theology. Stressing further he says that it "is the articulation, in a more or less systematic manner, of the experience of God within human experience."[6] With this basic understanding of what theology stands for, it is imperative that, all human beings, as soon as they are able to think about their existence, their relationship with the world, the purpose and direction of events, about the experience of the sacred and the holy are already doing theology.

Religious Violence: Causes and Effects in Sub-Saharan Africa

In an attempt to trace the Muslims and Christians relationship for about three decades, it has been observed that most African countries

> plagued with or threatened by religious violence are those situated just below the Sahel, with a strong Muslim presence in their northern regions and Christian presence in the south. Besides the influence from North Africa, northern populations have expressed a general feeling of political and economic marginalization by Christians — or in some cases, Muslims — in the south, which tend to control the political and administrative apparatus of the state. The last decade has seen an upsurge in religious or interreligious tensions and sometimes violence in West, Central and East Africa.[7]

The causes of this violence are many but for the sake of emphasis we shall discuss violence from the point of view of religion, politics and media reportage.

Religious Factors

There is no doubt that some of the causes of the riots/violence are based on extremisms. It is a bloodbath perpetrated by religious extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, Fulani herders (Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger), al-Shaba'ab in Kenya and Somalia, and the Seleka insurgents in Central African Republic.

> The goal of these groups is to advance a particular cause in the Islamic state, and they engage in violent activity in order to accomplish it, such as imposing a set of behavioural norms with punishments for disobedience. Even members of their own religious groups who are seen as not pious enough are punished.[8]

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[5]R. McBrien, *Catholicism, 3rd ed.*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 40-41.

[6]McBrien, *Catholicism*, 65.

[7]Wilton Centre, "Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: Religious Violence in Sub-Saharan African and the Future of the Secular State," https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/religious-violence-sub-saharan-africa-and-the-future-the-secular-state-0 Accessed. 20/05/2019, p. 1.

[8]Wilton Centre, "Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding," 1.

From the Christian perspective, the Christian fundamentalist groups in these countries, especially the Christian-cum-animist anti-Balaka mercenaries in Central African Republic have insisted on the superiority of their religion over the other. In fact, the interpretation of the various belief systems by the adherents of the two dominants religions in the sub region has fuelled religious violence at various stages. Interestingly, some of these religious fundamentalists have no value for people practising a religion other than their own. Such people are usually termed as infidel therefore for some, is either such people convert into their religion or extinct from that part of the country where that religion is most practised. Such viewpoints are even expressed in many forms including in writing. Ishaq Kunle Sanni, a Muslim scholar makes his stand clear when he writes:

> May the Almighty Allah save us from His wrath because of the Godlessness and irreligiousity of the so-called Muslim rulers. Our consolation lies in the prognostication of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be on Him) that all these unislamic Governments under the hegemonial suzerainty of tyrannical ruler and despotic playboys would Allah crumble. Alhamdulillah there are signs that they are already being submerged by the wave of Islamic awareness sweeping through the whole world. Their days are numbered by the Grace of Allah. We must continue to struggle. We should not rest until all the vestiges of Kufr is annihilated assiduously from our system and the Shari'ah established in all its divine ramifications. The journey is tortuous. The road is infested with thorns, yet it is a goal from which we should never waver or become despondent as a result of the simple tonic castigation of the ignoramus or the hypocrites.[9]

As a matter of fact, such comments and many more can easily spark up violence between Christians and Muslims. In most cases both Christians and Muslims have often been irritated because of their strong affinity to their religion. Another example of such provocative statements is: "Indeed I do not usually take Christians seriously in this country in matter of faith, it is because there is hardly any platform for discussing our differences. They have simply lost the original essence of their religion. Surely, "the only religion in the sight of God," as the Holy Qur'an has emphasised, "is the religion of Islam."[10] On the side of the Christians too, some preachers sometimes become too fanatical in their preaching. In the 1980s in Kano, Baba Yaro, a legislature had moved a motion at the State House of

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[9]I.K. Sanni, "Tribute to Brother Afar Sidique," in T. Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998, 80.

[10]S.A. Gumi & I.A. Tsiga, *Where I Stand*, Ibadan: Spectrum, 1992, 97.

