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A Review of the Doctoral Dissertation
by **Anthony Chukwuebuka Ohaekwusi**

entitled:

Analiza etyczna przemocy na tle religijnym we debatach o terroryzmie
(***Ethical Analysis of Religious Violence in the Contemporary Debates on Terrorism***)

The dissertation focuses on the relationship between religion and violence, with particular attention paid to contemporary terrorism. Generally speaking, the work aims to answer what factors are responsible for peoples' violent behavior associated with religion and how we can counteract these factors. Mr. Ohaekwusi divided the dissertation into five chapters, which he grouped into three parts.

Part one (*Religious Violence: a Problem of Meaning*) contains two chapters and concentrates on the meaning of religious violence. In the first chapter, the author tries to understand the conceptual link between religion and violence. He notices that religion (by which he means any traditional religion, paradigm examples being Judaism, Christianity, Islam, but also Hinduism, Buddhism, or traditional African religions) points at loving, peaceful God and the ideal of love. So understood religion seems to exclude any advocacy of violence. However, there have been many reports of religiously motivated violent behavior. Thus, the concept of religious violence may seem intelligible. The question then arises whether religion is inherently violent. Mr. Ohaekwusi's next step is a trial to define violence in religious contexts. The violence of this kind includes various forms: physical injuries, but also psychic or social forms of violence. It is worth noting here that the author does not focus on the very notion of violence, which would help the reader understand why the mentioned forms of injuries, self-mortifications, etc., should be considered examples of violence.

The first chapter closes with presenting various historical instances of violence in the main world religious traditions. They embrace not only various acts of violence but also discussions over violence. Good examples of the latter are the Christian doctrine of just war, the presentation of Buddist teachings on non-violence, or the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna presented in *Bhagavad Gita*.

Chapter two asks a more specific question, namely whether religion is prone to violence. In the search for the answer, Mr. Ohaekwusi takes three steps. Firstly, he analyzes the contemporary literature on the relation between religion and violence. He distinguishes three views: the deterministic view, the dualistic approach, and the instrumentalist view. According to the deterministic view, represented by authors such as Charles Selgngut, Richard Wentz, or Lloyd Steffen, religions are by nature absolutist, comprehensive and dogmatic. As such, they tend to demonize and exclude all the others (non-believers). Demonization leads, in the end, to the use of violence against the non-adherents of the given religion. The advocates of dualism (e.g., Regina M. Schwarz) claim that only some religions have these detrimental consequences, namely monotheistic religions, as they tend to be more dogmatic, monopolistic, and divisive.

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Instrumentalists (e.g., Julia Neuberger, Karen Armstrong, or Ann Widecombe) maintain that religion in itself is not violent. It may become such only when used for wrong purposes. In other words, only external, non-religious factors, such as geopolitics, economy, etc., could push people to instrumentalizing religion. Mr. Ohaekwusi supports the instrumentalist view (he makes it clear in the third part of the book).

The author's second step is the sociological analysis of various forms that religiously motivated violence may take. He groups these forms into two main categories: cultic religious violence and combative religious violence. In the former category, he lists ritualistic, punitive, and abusive violence. The latter category encompasses revolution, separatism, religious wars, sectarianism, and terrorism. This passage is more of description than estimation or argumentation.

The final part of chapter two contains a detailed analysis of challenging passages in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Quran. They (seemingly) present God as an envious, dangerous entity who punishes disobedient people severely and inspires believers to violent behavior (including physical destruction of non-believers). Such texts, the author maintains, stand in opposition to great religions' central message, namely that God is loving and we should do good to one another. Reading these passages literally (as religious fundamentalists do) leads to violence, i.e., these texts may seem to justify violence. Therefore, they require interpreting in the light of other, life-affirming passages.

The second part, *Religion and Contemporary Terrorism* (also containing two chapters), [1] focuses on two main issues: 1) whether religious extremism is a major cause of contemporary terrorism (in fact, this is the title of chapter three); and 2) how one could try to justify terrorism (chapter three). Chapter three consists of three sections. The first one contains a definitional analysis of terrorism with its subcategories and the distinctions between terrorism and other related phenomena, such as violence or terror. Another segment relates to observations on religious elements of contemporary terrorism. Here, Mr. Ohaekwusi, following other writers, makes several claims of empirical nature. For example, he says that terrorists use religious narration because it helps them create a strong identity. Sharing such religious identity motivates people to join or support terrorists. Having religious characteristics is desirable from terrorists' points of view also because then anxiety about terrorism is strongest.

Additionally, several religious reasons (factors) for engaging in terrorism are considered. For example, one may be motivated by the fear that one's traditional religion (and cultural identity based on the religion) is threatened or by absolutist concepts that require taking some violent actions against non-believers. The author claims that these religious components are not dominant motivations. The main reasons, he says, are political (p. 128).

