

RETHINKING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN THE LIGHT OF ASOUZU'S COMPLEMENTARY ONTOLOGY AND THE IDEA OF GOD

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Abstract

This work addresses the problem of religious intolerance which is borne out of some religious adherent's humanistic tendency to monopolize and canonize the idea of God making Him a private property confined to the limits of their religion only. The authors argue that this selfish and grossly parochial outlook has led to the development of extreme doctrines and practices that have helped in no small measures in fanning the embers of religious violence in our society today. The work decries the divisive, bifurcating polarising and domineering approach employed by some religious adherents to protect their interest. This unintended ethnocentric commitment and ambivalent tension engendered by ihekpuchianya (phenomenon of concealment) is the major cause of almost all the religious conflicts today. This work argues that religious intolerance stifles and closes the mind there by making it non-receptive to other religious views. Thus in a bid to be fanatically theistic, the mind becomes more atheistic. This is because it objectifies God and reduces Him to a property that can be privatized and caged for only a specific religious group. On the contrary, the authors see religion as a unifying factor that binds all humanity together in more cohesive and concrete whole. The authors maintain that the mind will be more receptive and open to welcome other religious views through noetic propaedeutic pedagogy, a rigorous process where the human mind will be purged of every bifurcating and divisive tendency and be educated to think in a humanocentric and mutually complimentary way, since to be, according to Asouzu's ontology is to be with others. As an addendum to Asouzu's complementary ontology, the authors make some recommendations for fostering and promoting of religious tolerance in Nigeria nay Africa. The paper employs critical analytical method of reflection to drive home her points.

Keywords: *Religious Intolerance, Noetic Propaedeutic, Antagonism, and Complementary Ontology*

Introduction

Religion in the world today is increasingly laden with religious conflicts precipitated by religious intolerance rooted in the simple belief that God is harmless. Hence, to be more connected with God, one must likewise be harmless. And for one to be truly religious there is need for every religious adherent to see another person from a different religious background as a missing link of reality and a part that completes the whole. This according to Asouzu's complementary ontology can only be achieved by educating the mind of every one through the rigorous process of noetic propaedeutic pedagogy to think holistically and complementarily such that it may grasp being in a complementarily harmonious way, without distortion or polarization. Asouzu holds that true religion should be based on the principle of forgiveness and reconciliation with God and man through the principle of complementarity for the harmonious coexistence of all. This religious ideology aligns with the teaching of Jesus who teaches and practices tolerance and the generosity of spirit when it comes to dealing with crimes. Just like Jesus who told the woman facing the death penalty to simply 'go and sin no more' (John 8:11), Asouzu in his complementary ontology holds the view that no religion holds the monopoly of truth but true religion is the uniting force and a missing link which bind every other religion into a coherent, concrete and cohesive whole, having as its common goal, the ardent quest to have a full grasp of the immensity of the supreme Being.

Asouzu's complementary ontology serves as an antidote to religious violence and intolerance that have threatened global and national peace with their homophobic antics. It serves as a bridge that links one religious sect with another for authentic international relation and global peace. Complementary ontology tames the mind against bifurcating, exclusivist divisive and distorted mind-sets which lead to religious and ethnic violence. Adopting Complementary reflection as a method will go a long way to harmonizing the various and varied human religious views into a concrete coherent cohesive and complementary whole. When our minds have been fully reoriented and refined through a rigorous and holistic overhauling of the mind called noetic propaedeutic pedagogy (education of the mind), it will open the windows of our minds to welcome the fresh air from other religious views. It will broaden our minds and establish an inextricable intellectual romance between one's religious views and that of others. It will enable one to see one first as a human person before his association with any other religion. Humanity will truly have its pride of place when we treat others first as humans before anything else. On the plane of humanity, every man is equal. Dichotomy or inequality comes in when we misplace priority by placing the less-valuable before the most valuable, and accident before substance.