Assembly to curb abusive religious preaching following public complaints made about some fundamentalists. Baba talking about the "illegal preaching," says:

> The way and manner the preaching is being conducted is not acceptable to the majority of our people as it is a total condemnation of the principles of Islam as accepted and practised by the Moslems. The fanatic had gone to the extent of arming his lieutenants with knives and other deadly weapons. He has in fact built an empire... In view of the fact whenever this Mallam and his aides preach; tension gathers momentum, it has therefore been necessary for the government to do something about it.[11]

As a matter of fact, such radical ideological positions do not give room to either interreligious dialogue or tolerance. It rather creates avenues were conflicts and violence may occur at very frequent intervals. To say the least, it is more of a time bomb that would explode at the least provocation.

Political Factors

Politics and religion have always had something to contribute towards the sustainability of the other. Sometimes whenever, issues arise where the ideologies differ in structure and operations there is bound to be some clash of interests. A good example of this is the 2013 descend into religious violence in Central African Republic when Seleka rebels topped the country's president, Francois Bozize, a Christian from the South and installed a Muslim leader, Michel Djotodia from the North as president.

Another dimension to the political factor worth discussing is the amalgamation, colonial government and its impact on the culture and religion of the people. Many scholars have indeed attributed this factor as the root cause of the modern day religious crisis in Africa. In Nigeria for instance, right from the political formation of the country by the British, the political structure has contributed in some of the conflicts in the country today. Many scholars have traced part of the religious crisis to this. For some Islamic scholars, the country should not have been a secular state with a federal system of government rather it should have been a religious state perhaps an Islamic state because of the belief systems and lifestyles of the people. Reacting against the political structure that does not favour the Islamic vision, Gumi and Tsiga observe:

> Many of our problems frequently arise because our vision has been fixed to a horizon well beyond our cultural borders. We are always looking for solutions to problems that bother other nations and working to achieve

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[11]Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, 151.

approval from others according to their set standards, which more often than not conflict with our own needs and values. This to me is worse than any material theft. No person could really claim to be successful unless his own belief, values and needs from the basis for his life's efforts.[12]

These scholars, further looked at the imperial government and thus described it as has been hostile and destructive to the minds of many states:

> Colonialism had always fought hard to destroy the indigenous basis of our lifestyle... This is on account of the fact that no conquest or domination by a foreigner ever succeed without first undermining the belief and self-confidence of the conquered people. It has often been demonstrated that whenever the colonialists arrived their very first action was to teach about the superiority of their own way of life, usually through emphasizing the inferiority of the local culture and uprooting its strongest attributes altogether. One has to be taught about the inadequacy of one's language, food or dress, for instance, before one is made to appreciate the glory of those brought to one by the colonial master. Thus the key to the success of colonialism everywhere has always been the amount of destruction it could carry out on the way of life of the indigenous people.[13]

The political structure in the continent based on the colonial government may not be totally unconnected with the crisis since most people are of the opinion that the Berlin conference of 1885 that led to scramble and partitioning of Africa did not as much consider the cultural and religious diversity of the people.

Mass Media Factor

With the development of new media technology, the media has increasingly become a powerful tool and a vital aspect of the modern-day society. This is because the media could be used in setting up agenda for the society and also acts as a gatekeeper. As the world is becoming a 'global village,' Africa is not immune from the influence of the globalization from the media perspective. However, in this paper, the media occupies a prominent position in our discussion. It is an essential commodity that has got two sides (negative and positive aspects). And indeed, hardly will one discuss religion in Africa without mentioning the media because it is very much influenced and built by it. On religious violence, one would say that the media could be used in solving if not reducing the intensity of the religious crisis in the country as well as a means through which the crisis could be aggravated.

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[12]Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, 28.
[13]Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, 78.

Mass media influence on the society in terms of the religious violence has been an issue of debate among scholars, Yusuf, a Christian leader from the northern Nigeria sets as a good example when he says:

> Christians have been denied access to electronic media in 16 Northern states, while Islam monopolizes 24 hours for its broadcast in the same area. Agents of the devil compound the misery by using the mead to heap insults on Christians. Every hour the Muslims broadcast provocative statements about Christianity. It means nothing, they proclaim, that people attend church on Sunday only to dance and listen to songs! Authorities merely wink.[14]

More so, because of the media law in the country, the electronic media has been subject to government control and by extension, censorship, than the print media. The recent emergence of independent radio and television stations in Nigeria has not considerably altered the picture.[15] There are strict government guidelines from the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) about religious broadcasting. Programs are previewed for content which may be provocative or critical of other religious groups. NTA staff is very aware of their responsibilities in promoting religious tolerance and the power of their medium to inflame negative sentiments. However, the censorship factor has led, according to Danmole, to a regrettable state of non-reporting of crucial and sensitive matters of public interest. The print media is not also left aside, the predilection of many newspapers for such descriptive labels as "fundamentalists," "Shiites," "fanatics," etc., notable when referring to Muslims. In some of the dailies, one equally finds out some publications that are provocative as well. A very vivid example is the Sunday Standard of February 28, 1988 where the prophet Muhammad was described as an epileptic prophet. The Kastina riots in March/April 1991 stemmed from the actions of some enraged Muslims in connection with a newspaper report. Yakubu Yahaya, follower of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, the national Shi'ite religious leader, led thousands of supporters to burn down the Daily Times office after an article appeared in *Fun Times* in December 1990 suggesting that the Prophet Mohammed had an "affair with a woman of easy virtue" and then married her, though, the newspapers rendered apology.

