THE POWER OF RELIGION IN A SECULAR SOCIETY: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

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Abstract

The power of religion in modern pluralistic societies has come along with its complexities and challenges. The current wave of religious fundamentalism and terrorism has raised the greatest concerns ever in human history whether the world is becoming a normless global village on the pretext of religious freedom of association and sociableness. Fundamentalism in whatever form it comes out with should not be seen as modern phenomenon in themselves, but more as reaction to the emerging trends and values inherent in modernized socio-cultural, politico-economic factors in developing human civilizations. Extreme modernist tendencies and extreme religious

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propensities are both dead ends and would have to readjust in order to participate in creating a just world of socio-economic and political order for human existence. This piece argues that religion and religious issues still form part of the fabric of modern societies. Religion cannot be withdrawn from the world, neither the world engaging in secular exclusivism. There must be the need for a common ground for interconnection and interdependence.

Keywords: Extremism, Fanaticism, Modernity, Nation-state, Pluralism, Religious Fundamentalism, Secularization

1. Introduction

Theology or religion on the wider sphere is never done in a vacuum. Human life experiences and how they relate with the environment give the opportunity to understand what influences human behaviour and reactions. Religion enters into the public square and engages complex issues confronting humanity on a daily basis because it brings a much-needed resource to its practitioners and to the wider faith community.

In Ghana, even though religious groups and institutions have been accepted as important in the social, political and economic life of the people, this recognition of religion or theology in public life has often seemed to be problematic and remains debatable among secular thinkers. This is due, in part to the unappreciative mode of politicians and political leaders to the interventionist role of religion or theology in national issues. Such issues or interventions are considered as detrimental and negative to a particular political grouping or ideology, mostly by those in government.

Quite recently, some of world's renowned sociologists, philosophers and cultural theorists like Jürgen Habermas and Karl Max[1] raised the concerns that religion was declining, being marginalized and becoming secular. Jürgen Habermas for instance held the view that religion was going to die, giving way to secularism. "Religion was seen as retreating into the domestic isolation of home and personal opinion."[2] It was only reason which could have sufficient ground for morality. Habermas anticipated that secularization of European society and culture would be the end of all religious faith.[3] In that context any notion of religion in public life

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[1]Warren S. Goldstein, ed., *Marx, Critical Theory and Religion; A Critique of Rational Choice,* Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006, 11-13.

[2]Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Lifeworld and Systems: A Critique of Functional Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, 140.

[3]Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* 140.

was irrelevant. However, it has not been the case, particularly in the context of African life and culture and even the period within which religion was predicted to die.

Charles Taylor had intimated that religion in the public sphere was problematic and that religion has lost its taken-for-granted status in society and in the public square. For him religion together with its worldviews withdraws from the public sphere to give way to what he described as "the secular age."[4]

Indeed the growing acceptability of the world becoming a global village is catching up with the burning desires of a nation's economy, politics and democratic governance. Scientific and technological advancements have contributed to the resurgence of everything within human positivities and possibilities. And religion cannot be left out of the resurgence in human advancements. Religion has either been a contributing part of the changing world or has been affected by it.

The importance of religion in the public sphere has been recognized as not ever to wither away under the pressures of modernization and secularization. In his turn-around posture on the nature of religion, Jürgen Habermas has consistently stressed the continuing global vitality of religion to what he describes as the 'post-secular' and philosophical realities of society's existence.[5] Consequently, we can support the assertion that,

> The post-secular stance looks to religious sources of meaning as both a helpful and even indispensable ally in confronting the forces of global capitalism, while underscoring the crucial difference between religious practices and perspectives continue to be key sources of the values that nourish ethics of multi-cultural citizenship, commanding both solidarity and equal respect.[6]

However complex and contradictory the vitality of religion in the public sphere is, the observation has been made to the effect that, religion cannot be and perhaps should not be easily absorbed into the public sphere. Religious experience, "whether it figures as threat or inspiration, unreflective conviction or prophetic challenge, the power of religion in the public sphere demands and deserves our critical attention."[7]

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[4]Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age,* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 2007, 34.