The human mind is the power house that incubates human thoughts and action. Everything is first conceived in the mind. Every moral action is the product of a healthy mind. This is why it is imperative that the mind of man is properly educated to shield it from corruption. This is the only way the mind of man can properly be immune against evil. And when the mind of man has been fully immune from corruption through a thorough and rigorous processes of mental overhauling in other words called noetic propaedeutic, it will be made a fertile ground that will accommodate other opposing religious views to yield the desired result we have been clamouring for. All humans will see it as a moral obligation to respect and tolerate the opposing views of others without alienating themselves from their humanity. It is at this point that we will come to the full realization of the fact that one's religious conviction does not make him more or less human than one on the wing of the religious divide. It is on this ground that we will come to terms with the fact that being a Christian does not make one more or less human than a Muslim, and being a Muslim doesn't make one more or less human than a Buddhist, Hindus, an African Traditional Religious worshiper, Agnostic, Atheist etc. We are all equal on the pedestal of humanity. It is downright wrong to allow religion to determine how you relate with humans. Rather, it is right and worthwhile to allow your humanity to be a determining factor in your relationship with others. This is because; the human feeling fully guided by the moral law is inherent in all humans irrespective of our religion, race or ethnicity.

In this vein, Uduigwomen asserts that "although the world has never known peace, peace has always been one of humanity's highest good and is ready to pay any price for it. "For such people, the most advantageous peace is better than the most just war" (228). Peace, being an opposite of dissension, violence and war, it serves as an antidote which heals the venomous wounds of hatred and hostility, sorrows and discords, tears and heart breaks among all those who clings to it, whenever forgiveness and reconciliation seems impossible. Jimi Hendrix opine that, "when the power of love overcomes the love for power, the world will know peace". A cursory look at Nigerian situation will reveal that some group of Nigerians who through their inhuman acts have been termed terrorists are indeed so tragically bound to the starless midnight of religious fanaticism, intolerance and violence that the bright day break of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

We have the conviction that an unarmed truth and unconditional love will be a desideratum. Little wonder then that mother Theresa supposed that, "if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other". Thus, the thrust of this work is to critically examine Asouzu's religion and the idea of God.

We shall conclude by buttressing the fact that Asouzu's complimentary ontology is the only panacea towards resolving religious violence and intolerance which has cost the lives of many. And that when the human mind is been tamed and trained to think complementarily, it will learn to see another human not as a rival but a being which serve the missing link of reality or a part that completes the wholeness of reality which he constitutes a part.

Clarification of Terms

• Religion

Religion like other elastic and dynamic terms used in social discussions, means different things to different people. Etymologically, religion is derived from the Latin word *religio*, which means to bind or to tie. Thus, from its root meaning, religion is seen as the bond that ties different level of reality together to form a coherent unit. Religion binds the Supreme Being with other beings, at other hand. And as such, religion in its entirety is conceived as an instrument of unification. The new Webster's dictionary defines religion as man's expression of his acknowledgement of the divine. It holds that religion is the system of belief and practice relating to the sacred and unifying its adherents in community. That is to say, things set apart and forbidden-belief and practices which unite one single moral community called a church or mosque by all those who adhere to them. (Emile 62). Religion consists of two elements;

1. The natural recognition of a power or powers beyond our control; the feeling of control; the feeling of dependence upon this power or powers
2. Entering into relations with this power or powers; uniting these elements into a single proposition.

From the above conception of religion, it is obvious that the idea of a supernatural being and his first position in the scheme of things is a common phenomenon to all forms of religious beliefs. In fact, no account of religion is complete without a belief in the supernatural being with absolute authority.

• God

God is generally regarded as the Supreme Being. He is a being or spirit that is worshiped, and is believed to have created the universe or to be the creator and controller of the universe. God in some religions is seen as a spirit who is believed to have power over a particular part of nature, or who is believed to represent a particular reality. From the philosophical perspective, God is a being who moves all things to existence yet remains himself unmoved. He is seen as an Uncreated creator who created all things out of nothing (*exnihilo*) yet remains himself uncreated. Which brings all finite beings into existence and the substance

which subsist in all accidents. God is analogically identified with these qualities; omniscience, omnipresence, patience, mercifulness, kindness, righteousness, etc.

An ontological argument for the existence of God begins with an analysis of the concept of God and believes that such a being necessarily exist in reality. It was first used by Saint Anselm who based it on the concept of God as the greatest being conceivable.