Nevertheless, Mr. Ohaekwusi does not seem to present any arguments as to why we should take this and other empirical claims to be true. By suggesting that not religious but political (or other) motivations drive extremists to terrorist actions, he refers to other people's internal, private mental states. However, they claim that their motivations are religious (one may draw such a conclusion after reading the letters of the terrorists who kidnapped the airplanes that attacked WTC and Pentagon in 2001). If one claims that it was otherwise, that it was not religious but political motivation, one needs to give some good reasons for thinking so. Apart from possible

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[1] Although, the question under the title oth this part suggests some other problem. The question goes: *What effects [does] terrorism have on contemporary attitudes towars faith?* The word "does" is missing in the original text (see p. 105).

psychological scenarios and opinions of other authors, such reasons are not provided in the dissertation, at least not directly. The closing section of the third chapter is devoted to a presentation of the Nigerian experiences with terrorism.

Chapter four (*Terrorism, Jihad, and Holy War: Implications and Provocations*) mainly concentrates on the issue of justifying terrorism, its negative consequences, and the way one should counteract it. Thus, placing the words *implications* and *provocations* in the title seems somewhat confusing.

While analyzing the problem of justification (more precisely, the question of "what ... values ... make terrorists feel justified in their actions"), Mr. Ohaekwusi points to the following factors that may motivate violence: religious identity, the absoluteness of religious values, the fear of extinction, or the psychological mechanism called *mimetic rivalry*. According to the author, these factors are somehow connected with the justification of terrorism. For example, the threat of extinction and the necessity to fight for the religion (or religiously informed culture) may seem to require resorting to violence (even terrorism). One might also feel justified in committing terrorist acts by reference to "sacred" texts, or if oppressed, one may claim the right to vengeance for oppression. Also, the aim of restoring the "authentic religion" may justify violent means.

The author notices that the actual justification of terrorism is non-religious, that religion plays only the function of decoy or façade. Religion is merely used to justify their wishes "to rape, pillage, and plunder." (see p.160). Again, the only rationale for such a claim seems to be the opinion of other authors.

A considerable part of the chapter is devoted to the possibility of justifying terrorism by reference to just war theory. The author, following C.A.J. Coady, introduces just war conditions, which are as follows: 1) declaring war by a legitimized authority; 2) just cause; 3) treating war as a last resort; 4) having a reasonable prospect of success; 5) using violence proportionately to the wrong resisted; 6) having right intentions; 7) non-existence of other ways than war to preserve certain values (this condition seems to be closely related to the last resort requirement); 8) non-combatants should be protected from harm. Terrorists believe they are fighting a just war. Therefore, they try to show that their fight meets the above conditions. If it does not meet some of them (e.g., the requirement of legitimate authority or no harm to non-combats), terrorists argue that these conditions are not necessary to justify their fight.

According to Mr. Ohaekwusi, at least one point requires special attention here, namely the condition of not harming non-combatants. To terrorists (but also some utilitarians), terrorist tactics may seem a better solution than a regular war; they can achieve the same objectives with fewer casualties. Terrorists do not make exceptions for civilians because they perceive the civilians as accomplices to the injustice against which they fight. However, to the author of the dissertation, all the conditions of just war should be observed: "[n]o degree of oppression or desperation can ever justify the killing of the innocent civilians" (see 166). Besides, as Mr. Ohaekwusi claims, there is always nonviolent means available. He tries to substantiate this claim in the last chapter, where he speaks a little of the efficacy of non-violence in fighting for justice.

The author's next step is taking a closer look at versions of religiously motivated groups, such ethno-religious state groups, religious insurgent/separatist groups, violent sectarians, or so-

called religious lone-wolves. This part is descriptive and plays a secondary (or illustrative) role in the reviewed book.

Another issue analyzed in the fourth chapter is the question of the negative consequences of religious terrorism, called by the author *challenges of terrorism*. The obvious effects are causalities, low economy, or instability of political systems. However, one can also point at other, less obvious results of religiously inspired terrorism. One of them is the (mistaken) perception that religion is the source of evil, general desensitization, and dehumanization.

The final section of the fourth chapter is devoted to possible means of neutralizing terrorism. The author points at two possible strategies: the hard one and the soft one. The hard strategy includes intelligence and combatant means. The soft strategy focuses on "the battle of ideas" and adequate communication either with terrorists or people that may support terrorists (e.g., constitute the pool of future recruits). The idea is that if such communication is efficient, it should discourage potential terrorists from joining those who try to recruit them.