[5]Habermas, *The Theory of Coomunicative Action*, 140.

[6]Eduardo Mendieta & Jonathan Vanantwerpen, ed., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, New York:Columbia University Press, 2011, 4-5.

[7]Mendieta & Vanantwerpen, ed., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, 12.

We can realize that modernization processes have not led to the eradication of religion from public life and that the privatization of religion is not a historical trend or a normative condition for modern liberal democracies, as one assumed.[8] Religion and religious issues still form part of the fabric of modern societies in all their socio-cultural and politico-economic endeavours. There even seems to be the renewal of the traditional bond between religion and nationalism in certain societies, and an increase in the kind of religious expression associated with fundamentalist and national religious expansion through religious communities catering for different racial, ethnic, social and political identities.[9]

Though it is widely accepted that religious presence in society quite creates a problematic situation, this article seeks to contribute to the issues of religious fundamentalism while highlighting on the fact that religion could still have its transforming relevance for the growing post-secular states in modern multicultural, political economies and civil societies.

2. Religion and Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism has always been a contemptible religious and social issue that society has always seen, at first sight as a great challenge to harmonious and peaceful co-existence. It is condemned as an upfront to human social cohesion and religious coexistence. This has been as a result of the approach of religious beliefs that have been subjected to extreme interpretations and their significant impact on human life without recourse to existential realities of cultural or social diversities.[10] The phenomenon of religious fundamentalism, according to the Association for Women's Right in Development (AWID), only "claim to protect and preserve often selective elements of a broader, more pluralistic, historical tradition, reconstruction or distortions of traditions, hybrid forms of powerfully framed and heavily influenced by colonial-era histories and laws, or in some cases, completely new creations."[11] Where societies and cultures were historically diverse, religious

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[8]J.S. Deyer and H.J.C. Pieterse, "Religion in the Public Sphere: What can Public Theology Learn from Habermas' Latest Work?" *Theological Studies* 66, 1 (2010) 7.

[9]David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions,* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 476.

[10]Deyer and Pieterse, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 8.

[11]AWID, "The Impact of Religious Fundamentalism and Extreme Interpretations of Religion on Women's Human Rights," [16-11-2015], available at *https://www.awid.org,* 14; assessed on 5-8-2017.

fundamentalism often seek to impose monolithic ideas about religion, denying or destroying rich cultural heritage in the process.[12]

Religious fundamentalism in such instance, projects itself as an authentic representative of the local culture only to introduce and impose homogenized, rigid, and arguably foreign elements on existing cultures.[13]

Consequently, Edward L. Nsemba and Johnson Abel stipulate that religious extremism can promote religious chauvinism in the sense that it can legitimize conflicting faith stance. This is made possible especially when religious zealots take on the perception that their own religion or a particular religious sect is more spiritually superior to others.[14] They emphasize that religious fundamentalism is a revolutionary approach to circumstances often caused by forces of modernity which promotes religious and cultural liberalism, which could in turn cause an eruption of religious extremism when liberalism would seem to promote secularism.

Indeed, religion in modern times has been employed as socio-political and economic instruments for change. Edward and Abel are of the view that religious fundamentalism is an eclectic concept viewed from three perspectives: First, from a cognitive understanding where the word is associated with a closed personality type that expresses exclusivity, particularity, literality and moral rigour. Second from a cultural theological framework, where the concept expresses opposition to religious and cultural liberalism in defence of orthodoxy and religious traditions. Third, from a social movement perspective, fundamentalism denotes organizational and ideological uniqueness from other types of religious movements.[15]

Remarkably, religious fundamentalism is not a peculiar crisis with one particular religion or religious sect. It is a worldview type that can be found across different religions in the world of today. According to Douglass Pratt religious fundamentalism denotes a paradigm shift in "mentality from the relative harmlessness of an otherwise quaint, ultra-conservative — or in some *apropos* sense idiosyncratic relative to an orthodox 'norm' — religious belief system;

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[12]AWID, "The Impact of Religious Fundamentalism," 14.

[13]Deyer and Pieterse, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 8.

