



ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNISM: A CURSORY LOOK

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Abstract

Islamic extremism is any behavior, attitude, or belief outside the norm of Islamic beliefs or practices. With reference to modernism in Islam, is the struggle of Islamic modernists to advocate flexible continuous reinterpretation of Islam, so that Muslims may develop institutions of education, law, and politics suitable to modern condition. Specifically, this paper examines the meaning of extremism and Islamic extremism. It is also explaining the practical features of Islamic extremism. The paper also assesses the factors responsible for Islamic extremism. It also addresses the consequences of Islamic extremism and modernism. The paper concludes that Islam encourages Muslims to maintain peace, love, mercy, tolerance, perseverance, patience, suppression of anger and conflict resolution. And also, the discourages Muslims from any forms of violence, extremism, insurgency and national insecurity. Lastly this paper suggests that any form of religious extremism should be kicked against by every Nigerian and for no reason should a Muslim or Non-muslim be killed in the name of any religion

Key words: Islam, Islamic extremism, Perspectives, Islamic Modernism.

Introduction

For more than a decade now, Islamic extremist sect has remained a source of regional, national, intercontinental and global concern because of their constant operation that had claimed many lives and destroyed several properties. The Director General International Nigeria, Abdu, disclosed on the 18th of June, 2016 that 14.8 million people have been affected by Boko Haram extremist in the North-East of Nigeria (Abdu, 2016). Globally, Islam is a total way of lives which encourages peaceful coexistence in which two or more groups live together, respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts in a nonviolent manner (Islam, 2018). Islam (2018) added further that it is a way for groups of different faith, ideology and background to live together peacefully with mutual understanding and tolerance of each other. This implies that there is no room for extremism in Islam but there is position for modernism in Islam.



]Meaning of Extremism and Islamic Extremism

There are many factors that influence the definition of extremism, such as a (non)democratic nature of the political system, the prevailing political culture, the system of values, ideology, political goals, personal characteristics and experiences, ethnocentrism, and many others (Mudde, 2017). Mudde (2017) explained further that extremism in terms of terrorism, racism, xenophobia, interethnic and inter-religious hatred, left-or right-wing political radicalism and religious fundamentalism is essentially a political term which determines those activities that are not morally, ideologically or politically in accordance with written (legal and constitutional) and non-written norms of the state. In most cases, extremism signifies political or religious views, ideas, actions and attitudes that are considered unreasonable and unacceptable to the vast majority of people (Kressel, 2019). Kressel (2019) opined that religious extremism is a process of committing, promoting or supporting purposely hurtful, violent or destructive acts against others. Other researchers like Hoffman (2016) and Oladosu (2014) have defined extremism as activities including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions and strategies that are far from the ordinary.

Practical Features of Islamic Extremism

It is relevant to describe Islamic extremists, Islamic extremists reject all contemporary ideologies and see themselves as outsiders with no option but to resort to militant Jihad. Islamic extremists believe that to kill the enemies of Allah and to offer the infidels the choice between converting to Islam or being put to death is the duty of every individual believer as well as the task of the Islamic state (Hoffman, 2016). Incidentally, features of Islamic extremism abound in Nigeria. Oladosu (2014) list the following to be the features of Islamic extremism:

- (i) the abduction of more than 500 secondary school boys and girls in Nigeria;
- (ii) the bombing of places of worship, by any religious organization, owned by adherents of other religious faith;
- (iii) the planting of explosives in public places for any reason at all;
- (iv) the killing of innocent souls and slaughtering of fellow human beings, because of their affiliation to a particular religious faith;
- (v) the burning of houses and other property, owned by adherents of other religious faith; and
- (vi) forceful conversion into Islam and married by force

Additionally, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (2014) reported that 1,188,018 people, including teachers and students have been internally displaced from their permanent homes in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states in the north-east of Nigeria. This happened as a result of religion extremism (Boko Haram extremists).

Modernism in Islam

The issue of religious modernism has been scholarly debated extensively which has made so many scholars conclude that there was a dire need of the modern interpretation of religion so that it becomes consistent with the modern standards. Those scholars include Kendall and Khan (2016), Kenney and Moosa (2013) and Ellethy (2014). Kendall and Khan (2016) added that it is the only possibility to keep Muslims firm upon their religion and save them from the attacks of



atheism. The above assertions call for definition of modernism; Charles and Adams (2016) view it as a deliberate attempt to free Islam from the shackles of too rigid orthodoxy. According to John (2018), modernism in Islam is the need to revive the Muslim community through a process of reinterpretation or reformulation of their Islamic heritage in light of the contemporary world.