Central and most valuable in the dissertation is part three (*Ethical Analysis of Religious Terrorism*). This part contains one chapter (chapter five), entitled: *Perceptions of Terror and the Clash of Moral Attitudes* (The title comes across as somewhat enigmatic and does not help anticipate the chapter's content). Its primary focus is presenting philosophical (and psychological) explanations of why people commit extreme evil and offering a philosophical ground for religious non-violence. Mr. Ohaekwusi starts with the question of why people commit terror in the name of God if (as he has shown) religion stands for life and wellbeing. Although various authors would claim that (at least) some religions inspire violence, he takes authentic religion (by which he means great religious traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) to be excluding any form of violence. Any violence is a human creation, and thus it is in human nature that one should look for the explanation of evil.

In his explanations, Mr. Ohaekwusi resorts to the concepts of depersonalization and dehumanizations. He points at Zimbardo and Milgram's psychological experiments that suggest that ordinary people can commit violent acts when exposed to specific circumstances. A further step in the explanation is achieved by referring to Hannah Arendt and Friedrich von Hildebrand's phenomenological approaches. The former postulated that people commit evil out of thoughtless implementing orders rather than hate. In her opinion, evil is banal; one does not need to have a wicked will nor be a moral monster to commit the worst of crimes. What is suffices is the lack of thinking about what one is really doing.

Another insight into human evil sources may be von Hildebrandt's concept of moral blindness. The blindness of this kind means a kind of numbness, impossibility to perceive another human being's personhood. The author of the reviewed dissertation brings the issue closer to the context of religion by reference to such authors as Jonathan Sacks or David Report. In line with the phenomenological explanations, these authors show that terrorism has its beginning in alienating other persons. According to Sacks, evil committed in a sacred cause is possible when one becomes indifferent to the lives one destroys. Extreme violence emerges when we draw a sharp line between "Us as all-good" and "Them as all-evil." This pathological dualism leads to dehumanizing and demonizing the enemies, which makes it easy to kill them. Desensitization relates not only to terrorists or extremists; it also reaches regular people who witness acts of violence, either directly or indirectly, via the spread of information.

One more time, the author comes back to whether religion plays a special part in motivating violence as if the issue had not been finally solved in the previous chapters. Again, he states that religion is a positive moral force, a moral guide concerned with good and evil, a ground of our morality, the basis for distinguishing good and evil. Nevertheless, Mr. Ohaekwusi seems to admit (following other authors, e.g., Jessica Stern) that there are some problematic elements in religion, for example, the exclusiveness of its truth, pretending to the monopoly of genuine salvation, or regarding non-believers (including those who believe otherwise) as condemned to eternal damnation (p. 212). However, it is not a religion but people, says the author, or their ideologies that cause the violence and terror. It is hypocrisy, he repeats after William Cavanaugh, to say that religion is necessarily more inclined toward violence than secular ideologies are.

The last step in the book is to show the solution to violence, and it is to be found in following the golden rule and its personalistic understanding of human beings. Firstly, the author claims that traditional religions already embrace this very solution. One can come across the golden rule (*Do to others what you wish others do on to you*) in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Also, in African traditional religions, one can find similar advice. Secondly, the golden rule presupposes the personalist norm, according to which every human (as a person) is a bearer of dignity, and as such, they deserve respect (or love).

According to the author, the personalist norm leads to the rejection of violence in its fullest form. That means going beyond a mere resistance from violence toward a conscious choice of non-violence "and active promoting values and virtues that discourage harm and violence, even in the face of oppression." Mr. Ohaekwusi also seems to suggest that the personalist norm should influence the interpretation of the "hard" texts – only then violent readings would be overcome, and violence for God's sake excluded. From this suggestion, it follows that religions could be evaluated from the moral point of view. This view seems to have far-reaching consequences in philosophy, especially for divine command ethics (I will develop this thought later on in the review). The philosophy of non-violence finds its fuller expression in Mahatma Gandhi's concepts of satyagraha and ahimsa and in Christian personalism. For this reason, the author devotes a few pages (226-230) to present the core ideas and perspectives of these philosophical approaches.

This closer presentation of personalist views allows Mr. Ohaekwusi, in the last section of the fifth chapter, to claim "possible remedies" against religious violence, which is "intensifying the centrality of person in religious tradition." (p.230). As if confirming this claim, the whole dissertation ends with the words by Karl Marlantes that go as follows: "When we find a person in an enemy, a human being, we will find it hard to crow about burning them to death" (p. 252).

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I will divide my estimation of Mr. Ohaekwusi's dissertation into three parts. The first part will point at what I take to be its strong sides; in the second part, I will draw attention to what I consider its weaknesses; and finally, I will point at some issues that invite discussion.