[14] Edward L. Nsemba, & Johnson Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism and Problem of Normlessness: Issues in Value in Nigeria," in *Global Journal of Human Social Science, Sociology, Economics and Political Science* 12, 9, (June 2012) 46.

[15]Nsemba and Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism," 44.

to a religiously motivated and fanatically followed engagement in aggressively impositional, even terrorizing, activity."[16]

Danjibo argues that, religious fundamentalism is built on the principle of "authority of Scripture and the necessity of righteous living and on the right doctrine and the necessity of organized warfare against the forces of modernity."[17] Douglass Pratt, in his analysis on terrorism and religious fundamentalism affirms that Fundamentalists have been recognized as people who

> fear loss and change through whatever serves to relativize the world and their worlds. There is constant fear of pluralism, or the stranger who brings other ways which may be alluring or threatening… Pluralism confuses; it presents not only the threatening but also the attractive neighbor at hand, and that could lead to loss of identity in a group.[18]

Fundamentalists are afraid of change but in their bids to resist any differentiation of faith or change they seek to change the world to the dictates of their positions or faith by their lively, intense, creative setting out to make a difference, indeed to change the world. For Douglas Pratt, the movements around religious fundamentalism involve creative and lively acts intended to make a difference in society, implying 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.[19]

We can also agree with Steve Bruce that fundamentalism is a rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world.[20]

All these expressed views, emphasize the real challenge of religious fundamentalism as a threat that results in creating socio-political, economic and religio-cultural disorders in society. For Krishna Kumar, the problem of fundamentalism knows no borders, and it is a common enemy of humanity. Fundamentalism is seen by many as conjuring images of mob actions, shouting 'death to certain civilization,' setting embassies into flames, assassination of political

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[16]Douglas Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: Prospects for a Predictive Paradigm," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 11, 1 (June 2006) 5.

[17]N.D. Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The 'Maitatsine' and 'Boko Haram' Crisis in Northern Nigeria," *Peace and Conflict Studies Programme*, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 2010, available at *https://www.scribd.com*, assessed 13/8/2017, 54.

[18]Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism…," 2-3.

[19]Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism…," 3.

[20]Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, Cambridge: Politv, 2000, 117.

figures, hijackings which threaten innocent lives and the oppression of women. Some issues relating to fundamentalists' negative effects on women indicate that:

> Religious fundamentalists all over the world oppose women's autonomy and any space for change, resulting in direct and indirect controls over gender and sexuality, the curbing of women's rights and especially those of women from marginalized communities, including gender and sexual non-conforming persons. They normalize the inequalities that they perpetuate, and by giving their patriarchal policies divine justification they make them harder to challenge... Religious fundamentalism has rolled back past gains made on women's and girls' rights.[21]

The negative impact of religious fundamentalism presents devastating consequences. Martin E. Martey and R. Scott throw more light on the negative impact of fundamentalist activities from the Indian history:

> Indian experience with religious fundamentalism had been bloody and traumatic. Mahatma Gandhi, before he could fully savor fresh air of independent India, fell victim to Hindu fundamentalist's bullets. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was gunned down by her own Sikh bodyguard in the aftermath of the Sikh fundamentalist movement that swept through the vibrant state of Punjab in the early 1980s. And a female suicide bomber of the Tamil fundamentalist group from Sri Lanka blew up Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi, who had succeeded her as Prime Minister. The assassinations of the Mahatma, Indira and Rajiv serve as stark reminders of what happens when contractual bonds holding together the complex social elements composing the body politic are broken and when political affiliations are weakened.[22]

The rise in religious fundamentalist activities in recent history across the globe, are not always responses to deal with religious infractions, but religion is only used as a strategy to counter political and economic crisis confronting nations. Edward L. Nsemba affirms by asserting that, in modern times, fundamentalist movements have found expression in the use of religion as instrument of socio-political and economic assertion for change.[23]

2.1. Islam and the Challenge of Religious Fundamentalism

We would like to remark that this article is not in any way intended or designed to particularize religious fundamentalism and

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[21]Casandra Balchin, "Religious Fundamentalisms on the Rise: A Case for Action," www.awid.org, November, 2007, 7-13

[22]Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed., *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 235.