Hasan (2017) opined that modernism is to be understood as a positive attitude towards innovation and change and towards the modern civilization generally while traditionalism is to be viewed as a negative attitude towards all types of innovation and towards modernity. Modernism, thus, represents a dynamic outlook, essentially pragmatic and adaptable; while traditionalism is a static position, fundamentally passive and hardly able to react to external stimuli. Thus, the modernists' purpose is to create an amalgamation of faith and modernism, Islam and secular modernity (Abū-Zayd, 2016). Iqbal (2013) added that making religion compatible with the modern world requires a thorough reconstruction of religion. No one denies the fact that to encounter the modernity an intellectual effort is needed.

Further, according to Fazlur (2015), the sustenance of Qur'an's value is possible only by adjusting it in the modern paradigm, otherwise it will become outdated. Although the Islamic modernists do not compromise the superiority of Islam over other religions, and their primary motive is to serve Islam, but the results of their efforts arguably proved harmful to Islam (Meehan, 2014). Islamic Modernism remained the dominant discourse in postcolonial Muslim societies (Kobo, 2012). The political, cultural and administrative leadership remains with the Islamic modernists. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st century, some intellectual and cultural trends emerged that challenged the hegemony modernism in Islam. Fundamentalism and cosmopolitan liberalism posed a real threat to Islamic modernism (Aydin, 2014).

Furthermore, Quadri (2017) added that the peaceful nature of the Prophet is manifested in the wars he prosecuted. His instruction during wars reveals peaceful intention. For instance, the Prophet sent Ali to Yemen and asked him not to fight as long as he stayed there, unless he was attacked. On another occasion, he instructed his soldiers not to injure the weak. He said: "In avenging the injuries inflicted upon us, molest not the harmless inmates of domestic seclusion, spare the weakness of the female sex; injure not the infant at the breast, or those who are ill in bed; abstain from demolishing the dwellings of the unresisting inhabitants: destroy not the means of their subsistence, nor their fruit trees and touch not the palm (Quadri, 2017).

Qur'an 5:5 states that the food of the People of the Book (e.g. Christians and the Jews) is lawful for the Muslims to eat. Likewise the food of the Muslims is lawful for them. This Qur'anic provision encourages mutual trust, understanding, peace and love between the Muslims and other People of the Book. The Qur'an also enjoins Muslims to invite the People of the Book for discussion, whereby they will jointly consider issues that are common to both of them and emphasise on such issues so that peace and cordiality will reign supreme in the world. Qur'an 3:64 says that "O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you...." As Islam expects Muslims to interact with adherents of other religions with the spirit of peaceful co-existence, co-operation and understanding, it also teaches them to apply the same spirit to



themselves; to deal with one another in a peaceful manner. Qur'an 28:77 states categorically that Allah does not love those who do mischief. It warns men not to even seek mischief on earth because doing so will not ensure peace.

Moreover, the Glorious Qur'an enjoins Muslims to make peace between warring factions. Qur'an 49:10 says that believers are a single brotherhood and that they should make peace and reconciliation between one another. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also says that if two Muslims confront each other with their swords, they stand at the edge of Hell, and if one kills the other, both of them shall enter Hell. Abubakar questioned the Prophet on this statement by saying that the perdition of the killer is obvious but what has the victim done to be consigned to Hell? The Prophet replied that the victim had also intent to kill the other (Quadri, 2017& Bukhari, p. 2).

The prophet (SAW) also cautioned people against what could cause unrest in a society. He said that the best among God's servants are those whose sight reminds others of the oneness of God, and the worst are those who go about backbiting, causing strifes among friends and searching for defects and vices in the pious. Quadri (2017) concluded that Prophet Muhammad was an embodiment of peace. He stood for peace in all its ramifications and encouraged his followers to be peaceful, not only among themselves but to others. He has taught that a Muslim is he, who submits to the will of Allah and lives peacefully with his fellow men.