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[14]J.T. Yusuf, *That We May Be One: Autobiography of Ambassador Jolly Tanku Yusuf*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, 85.

[15]B. Musa, "Pluralism: Prior Restraints on Religion Communication in Nigeria: Policy versus Praxis," in J. Thiestein & Y. E. Kamalipour, ed. *Religion, Law, freedom: A Global Perspective*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000, 107.

Local stories and rumors can take on interreligious implications of greater import when reported irresponsibly by the media. For example, in 1995 in the city of Jos in northern Nigeria, there were Muslim reports of Arabic script appearing on a rock and then on a newborn baby of a pastor. According to a Jos resident, by rushing to print these unfounded stories, the newspapers inflamed the situation which had already resulted in fighting between Muslim and Christian youths. Jibrin Ibrahim unequivocally states that, "the role played by the media in fueling the crisis cannot be overemphasized."[16] Critical of the national and international media, Jibrin further called for "conscientious and prudent reporting."[17] He said the media tends to worsen the conflict by conveying false information and publishing numerous pictures in order to draw as many readers and viewers as possible.

More so, in a similar incident, the Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria, FRCN in 2008 is reported to have broadcasted regular bulletins concerning the massacre of Muslims and burning of mosques in Kafanchan, while they failed to report details on the counter-attack on Christians.[18] In fact, false reporting indeed has continued to inflame the conflict with "counter-productive" reporting that has caused incessant religious crisis and violence. This of course explains why many groups in Nigeria on May 23rd 2019, condemned the Federal Government's plans to establish a Fulani radio station in the country as announced by the Minister of Education Prof. Adamu Adamu on 23rd May 2019. According to South and Middle belt leaders:

> Using the instrumentality of the Federal Government to set up a radio for Fulani herdsmen [Terrorist group] will throw a knife at the tiniest of the threads still holding Nigeria together as all illusions of an inclusive country would be removed and the rest of the country would conclude we are now under Fulani Government of Nigeria.[19]

The media and its content as a matter of fact, has contributed in diverse ways in escalating religious violence in Africa.

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[16]M.A. Bidmos, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience*, Yaba: Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, 1993, 21.

[17]Bidmos, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: the Nigerian Experience*, 22.

[18]P.O.J. Umechukwu, *The Press of Religious Violence in Nigeria*, Enugu: Ugovin publishers, 1995, 33.

[19]Shahara Reporters, "Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Reject Fulani Radio Station Funded by Federal Govt," http://saharareporters.com/2019/05/23/southern-and-middle-belt-leaders-reject-fulani-radio-station-funded-federal-govt. Accessed. 24/05/2019, 1.

Intervention of Theology and Communication

Both Islam and Christianity are built on "communicative theology." Theology is not an exclusive preserve of any religion. This notion consequently exterminates the question that out of curiosity may be generated — for example, questions such as, *which* theology will be applied and by *whom* and *how* will it be applied in the process of managing religious violence in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria. The application of theology in this case is on the aspect of measuring what is believed and what is taught against certain criteria. Within the context of our inquiry, the duo religions that appear more prominently in the theatre of religious violence in Nigeria believed in the Supreme Being which is either called God or Allah, sometimes referred to as the God of peace. As a way of doing theology, sharing common beliefs such as these could breed new conditions and new forms of life. The proverbial "door" of common beliefs could open new avenues such as dialogue and non-violence in our society today

This basic assumption stems from the fact that, each of these faith-community sees religion as an ideal way of life that has to be communicated by way of propagation and preaching of the basic authentic values through various means of communication accessible to the audience. No doubt, some of the religious violent actions are brewed from the content and channel of sharing their different belief systems. With our basic understanding of theology in this paper, communicating theology from the point of view of peace amidst religious violence will quell some violence. Inter-religious dialogue as strategy of managing religious violence has yielded positive effects, nevertheless, a theology centred on "common beliefs" through the use of the media by theologians can brawl religious violence in Africa. Over time, Christianity and Islam at various moments have severally engaged in self-defence wars (Jihad and Crusade), but then they still believe in peace and peaceful co-existence with people of other religions.