[23]Edward L. Nsemba, "Religious Fundamentalism...," 44.

its attendant terrorism to particular religious sects or denominations, either Islam or Christianity or intra-religious fundamentalism among Christians or Moslems. However the spate of terrorists' attacks globally has had religious fanatics and extremists related to the Islamic religion or its related sects to be considered as Islamist fundamentalists in its negative sense. There are movements in which religion has been employed to serve as a marker of ethnic, or social or national identity. Some of them have had a clear fundamentalist dimension in the sense that most of their prominent adherents insist on strict conformity to sacred scripture and the moral code ostensibly based on it.[24]

To acquaint ourselves with the principles and the modus operandi of fundamentalists in modern religious extremism, Henry Munson poses the following questions for our consideration.[25]

To what extent are these movements a reaction against secular 'modernity'? To what extent do these movements articulate social and nationalistic grievances as well as moral outrage provoked by the violation of traditional religious values? Do these movements have a messianic and apocalyptic dimension? Can these movements be considered totalitarian insofar as they seek to force all aspects of society to conform to religious laws? Or do they withdraw from society to maintain their way of life in selected enclaves? And are these movements violent?

The above questions help to identify the nature and the characteristics of a religious sect and its activities in respect of societal norms that could confirm or otherwise their movements as fundamentalists. The fundamentalist movements seek to exploit the importance of religion in the lives of the people, calling up religiously defined concepts of "good" and "evil," and offering certainty, hope and quick solutions to the most complex or subjective problems.[26]

In this perspective, Bassam observes that, the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism is its propensity to create disorder, not only to the West and to its civilization, but also a threat to decent and peace loving Muslims, men and women who suffer the intolerance and the totalitarian views and practices of the fanatics.[27]

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[24]Henry Munson, "Fundamentalism," in *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religions*, John R. Hinnels, ed., New York: Routledge, 2005, 352.

[25]Henry Munson, "Fundamentalism," 353.

[26]Balchin, "Religious Fundamentalism on the Rise...."

[27]Tibi Bassam, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, Los Angeles: University of Califonia Press, 2002 (updated edition), xxii.

Bassam therefore views Islamic religious fundamentalism as a generic politicization of religion, a contemporary global phenomenon engaged in international politics, "flying on the wings of faith in a divine order of reality."[28]

He identifies religious fundamentalism not as a spiritual faith, but as a political ideology based on the politicizing of religion for socio-political and economic goals in the pursuit of establishing a divine order... This ideology is exclusive, in the sense that it attacks opposing option, primarily those secular outlooks that resist the linking of religion to politics.[29] The political ideology of religion as presented by fundamentalism makes clear, the dilemma of the tension between the secular and the sacred — the outgrowth of the tensions that hold between the secular worldview of the western cultural modernity and the monotheistic worldview of Islam.[30] The fundamentalists formulate their foundational thoughts on the interpretations and applications of sacred scripture and other sacred writings. However, for Bassam in their writing, Islamic fundamentalists present themselves as true scripturalists, though they invoke the scriptures in a highly selective manner ... such Muslim fundamentalists, he argues, are not traditionalists; their ideal is the selectively perceived and arbitrarily purified state of seventh-century Islam. Those Islamic fundamentalists go beyond the Qur'an.[31]

Bassam's views have been supported by Keith Suter who emphasized that, the entire Muslim world turned fundamentalist around the 12th century, "when the ultraconservative interpretation of the Qur'an triumphed and since that time, whenever Islamic ways of life have 'softened,' ultrafundamentalists have reacted against the laxity of leaders who failed to implement the Shar'ia, the revealed laws of the religion of Islam."[32]

The followers of Islam for many years have lived with the sense that their religion is superior to other religions and they believe their religion was the last to receive God's final revelations to humans. To position their religion as such, fundamentalism has been adopted to align their religion with nationalism and popular reaction against what is regarded as foreign cultural and religious traditions.[33]

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[28]Bassam, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, xxiii.