From the philosophical or ideological point of view, the Qur'an declares in Chapter 1:1, that Allah is the Lord of the worlds. The word (*rabb*) -Lord- refers to one who provides all the needs for the growth and development of mankind. Allah is not the Lord of any nation, race or religion. He provides physical sustenance and development for all, irrespective of nation and religion. He raised His messengers for the guidance of all nations. He is as much the Lord of a non-Muslim or an enemy of the Muslims, as He is the Lord of a Muslim. Similarly, Qur'an 114: 1-3 has a prayer which begins with: "Say I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind". Moreover, directly addressing all mankind, Qur'an 2:21-22 stresses the fact that God created humanity as a single nation, from a single source, to live in a house with the same floor beneath their feet (i.e. the earth and under the same sky). All human beings are equally the creation of God, and so also were their ancestors. People share the same living space, atmosphere and resources. Their service is due only to this Creator and not due to another.

Q.1:1 "الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ"

Thus, the teachings of the Qur'an that Allah is the Lord of all mankind, that mankind is one nation, that the messengers of God were raised among all nations, and that Muslims must believe in all these messengers just as they believe in Prophet Muhammad, provide the philosophical and ideological bases for Muslims to live in peace and harmony with others. A practical effect of these precepts can be seen in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad: reported that "a funeral procession passed in front of us and the Prophet stood up and we too stood up. We said, oh Messenger of Allah! This is a funeral procession of a Jew. He said, "whenever you see a funeral procession, you should stand up" (Quadri, 2017).



Sahl bin Hunaif and Qais bin Sad were sitting in the city of Al-Qadisiyyah and a funeral procession passed in front of them and they stood up. They were told that the funeral procession was of an inhabitant of that land, a non-believer living under Muslim rule. They said: A funeral procession passed in front of the Prophet and he stood up. When he was told that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, 'Is it not a human soul?' (Bukhari, P.1312). The basis within the law of Islam upon which Muslims can live in peace and harmony among others is provided by the injunction that says the believers should fulfil the obligations in Qur'an 5:1. Here, "obligations" include all covenants, contracts, agreements, and treaties. Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, where they are free to pray, go to mosques and call themselves Muslims, are in a covenant with the legal authorities to obey the law of the land.

There are several sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad emphasising the duty towards one's neighbour. For example, the Prophet said: "Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his neighbour, and that "None of you is faithful until he loves for his what he loves for himself (Bukhari, & Muslim 5 p. 15 & Bukhari, & Muslim 45 p. 13). As in the verse of the Quran (4:36) quoted earlier, there is no distinction made here between a neighbour from one's own people, race or religion, and a neighbour from a different nation and religion. By adhering to these teachings, Muslims, whether as individuals, communities or nations, can live in peace and harmony with their non-Muslim neighbours. The relationship of Muslims with people of other convictions is based on mutual social benefit and on the good of all mankind (Hasan Al-Banna, 1997). From the above explanation, Islam encourages any form of Islamic modernism and discourages any form Islamic extremism. Islam also urged every Muslims to live harmoniously with non-Muslims.

Factors Responsible for Islamic Extremism

It is important to briefly discuss the factors responsible for Islamic extremism. Oladosu (2014), Freedom (2014) and Issa (2022) identified several factors as the causes of religious extremism. To Oladosu (2014), these include, among other factors: compounded ignorance; narrow-mindedness; miseducation; misorientation; misinformation; misconception; and misinterpretation of specific texts and teachings of Islam, allegations of religious intolerance by Christians against Muslims and vice-versa, negative influence of some non-Nigerian migrants who readily capitalize on any slight opportunity to fuel religious conflicts; influence of poverty which makes it possible for fanatics to easily employ the services of the destitute in fomenting religious troubles; and the phenomenon of "Street Culture" where a large number of homeless youths roam about the streets thereby making them easy victims of luring into involvement in illegal and anti-social activities.

Oladosu (2014) explained further that superiority complex which makes the adherents of a particular religion claim that others are inferior. Lack of a deep understanding of one's religion which results in the total condemnation of other religions, lack of a deep understanding of other religions which results in unnecessary argument and confrontation, aggressive and insulting methodology in the course of propagation activities which engender counter-aggression, and insult, misconceptions about other religions which make some people feel that the adherents of



other religions are infidels, misinterpretation of religious texts which results in twisting the original meaning of such texts in an offensive manner.