It must be appreciated that the monograph offered by Mr. Ohaekwusi focuses on a socially significant and hotly debated issue. Terrorism has affected the lives of many societies all over the world. A vast literature on the subject only confirms its significance. Many authors accuse religions (especially Islam and Christianity) of their inherent tendency to violence. Some try to show that the problem lies more deeply in human nature, and we will not solve it by eliminating religion or closing it in the private sphere. The vastness of literature does not mean that all has

already been said and nothing new, worth reading, can be added. Thus, the choice of the problem o religious violence for the doctoral dissertation is to be positively evaluated.

It also deserves to be highlighted that Mr. Ohaekwusi has gathered and organized numerous and very different voices into one very well-structured whole. He was able to swiftly put together philosophical, sociological, and psychological perspectives to support each other in the realization of the main goal of the dissertation. The goal was to answer what makes people behave violently in the name of religion and how to remedy this violence. The goal has been achieved satisfactorily (although some critical commentaries on the realization need to be made).

Additionally, Mr. Ohaekwusi's dissertation is a valuable application of personalist philosophy in contemporary debates. He proves that personalism is still a fruitful ethical approach deserving more attention from ethicists, social philosophers, and other scholars who deal with human reality.

Despite all the positive comments, some weaknesses must be mentioned. First of all, through all the book's length, the author excessively uses citations. To every 30 lines, on each page, on average, there are between 10 to 15 lines of quotations. While reading, one may have an impression that it is not Mr. Ohaekwusi speaking but other people. In academic language, such a move is called compilation. A tendency to overuse citations is often a sign of an immature thinker, afraid to put a thought in his or her own words, uncertain of having fully grasped matter. It is my understanding, based on the lecture of those passages in which Mr. Ohaekwusi uses his own words, that he is capable of expressing thoughts in his own language, even if, maybe, not as swiftly as the authors to which is he is referring in his work.

Another critical remark focuses on the way the footnotes are made. The author does not make any differentiation between them. Whether it is a citation, just reference, or paraphrase (these were very rare), he always uses the same pattern. No words such as *vide, ibid., idem,* etc. appear in the footnotes.

To go on, one of the consequences of overcitation (but also partly independent of it) is the way various topics, paragraphs are joined together. Although the author uses some navigational words like "consequently," "thus," "however," they seem insufficient. There should be more passages that summarize what has been done so far, more passages that make projections into what awaits the reader. Without such directions, the text is, at times, confusing and requires of the reader more reading attempts to grasp the microstructure of particular passages. This remark should not be read as a no-structure accusation, as, especially after more careful reading, such structure can be found.

There are also a number of minor mistakes, such as inconsistent usage of capital letters in subtitles (e.g., in sections 1.2.2; 1.2.3, 1.25); questions added to the titles of parts are formatted inconsistently. In Part one, there is no word "question," while in the other parts, the word "question" is put in front of the question. The question under the title of Part two has a grammatical error (Instead of: *What effects does terrorism have on ...?*; it goes: *What effects have terrorism ...?*).

The above remarks do not undermine the overall positive estimation of Mr. Ohaekwusi's dissertation. They only show that with little more effort in proper time, the dissertation could have reached even higher quality.

I want to end the review by pointing at one issue which, in my opinion, provokes some discussion. It does not mean that I find another flaw in the work of Mr. Ohaekwusi. On the contrary, I want to say that the dissertation can inspire the reader to make further considerations. One of the essential claims made by Mr. Ohaekwusi is that religion cannot encourage violence. The claim is partly based on the analysis of religious traditions (that they all acknowledge the golden rule) and because religions cannot admit contradiction (admitting violence would contradict the golden rule). On page 225, he acknowledges, that based on the ethical evaluation, we can claim that religion cannot promote violence. From this view, we can conclude that whether we admit some religious revelation as authentic depends on our ethical estimation. If religion promotes moral evil, we may reject it as not authentic. Nevertheless, on page 211, Mr. Ohaekwusi writes that God is the source and the basis for distinguishing good and evil. We may interpret this claim as admitting that we would not know how to distinguish good from evil were it not for God's revelation.

Assuming that I read the text correctly, one might ask if we are not dealing with a vicious circle here. On the one hand, our moral knowledge is based on revelation; on the other hand, we evaluate the revelation based on our moral knowledge. We may avoid this problem by assuming that we have certain genuine moral intuitions (e.g., about a person's dignity) and have moral knowledge independently of revelation. Or, maybe, the claim that God is the source of morality has other meaning than epistemic. I leave this question open here. My intention was merely to show that the lecture of Mr. Ohaekwusi's doctoral dissertation is not only informative but also inspiring.

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Summing up, the dissertation by Mr. Ohaekwusi meets all the necessary conditions of a doctoral dissertation. Therefore, he should be allowed to move on to the further stages of the doctoral thesis process.