[27]Bassam , *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, 20.

[30]Bassam, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, 143.

[31]Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism...," 4.

[32]Keith Suter, "Religious Fundamentalism," www.Global Directions.org

[33]Krishna Kumar, "Religious fundamentalism in India and Beyond," Parameters, 2008, 23, www.proquest.com

Religious fundamentalism especially with Islam has been associated with violence and terrorism. That is not to conclude that, Islamic religion was founded on violence or terror. It is only the extremism and the fanatic considerations that have led to the state of affairs of the apparent violent nature of Islam. In recent times, militant Islamic movements clearly resort to violence far more often than any other religions. It does not therefore mean that Islam is inherently violent. Though Islamic religion believes in messianic and apocalyptic themes, however such theological concepts are of less significance to them than their preference to jihadist or holy war tactics against their opponents. Henry Munson makes the point that, the distinction between Muslim and the 'infidel' became intertwined with the distinctions between the colonized and the colonizer and the oppressed and the oppressor. Thus traditional hostility toward the unbeliever as an unbeliever was now infused with new meaning.[34]

From the time of Ayatollah Khomeini (1978), Islamic militancy has had a nationalist dimension because of the fiery denunciations of the West. The goal of creating an Islamic state and society based exclusively on Islamic law was inextricably intertwined with the goal of overcoming foreign domination. Khomeini captured in his work this same declaration on two occasions in 1977 and 1981 as has been cited by Henry Munson:

> If the Muslim states and peoples had relied on Islam and its inherent capabilities and powers instead of depending on the East (The Soviet Union) and the West, and if they had placed the enlightenment and liberating precepts of the Qur'an before their eyes and put them into practice, then they would not today be captive slaves of the Zionist aggressors, terrified victims of the American Phantoms, and toys in the hands of the accommodating policies of the satanic Soviet Union. It is the disregard of the noble Qur'an by the Islamic countries that has brought the Islamic community to this difficult situation full of misfortunes and reveals and placed its fate in the hands of the imperialism of the left and the right.[35]

In the same perspective, it is observed that, Muslim fundamentalist tendencies since the 19th and the 20th centuries have had the wildest dream to reform and modernize cultures, political life and the special behaviour of society.[36] Islamists assert Islam as a revolutionary idea and program with the aim of utterly destroying the social structure of the world in order to build it new. Jihad is thus revolutionary combat

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[34]Munson, "Fundamentalism," 347.
[35]Munson, "Fundamentalism," 348.
[36]Munson, "Fundamentalism," 348.

in a transcendent cause. The struggle is to put in place civilization of world order which is implicitly based on the *Word of God*.[37] We can conclude from the analysis so far that, Islamic fundamentalism sees the Western world as the great Satan, and therefore fights first, all the Muslims who have accepted the Western world's principles and spread its poison in Muslim countries, and second to resist the actual principles and cultures as alien to Islam. This means that we cannot understand the phenomenon of modern fundamentalism just by itself.[38]

2.2. Christianity and the Fundamentalist Story

Christian fundamentalism has taken different forms and dimensions in the world over. Christian fundamentalism has been experienced within US Protestantism.[39] Research focusing on Christian fundamentalism over the years has shown that, Christian fundamentalism has taken the same form in terms of the reasons of reaction to secularization, modernization and economic marginalization. Research points to a consistent and strong connection between (Christian) religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism and rejection of outgroups such as homosexuals and members of other religions and races.[40] Edward L. Nsemba agrees with Huntington on the power of religion in shaping people in self-identification in relationships. That religion has the capacity for directing people's different views on the relationship between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as deferring views of relative importance on rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy... Even more than ethnicity, religion discriminates sharply and exclusively among people by creating a sharp identity of "us" and against "them", especially in a multi-ethnic and religious society.[41]

The dimension of positive change that is expected in every religious experience is that which promotes the transformation of socio-economic, cultural and political values, institutional practices and belief systems in a given context, whether at individual, group, or society level.