The act of playing God which results in some people condemning the adherents of other religions to hell even before the day of judgment, fanaticism and overzealousness which result in individuals taking the law into their hands and thereby killing the adherents of other religions and setting their places of worship on fire, exploiting people's peculiar problems and seizing this opportunity to convert them into one's favoured religion, dishonesty on the part of some politicians who cleverly hijack religion and use it to fuel conflicts, and dishonesty on the part of some religious leaders and teachers who mis-educate their followers and feed them with negative impressions about other religions. It should be added that irrespective of the causes or sources of specific conflicts, and regardless of whether they are intra or inter ethno-religious in nature, these conflicts are invariably associated with perilous consequences and untold woes.

Freedom (2014) mentioned ignorance of religious teaching; unemployment and poverty; children with poor upbringing; high level of illiteracy; response regarding the excesses of security forces and widespread corruption among government officials as causes of religious extremism. According to Issa (2022), it includes ignorance, poverty / unemployment, cultural background, sectarianism, hero-worshipping and ego-centricism. Oladosu (2014) concluded that immoral acts and national insecurity could result in loss of loved and beloved ones who can never be replaced, loss of innocent souls that can never be substituted, loss of invaluable properties including houses, vehicles and personal effects, perpetual psychological trauma that may result in the sudden death of the victim, mass exodus of people and dislocation of individuals particularly old men, women and children who cannot survive on their own, scars of bitterness, sorrow and unpleasant memory, lack of meaningful growth and development, social instability resulting at times, in further killings and counter killings. Spread of poverty and misery resulting in a miserable life for the masses and spread of deadly diseases which are usually beyond the control of available medical doctors.

Islamic extremism could result in any of the following attendant consequences and woes:

1. Loss of loved and beloved ones who can never be replaced.
2. Loss of innocent souls that can never be substituted.
3. Loss of invaluable properties including houses, vehicles and personal effects.
4. Perpetual psychological trauma that may result in the sudden death of the victim.
5. Mass exodus of people and dislocation of individuals particularly old men, women and children who cannot survive on their own.
6. Scars of bitterness, sorrow and unpleasant memory.
7. Lack of meaningful growth and development.
8. Social instability resulting at times, in further killings and counter killings.
9. Spread of poverty and misery resulting in a miserable life for the masses.
10. Spread of deadly diseases which are usually beyond the control of available medical doctors (Oladosu, 2014).



Consequences of Islamic Modernism

With reference to consequences of Islamic modernism, Islamic modernism could result in any of the following attendant consequences:

1. Permanent peace and love;
2. Mercy and tolerance;
3. Perseverance, patience and suppression of anger;
4. National integration, cooperation and understanding; and
5. Rapid religious, political and economic development.

There is no doubt, a society where tolerance, brotherhood, love, mercy, goodness and righteousness are predominant there must be rapid religious, political and economic development. This is what modernism in Islam is explaining.

Conclusion

Islam discourages Muslims from any forms of violence, extremism, terrorism, insurgency and national insecurity but encourages Muslims to maintain peace, love, mercy, tolerance, perseverance, patience and suppression of anger. More over Prophet Muhammad was an embodiment of peace. He stood for peace in all its ramifications and encouraged his followers to be peaceful, not only among themselves but to others. He has taught that a Muslim is he, who submits to the will of Allah and lives peacefully with his fellow men.

Way Forward

Based on the above submissions and conclusions, the writer wishes to suggest as a way forward:

1. Any form of religious extremism should be kicked against by everybody and for no reason should women be married by force in Islam.
2. For no reason should a Muslim or Non-muslim be killed in the name of any religion and children and women should not be abducted in the name of any religion.
3. Workers in the field of Islamic and Christian religious propagation should be knowledgeable, professionally trained, wise, polite, flexible, sincere and tolerant in their approach and methodology.
4. Under no circumstance should mosques, churches and other places of worship be set on fire in the name of any religion and every individual in Nigeria should ensure that he or she not be persuaded into acts of terrorism by foreigners.
5. Issues bordering on peaceful co-existence between the various religions in Nigeria should be included in the curriculum content of the different educational levels in Nigeria.
6. All the agencies of education – the home, the parents, the teachers, the radio, television, newspapers, etc., should emphasize peaceful co-existence among the various religions in Nigeria.
7. The committees should organize periodic conflict resolution workshops, conferences, seminars and public lectures to deal with matters of mutual interest such as mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence between Muslims, Christians and followers of other faiths.



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