Thus, St Anselm in his work, *Pros logion* applied his ontological argument for the existence of God in this manner. God is the being greater than which none can be thought of or imagined. God in other words is the greatest being we can possibly imagine or think of. But the all-pervading existence of God cannot not fully be fathomed by the human mind alone, because he exists independent of the human mind and a being which can only exist in the mind and does not exist outside the mind cannot be the greatest possible being we can think of both in the mind and outside the mind. Therefore, God exists whether the human mind is able to conceptualize or fathom his essence or not.

Religious Intolerance: An Appraisal of Asouzu's Complementary Ontology and the Idea of God

Simply put intolerance mean unwillingness to tolerate. Religious intolerance is therefore, an act of not being able to accommodate a contrary or opposing religious ideals or beliefs. As a phenomenon, religious intolerance denotes a continuous refusal to reorganise the necessity of coexistence of diverse religious beliefs in spite of human insufficiency. It is the non-recognition of the fragmentation of human historicity as necessary dimension of human existence.

Given the mind-set, any human society is prone to all forms of contradiction and conflict. As it was earlier stated, the cause of intolerance is deeper than we can imagine. This process will be better appreciated if religious intolerance is examined from the ontological composition of the individuals that makeup the various sects. This approach becomes imperative in as much as the way we relate to the world and people around us depends on the way we conceptualise reality.

Looking at religious intolerance from the perspective of Asouzu's complimentary ontology, it becomes clear that religious intolerance breaks out as a result of the wrong perception of most religious adherents and their unhealthy relationship with others who do not share the same religious creed with them. Today, most religious adherents act antagonistically towards others under the influence of the heavy dose of a bifurcating, divisive and exclusivist ontological mind sets within

this ambience. The human mind is incapacitated in becoming aware of it sharing a common complimentary horizon with other units and missing links within a giving framework (Sophia; an African journal of philosophy, 2005, 56).

From the conception of religion presented earlier, it is evident that human beings seek fulfilment and self-understanding in the transcendent. This is something that has to do with the foundation of our being outside of ourselves. As such, the human mind is called to duty as it is the instrument with which we pierce into the transcendental world which is not accessible. But in a situation where the mind has been distorted in conceptualizing adequately the relationship between parts of the whole, the resultant effect is conception of an absolute. It is in this situation that human beings start to construct an idea of an absolute Being of their ideal and imagination which may not be in consonance with that of others. And the tendency is to lord it over others as the ideal picture of God, an attempt that is bound to be fatal. The moment we are unaware of the ambivalent nature of our minds in conceiving the absolute that is the moment we conceive an image of our self-imagined God, which falls short of the immensity of its determination and indetermination. Asouzu captures this point clearly when he writes, in most cases involving claims to clear insight about the nature and existence of God, the human mind fails to understand that no designation is adequate enough to capture the essence of God in the ultimacy of its immensity (339).

In a bid to simplify the issue of the limitation of the human mind in comprehending the totality and immensity of God, Asira, adopted a legend about the proverbial elephant. According to him God is like an elephant different people (religions) approach from different dimension. Those who approach the elephant from the ear would say it is a big fan, others who approach it from the leg would say it is a big trunk of a tree, yet those who approach the elephant from the tail would say it is a big rope. And when an argument ensues as to the real nature of the elephant, each of these groups of people will express themselves from the angle or direction it encountered the elephant. And because of their limitation of comprehending the totality of the elephant's nature, there is bound to be a misunderstanding and self-destruction, as each group thinks its own description is the real picture of the elephant. The same is true about the nature of God and the various religious attempt at comprehending his immensity (23).

Within the ambience of complementary ontology, such confusion and misunderstanding is out of place as the mind becomes aware of its tendencies of picturing reality in an incomplete and naïve manner. This self-realization result in the clear need for complementation from other units of reality. It is in this way

that we can uphold a healthy relationship between parts and the whole in natural complimentary spirit.

In effect, the misconstrued idea of religion and the distorted and disjointed knowledge of God which nosedive into religious intolerance and violence will be dramatically curbed if not utterly obliterated from the prism of complimentary ontological mind set as different religious experiences will be seen as a form of the diverse manifestation of God. As such, religion turns into a mechanism for the harmonization of the diverse opinions of God for a full appreciation of His immensity and incomprehensiveness.