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[37]Pratt, "Terrorism and Fundamentalism...," 7.

[38]Jürgen Moltmann, *God for A Secular Society,* London: SCM Press, 1999, 209.

[39]Munson, "Fundamentalism," 339.

[40]Ruud Koopmans, "Religious Fundamentalism and Out-group Hostility among Muslims and Christians in Western Europe," Presentation at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists, Amsterdam, 25-27 June, 2013, available at https://www.wzb.eu/sites.default/files/u8/ruud-koopmans... 1-21

[41]Nsemba & Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism...," 46.

Theologians, both Catholic and protestant, who for many years had held the views about the problematic role of religion in the public sphere seemed to have revised their notes on matters relating to religion's engagement with issues of social concerns. Jürgen Habermas has been cited as having made a remarkable change of mind on religion and the public square, particularly at the turn of the millennium"[42](21st Century). Harrington has commented on Habermas' revised position on religion in the public sphere as follows:

> Since the turn of the millennium Jürgen Habermas has been increasingly writing about matters of religious and theological relevance... In his most recent work, by contrast, Habermas offers a considerably more sympathetic engagement with the arguments of theologians and, at least on the surface, a dramatic self-distancing from his earlier secularist advocacy.[43]

Moltmann speaks from a Christian theology point of view and addresses issues bordering on religious fundamentalism in general and Christian fundamentalism in particular. He agrees with the fundamentalists' principles in view of the modern world systems and their oppositions to it. He reiterates the points discussed early on to the effect that,

> Fundamentalism is a modern reaction to the modern world, but it has no hesitation about employing against that world every means of communication which the modern world offers, as a way of surmounting its perils. In Christian fundamentalism, the opponent is 'the modern world' itself, but even more than that, all the Christians who in the form of Christian modernism have fallen victim to that world.[44]

Moltmann's thoughts are centred on the fact that, fundamentalism is only a reaction against the essence and values of the modern world and Western civilization.

As a Christian theologian, he looks forward to ways opened to Christianity in the modern world beyond liberalism and fundamentalism.[45] Moltmann reminds of the responsibility to the Christian calling to the recollection of God's kingdom to the reality of their existence and in anticipation of the new creation of all things.[46] Moltmann elucidating on Christian theology's responsibility beyond modernism and fundamentalism concludes that,

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[42]Dreyer and Pieterse, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, 3.

[43]A. Harrington, "Habermas' Theological Turn," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 37, 1 (2007) 45-61.

[44]Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 209.

[45]Moltmann, *God for A Secular Society,* 209-210.

[46]Moltmann, *God for A Secular Society,* 211.

Today we must transfer this public reminder to the market economy, culture and the ecology of the earth. It remains the critically prophetic and hence public task of Christianity in the modern world. There can be no withdrawal from public life into the unchallenged space of the church, or the holy remnant of true believers, such as the fundamentalists seek; for that would also be to withdraw from the prophetic task in public life.[47]

The above comment according to Moltmann should be true for Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith in God as well. Religion and religious experiences cannot be confined to the intellectual corridors or to the ecclesial parameters. The interaction of people in shaping religious meaning, have come to the consensus that religion is contextual and particularly so when the praxis of religion in public life must be defined and informed by a context.

If there is any good that religion must bring to society's transformation, it should not be plunged into extremists' utopianism in order to achieve its aim of becoming a part of society's transformation. Religious fundamentalism has never received the approval of the masses, but has to some extent served as a reawakening time bomb when the war on the Al-Qaeda group (Talibans) in Afghanistan begun and the subsequent attacks on the US on September 11, 2001.

