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AFTER-LIFE IN ISLAM AND ITS INTERPRETATION BY *BOKO HARAM* FUNDAMENTALISTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The recent patterns of intolerance and bombings with religious undertones in major parts of Nigeria show that the country is no longer a model of religious tolerance. This is a problem that calls for academic investigation. Some of the suicide bombings resulted in extremely serious loss of lives and destructions of property. These religious developments throw up the issue of after-life in religions; particularly how the sect "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda' await Wal-jihad", popularly known in the media as Boko Haram interprets after-life. This is especially because the actors of the Nigerian Boko Haram claim to be propagating the Prophet's teaching and jihad. They voice visions of after-life and defence of Islam in their public statements. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to examine the Islamic views on oneness of God, after-life, and Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria. The paper, using historical and analytical methods, argues that in the sacred texts and traditions of most religions are found basis for violence and doctrines that are subject to contradictory interpretations. This accounts for the reason why people take to fanaticism, suicide mission and bombings in the name of God. The paper recommends and concludes that in the 21st Century, people should recognize and appreciate the supremacy of citizenship over religious or ethnic claims. This is the challenge of globalization.

Keywords: Afterlife, Fundamentalism, Islam, Quran

Introduction

In view of the many reported and unreported cases of bombings, which have literally become a routine in the Northern part of Nigeria, the development of the afterlife doctrine in Islam has become especially important to scholars. Religious practitioners and researchers now commit time and energy to survey the Muslim tradition to get a broader perspective on the after-life. The Nigerian actors of *Boko Haram* phenomenon voice visions of after-life and defence of Islam in their suicide notes, and they see their members who have died as martyrs; yet not even their intense faith can persuade most Nigerians,

or some Muslims, that their actions are the norms for after-life in Islam. *Boko Haram* as a sect is the '*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'await Wal-jihad*', meaning a community witnessing to the Prophet's teaching and jihad. The group is committed to proselytization and armed struggle in defense of Islam.

Though the group has come to be popularly known as *Boko Haram*, it is doubtful whether the sect called itself by this name. This is because the words: '*Boko*' and '*Haram*' convey neither theological meaning nor a system of beliefs. Be that as it may, in the mind of an average Muslim, every act is either permissible, that is, *Halal* or impermissible, *Haram*. In this regard, while '*illimin Islamiyya*' was considered '*Halal*', '*Ilimin Boko*' was '*Haram*' or impermissible act. Therefore, '*Boko*' is now used in relation to western education. In other words, '*Boko Haram*' is used to derogatorily refer to western education as forbidden or witchcraft. Today many scholars and religious leaders in Nigeria have described and condemned *Boko Haram* phenomenon as un-Islamic and dangerous. Having said that, Nigerian *Boko Haram* activities have something important to teach about after-life beliefs through fundamentalist extremism in every religion.

Boko Haram activities in Nigeria are fired by deep religious convictions and the phenomenon presents a multi-level response than the government in power is doing. Political imbalance, social injustice, unemployment and poverty created fertile feeding grounds for *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. But these conditions in themselves are not the prime reason some people feel compelled to kill in the name of their religions. The political, social and economic situations in some Northern states of Nigeria may have acted as a trigger to the present bombings in Nigeria but the roots of the religious intolerance and militancy are encoded in the history and sacred scripture of the religions. McTernan confirms this when he observed that, "today's extremists can find in their own traditions sufficient texts and in their own religious history sufficient exemplars to justify their adoption of a worldview that allows them to annihilate those who think or act differently."

Therefore, in this chapter, the intention is to examine Islamic views of the after-life and try to avoid the prejudices of seeing Islam from the perspective of its extremists exemplified in Nigerian *Boko Haram*. Ordinary Islamic views of the after-life seem to be as manifold as in African Religion or Christianity. It is in this regard that this paper, using historical and analytical methods, argues that in the texts and traditions of all religions, particularly Islam, lay a destructive potential susceptible to contradictory

interpretations. This accounts for the reason why religion is always ignited into political and ethnic flames by some people to achieve selfish purposes both locally and globally.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of contemporary Islamic thought of the afterlife, the theory of dualism comes to mind. The theory of dualism has to do with the dichotomy of principles that manifest themselves in the universe. The Greek Philosopher, Plato (428-347BC) was the most prominent scholar of dualism and his work titled: *Timeus* has purely dualistic foundations. For Plato, the human spirit belongs to the world of idea which is divine while the body which is mortal comes from the lower goods. Plato explains the presence of the immortal soul in this world with the doctrine of "the fall" of the soul; and the reason for this fall is non-reason.

Overtime, platonic dualism came to have a long echo in the history of the major religions of the world, including Islam. Islam, from its inception, is a religion of conversion. Conversion in religions is a type of transformation. In this context, Schmidt submits that,

Inner conversions involve a reorientation of identity, a dying to the old self and the birth of a new identity. Structural conversion entails a change from one religious tradition to another.

In the light of the above, Prophet Muhammad who lived as a preacher challenged his hearers to convert because the soul will stand in judgment in the after-life. Prophet Muhammad was born around the year CE 570 in Mecca. In about 610 he came to believe that he was receiving messages from God which he was to convey to his fellow Meccans. These messages were later collected and form the Glorious Qur'an. The central message of the Prophet is that God is one (Allah) and that he is merciful and all-powerful, controlling the course of events. The Prophet taught that on the last day God would judge people according to their acts and assign them to heaven or hell. In the revelations, Muhammad saw himself as merely a spiritual watchman, telling of God's punishment for sinners and reward for the just. In any event, the close connection between the vision of the horrors awaiting sinners in the afterlife and the necessity of conversion is at the base of Islam, which is the only way for an unbeliever to avoid the coming eschatological disasters.