Being-in-Control: The Power of Religion and the Idea of God

Asouzu in his complementary ontology, holds tenaciously to the view that one of the greatest dangers that threaten the world today is that of the human endemic thirst for absolute power over other human beings. This aligns with the assertion, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The danger of being in control in the most negative form is when people easily become intoxicated by their position and achievements as they seek to lord it over others. This is when people easily start perceiving themselves as invulnerable and here, they start to view others with contempt as less humans and under achievers (334).

Any careful observer will be shocked at what is happening in the world today. We witness a worrisome situation where conflicts are instigated, human beings manipulated, nations incited against each other in a bid to create enabling atmosphere to control themselves and demonstrate one's superior position as indispensable determinant and controller of human destiny.

Worst still is a situation where some nations give the impression that they are above the law because of their own types of absolute self-perception. This matter offers us an opportunity to delve into metaphysical matters in a very concrete and practical way. To such issues belong matters dealing with the idea of God, cause, effect, mode of existence and above all, the mode of relationship between substance and accidents, God and man, etc.

Some Humans in their inordinate quest for power have assumed the place of God. This is fully manifested in their God complex personality of their physical inapproachability, unavailability and inaccessibility in times their presence is needed most. This trait has gone a long way in blurring the idea of God in the heart of humanity.

Today, the issue of absolute power and religion go hand in hand. What is interesting today is that religion offers itself as a veritable camouflage for the perpetuation of the vilest forms of evil while still sounding credible. Here, we are not thinking only of those known religious zealots and fanatics, who in their professed activism remain dangerous. We are thinking more of many who are still more dangerous. These are those who claim a higher form of legitimacy endowed by religious values and what they propagate as higher civilization but who in effect stand against any thing that is civilized and human (Asouzu, 338).

In this case, religion and the idea of God become tools of manipulation and exploitation. These are those cases where God turns out to be the being on our side of injustice or he is invoked to facilitate our interest and welfare. He is that being that protect our most cherished interest against outside intrusion. This the God that can be invoked to eliminate one's enemies and destroy and enhance our welfare, even when this entails denying same to others.

It is a God who knows what we need most and one that knows how to get it from others to satisfy our despicable craving, an unjust and narrow-minded God. It is the God created in man's psychopathic and homicidal image and likeness. It is that God that is invoked to secure those interests that induce the mind to be ruthless and inconsiderate to the point of absurdity.

When closely considered, we notice that in most contentious situation, individuals and groups create an image of an absolute being that is in harmony with the vile cravings of their minds and imagination. The moment the mind start seeing the world in polarizing antagonistic images, its idea of God is bound to be fatal. This God of our imagination and creation according to Asouzu, does not exist. If he does exist, he must be a God that is dead to contradictions in his essence and existence. If this submission has any element of truth in it, then Nietzsche was not wrong to have said that God is dead. It is this distorted image of God we project in our minds that is dead, not the real God. In fact, a supposedly infinite and all powerful God who relies on the finite powers of humans to fight for him should be a dead God.

In this case, the moment we forget that the idea of God remains both a uniting line and a dividing line, that is the moment we create an image of God that destroys what God stands for. This is why God is referred to or described as the absolute being and an infinitely supra sensible incomprehensible being, as that beyond which nothing can exist that has being as the ultimate foundation of all missing links.

It is in the sense also that this absolute Being finds expression in diverse human communities as chuckwu, Abasi, Olodumare, Oloom, etc. (Metuh Comparative Studies, 86-89)