Duncan Forrester adds his voice to the debate on the topic of the power of religion in an age of terror and intolerance. He asserts that,

The events of September 11, 2001 transformed everything in a moment. The pressing issue is now no longer how to present the claims of contemporary Christian theology to a hearing in the secular public arenas of the North Atlantic countries, or how to gain and sustain a constructive Christian theological presence in the Western public sphere. It is now the urgent life-and-death question of how to understand, discipline, channel and criticize the powerful forces of religion which today dominate the global political scene, for better and for worse. These voices have for the most part been excluded from and unheard in the public forum in the liberal West. What we now need is not so much a forum for more academic and good-mannered discourse about conflicting truth claims, but an arena in which rage, frustration, hatred and fear as well as reason are in play, and are attended to, and one hopes, are healed.[48]

For him, religious reasons dominate people's natural dispositions so whether they are allowed to demonstrate or not, or like or dislike them, religious experiences and their influences on people are strongly significant in global politics today. The challenge of religious

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[47]Moltmann, *God for A Secular Society*, 221.
[48]Duncan Forrester, "The Shape of Public Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17, 2 (2004) 16.

extremism stirs in the face of human intelligence but it cannot be fought with weapons of mass destruction or wished away.

3. Religion, Secularization and the African Experience of Religious Fundamentalism

The undercurrent of religious fundamentalism has brought several countries in Africa on their knees. It has become very difficult for indigenous cultures, norms and values to guide their cultures and values against the spreading of destructive worldviews of religious fundamentalism. Edward L. Nsemba has reemphasized the catastrophic effect of the new trend of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria:

> It is no doubt that religious fundamentalism in Nigeria has assumed a destructive dimension creating problem of normlessness. The consequence of fundamentalism dynamism has created skepticism and insecurity among Nigerians, which does not only occur at the intra-group, but at the inter-group level in the country. The increasing tide of religious fundamentalism present Nigeria as a country in dilemma of normlessness, or in a state of anomie informed by the dominance of foreign cultures and civilizations.[49]

For Edward L. Nsemba religion in Nigeria could sometimes in some places be used to legitimize evil, taking on other religious sects as more inferior to the others. Other religious faiths or expressions, either inter or intra-religious persuasions are seen in most parts in Africa as promoters of modernism. Such religious groups are seen to religious extremists as harbingers of Western culture and education. Religious fundamentalism, in most cases is therefore seen as a reaction to modernism.

Edward L. Nsemba sees the explosion of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria today as,

> a product of clash between cultural forces which are inherently antagonizing within an expressed pre-existing cultural space. Moreover, the socio-economic and political realities in Nigeria are also aggravating the expression of religious fundamentalism and are central to the problem of normlessness in the Nigerian society.[50]

Examples include, DR. Congo, Gambia, Sudan, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, etc.

There is the dimension of religious fundamentalism existing in the already problematic situation of relationship between Christians and

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[49]Nsemba & Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism…, ," 43.

[50] Nsemba & Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism…," 44.

Muslims particularly in Africa. Religious fundamentalists take their extremist agenda to create conflict from their perspectival absolutism, which remains the only truth to which all other phenomena must be explained, relativizing any form of religious pluralism and culture perceived to be an alien civilization.[51] It is the case with Gambia, Sudan, Mauritania, etc. where religious fundamentalist activities have caused massive displacement of people from their place of living.

The clash of the conflicting truth-claims has the potential to resurrect extremism from both sides of the divide, either from the side of Christians or from the side of Muslims. Rosalind J. Hackett has drawn our attention to the prediction of Pope John Paul II that,

> the relationship between Christians and Muslims is central to peace and social stability in the new millennium. While religious violence in Africa has not achieved the notoriety it has in other regions of the world, there are nonetheless some highly pertinent examples of it arising from Muslim-Christian tensions — in Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, Ghana, Mali and Zambia, to name but a few countries.[52]

Rosalind further states that the rise in religious extremism that leads to tensions and conflict has come about because the nation-state through political systems has failed to provide adequately to or respond to the socio-economic needs of citizens, and religion then fills the vacuum created. "Thus the national scene becomes more competitive as religious institutions that were formerly privileged by colonial regimes find themselves as just one of the players in a new pluralistic dispensation."[53]

Religion and its implications in the African life are very complex, because religion in Africa is less individualistic. It is more of communal, from the African religious worldview. Religion has the characteristic of group-related phenomenon, less materially grounded, and could be ethnocentric and develops interconnections with political power. This makes any form of religious fundamentalism very degenerative if allowed to fester over a period of time. It equally makes it difficult for religious elites, state functionaries and other interest groups to condemn any (negative) variations in religious activities in Africa.