The visible realities concerning the incessant religious violence in the country may plague the credibility of this assertion. However, the book of the Qur'an for the Muslims, present a theology that does not have violence as its essential component. Its adherents while using the Qur'an as the *magna carta* would describe it as a "religion of peace." Peace therefore forms its moral standard. Admittedly, the sacred book of the Qur'an encourages peace, "if two parties among believers fall into quarrel, make ye peace

between them."[20] In the past, Islam has demonstrated this during the Makkan period and with the "people of the book" in the Madinah era. Within this period non-Muslins were never molested for refusing to change from their idol worshiping. This was basically enshrined in the book of the Qur'an thus: "Say: ye that reject faith, I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine."[21] Within the same vain, "people of the book" i.e., the Christians and Jews, the Muslins believed that they shared common origin and whenever there was any discrepancy, the book of the Qur'an advocates for dialogue: "Say O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between you and us that we worship none but God..."[22]

Christianity is not a religion of violence. Apparently, violence is contrary to the Christian faith. Pope Benedict XVI accentuates this in his 11th March 2012 midday message to Pilgrims in St Peter's Square when he says: "Violence is contrary to the Kingdom of God. It is an instrument of Antichrist. Violence never serves man, but dehumanises him." Christianity equally propagates that same morality of peace drawing paradigms from its founder known as the "prince of peace" (Is 9:6). Therefore as she continues her mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*, peace remains part of her missionary strategy following the mandate of Christ (Jn 10:13). The *magisterium* of the Catholic Church over the years encouraged peaceful co-existence with people of other religions. In fact, she "urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions."[23] Pope Benedict XVI, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, observes that "the Church does not make religious discrimination,"[24] thereby rejects the climate of hostility among the people created by God. Indeed, both religions have peace at the hub of its central belief structures. Pope Francis in many fora has preached peace and prayed for peace in the world.

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[20]Qur'an, 49: 9.

[21]Qur'an, 49: 14.

[22]Qur'an, 3:64.

[23]Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2, in A. Flannery, OP, ed., New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1982.

[24]Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exaltation*, Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2012, 49.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

Through the use of both trado and modern means of communication, the adherents of the two dominant religions have to employ a wider, less dogmatic, less radical but more inviting and inspiring presentation of their faith especially in relationship to people of other faiths. Communion and dialogue of life, not of concepts and doctrines, should be shared among Christians and Muslins. Obviously, the first basis for managing religious violence in Sub-Saharan Africa is the communication of the common beliefs.

Christianity and Islam have myriads of things in common and most times some of those who engaged in violent actions may not as much be aware of common beliefs. Both religions believe in God who is the creator, the provider, the merciful, the all-powerful and the final judge of all human beings.[25] More so, they also trace their faith back to Abraham and so strive to submit themselves without reservation to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted to God's plan.[26] In fact, Peter T. Tanko observes that: "Christians and Muslims also believe that details of their daily lives should be governed by obedience to God's will and that prayer, fasting and almsgiving are necessary."[27] Francis Cardinal Arinze, while tracing the path of these common beliefs says:

> ...the reverence and love which Muslims have for Jesus and the honour which they give to his virgin mother Mary are a bond which Christians have with no other religious group. Christians can be surprised to learn that Mary is mentioned nineteen times in the Bible, while in the Qur'an she is mentioned thirty-four times and is called "the greatest of all women."[28]

Religious fanaticism and idiosyncrasy could be healed if some of these common beliefs are effectively communicated through the right channel to the people. A lot of people engaged in such violent acts may not be properly informed or schooled; some perhaps may have acted out of religious ignorance.

In conclusion, the two universalistic exclusive religions, Christianity and Islam, through the efforts of theologians and the effective use of the media can promote values that will reduce

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[25]*Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

[26]B.T. Tanko, "The Church and Inter-religious Dialogue," *Jos Studies* 11 (2002) 73.

[27]Tanko, "The Church and Inter-religious Dialogue," 73.

[28]F. Arinze, *Church in Dialogue: Walking with Other Believers*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990, 315.

religious violence in the society. The sharing of the common beliefs by theologians about the two religions via posters, billboards, newspapers, tracks, pamphlets, radio, TV, Internet (social media) and other forms of group communication such as seminars, symposia, meetings, etc. will promote interreligious harmony and peaceful coexistence between adherents of the two dominants (Christianity and Islam) religions.