Way Forward for Religious Intolerance/Antagonism

Religious intolerance and antagonism are complex issues that require a multifaceted approach to address effectively. Here are some of the way forward to promote tolerance and reduce religious antagonism to the barest minimum in Nigeria nay Africa:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Education plays a crucial role in combating religious intolerance, promoting religious literacy and understanding by including comprehensive education about different religious traditions, their beliefs and practices in school curricula and providing sufficient reasons why certain people behave in a particular way different from us will go a long way to fostering empathy and openness to dialogue.
2. **Interfaith Dialogue:** Religious leaders should create enabling environment that will encourage interfaith initiatives provide a platform for individuals from different religious backgrounds to come together, share their experiences ,and foster mutual respect. Such conversations can help build bridges, promote understanding and address misconceptions.
3. **Legal Protection:** In order to ensure a healthy religious atmosphere and safeguard the life of every citizen while exercising their right to freedom of worship, the government owes every citizen legal protection while exercising their inalienable right to freedom of worship. The government ought to guarantee the safety and legal protection that will foster religious freedom and equality. Laws should be made to safeguard the rights of individuals to practice their religion freely and protect them from discrimination. Government should actively enforce these laws and take measures to prevent hate speech or act of violence targeting religious communities.
4. **Media Responsibility:** Given the pivotal role the media play in our world today, this paper strongly recommends that the media should be used as a veritable tool to promote religious tolerance. The media should be used as unifying factor to connect and link the entire humanity irrespective of our creed, culture and race in an inextricable string of mutuality. In this vein, this paper holds strongly to the view that all individual users and media houses make it a point of duty to censor every information to ensure that such information are not religiously inciting, incendiary and provocative. The authors encourages responsible media reporting that promotes religious understanding and avoid sensationalism or the perpetuation stereotypes. Media outlets should strive for balanced coverage and avoid stigmatizing or

marginalizing any particular religious group. The paper also encourages media houses and individuals to promote positive stories of interfaith cooperation and highlighting common values can also help counter negative narratives.

5. **Grassroots Initiatives:** The researchers encourages everyone to put all our hands on deck to support grassroots initiatives that promote religious tolerance and understanding. Local community organizations and religious institutions can play a vital role in fostering dialogue, organizing interfaith events, and creating platforms for collaboration and cooperation. Encouraging these initiatives can help build trust and foster relationships among diverse religious communities,
6. **Leadership and Role Models:** The researchers urges everyone to make concerted effort to support and promote religious leaders and influential figures who actively advocate for religious tolerance and respect. Religious leaders have significant influence on their followers, and when they promote the message of inclusivity, respect and understanding, it can have a positive impact on reducing religious antagonism.
7. **International Cooperation:** This paper recommends that policy makers formulate policies that will encourage international collaboration and dialogue on religious freedom and tolerance. Government, organizations, and civil society groups can work together to share best practices, promote dialogue and address religious intolerance at global scale.

It is important to recognize that addressing religious antagonism require a long term commitment and sustained efforts from individuals, communities and institutions. By fostering understanding, promoting dialogue, and protecting religious freedom, we can work towards a more tolerant and inclusive society. In a way, this paper holds strongly that for religion to perfectly play its role as a unifier, the onus lies on religious leaders and followers to generate centripetal forces not centrifugal forces (as currently witnessed across the globe) in order to bring all humanity to a more cohesive, coherent and concrete whole for harmonious complementation since all that exist serves a missing link of reality.

Conclusion

From the fore going, it is clear that religion in its entire ramification involves a relationship between God and man on the one hand and humans to human on the other hand. Thus, religion is a mechanism for the harmonization of these levels of interaction from the stand point of Asouzu's complimentary ontology; it is argued that religious intolerance is a product of the inability of the human mind to be aware of its ambivalence in conceptualizing the idea of God. This inability

emanated from the heavy dose of an exclusivist, polarising and bifurcating ontological mind set which needs to be reconstructed in our ontological life.

It is therefore argued in this work that tolerance, which is the missing virtue in contemporary religious interaction, is a product of the mind-set that is fundamentally structured to recognise its deficiency in comprehending the totality and immensity of God, with this religious intolerance will give way to mutual coexistence and tolerance among religious adherence.

With regard to religious violence, Asouzu argues strongly that, in an eagerness for some religious fanatics to fight for a God of their fantasy, they end up negating this very God. More explicitly, a situation where the more the mind seeks to be theistic, it becomes more atheistic. It is that form of fanatical intolerance that seeks to enthrone the ego and sees it as the only being in control at the expense of other missing links. In this vein, the problem of religious intolerance that has cantankerously eaten deep into the fabric of our society can only be solved through *noetic propaedeutic* pedagogy, a rigorous process where the human mind will be purged of every bifurcating and divisive tendency and be educated to think in a humanocentric and mutually complimentary way since to be, according to Asouzu's ontology is the capacity to affirm 'that I may not be alone' for to be is to be with others.

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