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[51]Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism," 8.

[52]Rosalind J. Hackett, "Religious Freedom and Religious Conflict in Africa," *Religion on the International News Agenda*, Mark Silk, ed., The Leonard E. Greenberg Center: Hartford, 2000, 102-103.

[53]Rosalind J. Hackett, "Religious Freedom and Religious Conflict in Africa" 103.

Before concluding this section, it is expedient to take a second look at the re-emergence of fundamentalism in Africa, and about the rise of mass revolution in some parts of Africa referred to as the "Arab Spring." [54] The dominant causes of the uprising have not been religious critically, but religion could have popular undercurrents as the potent force but not the motive force. "The wave of social protests that swept through the Arab world during 2011, toppling long-standing regimes and seriously destabilizing others, was the consequence of decades of oppressive and authoritarian political systems."[55] (Examples include, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya).

The motive force behind the uprising mostly in Africa has been against authoritarianism (political, economic and social), and the liberalism perceived to be Western culture and religious infiltrations into such countries targeting Islamic religion and culture.

In many of the Arab countries which were hit by the 'Arab Spring,' Christians are in the minority and they became easy prey for Islamic radicalism and terrorism. Criminal gangs took advantage of the breakdown of laws and institutions to destroy churches, displace, kidnap and assassinate Christians and their critiques. In many countries like Egypt and Libya, the 'Arab Spring' led to the deterioration of the positions of Christians, due in part to the regime change, and whose rights hitherto were safeguarded by the authoritarian regimes.[56]

The re-emergence and the empowerment of fundamentalist groups like the Muslim Brotherhoods in Egypt, Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and Salafism led to the negative effects for Christians and other religious and political ideologies perceived to be alien to Muslim faith. Libya has slipped into a situation of absolute lawlessness, in which Christians, particularly Sub-Saharan migrants, are among the most vulnerable groups. Elvin Aghayev, observes that Libya has become a safe haven for

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[54]Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, "The Impact of the Arab Spring on the Political Future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East: Jordan as a Case Study," in *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA) 19, 3 (Fall 2015) 41-57, available at *www.rubincenter.org*, accessed August, 2017.

[55]Lt Col. El Hassane Aissa (Moroccan Army), "The Arab Spring: Causes, Consequences and Implications," unpublished Master of Strategic Studies Degree Thesis, United States Army War College, Carlisle Pennsylvania, Class of 2012, 2, *available at www.dtic.mil*

[56]Kamal Sedra, "The Role of Social Media and Networking in Post-Conflict Settings: Lessons Learned from Egypt," The World Bank/TDRP, June, 5—6, 2013: http:www.tdrp.net/PGFs/social

criminals and terrorist gangs to perpetuate criminal activities in the name of religion.[57]

4. Conclusion

The use of religion as social or political tool to demand for a social, economic, political transformation of world order will be prone to be problematic for even perpetrators. Religious fundamentalism in the 21st Century has brought in horrific scenes ever to occur in human history. Apart from the September 11, 2001 terrorists attack in the US, Africa has received its share of religious extremism. The experience of Africa has been multifaceted; it has been pushed by ideological conundrums buffeted by political, socio-economic and civil society eruptions.

The rampaging effects of the undercurrents of religious fundamentalism and its resultant effects of terrorism and conflicts have produced conflicts and tensions among Christians, adherent of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Muslims. The major target for religious fanaticism has been modernity and its offshoot of secularization. Africa is no different from the fundamentalist approach to issues of modern concerns.[58] Though modern developments have their negative stakes, it does not need extreme ideologies either religious or secular to counteract or engage it. There is the need to avoid extreme secularity and extreme religiosity to achieve world economic, social, and political order.

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[57]Elvin Aghayev, "Analysis and Background of the 'Arab Spring' in Libya," *European Researcher* 39, 1-2 (2013) 193-195.

[58] Nsemba, "Religious Fundamentalism and Problem of Normlessness," 44.