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A Review of the Doctoral Dissertation of Anthony Chukwuebuka Ohaekwusi Entitled
Ethical Analysis of Religious Violence in the Contemporary Debates on Terrorism
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The main goal of the research project presented in the dissertation of Anthony Chukwuebuka Ohaekwusi is a philosophical analysis of the very topical problem of various forms of violence inspired by religious motives and content. The work is a continuation of the author's earlier studies concerned with this very important subject, whose results were presented in his M.A. dissertation entitled *Ethical Case Study of Terrorism in Nigeria in the Light of Hannah Arendt's Notion of Banality of Evil*.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, a summary, and a bibliography. Chapter 1 discusses the understanding of violence in the greatest religious traditions of humanity (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, traditional African religions). Chapter 2 deals with the various forms of religious violence and their relationship to the identity of religion as such. The next chapter presents an analysis of contemporary forms of terrorism. Chapter 4 discusses the mutual relations between terrorism, jihad, and the concept of holy war. The last chapter contains ethical analyses concerning religious terrorism.

The Ph.D. Candidate disagrees with researchers such as Samuel Huntington, Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris who argue that religions are inherently violent because they include content that is absolute and irrational. If religions are a source of war and violence, then they need to be gradually eliminated. Consequently, peace and justice may triumph only on the ruins of existing religious faiths and beliefs. This intellectual approach,

explicitly hostile to religion, is currently represented by certain atheist and agnostic circles in some countries around the world.

The author of the dissertation strongly disapproves of this approach and demonstrates that the relationship between religion and violence is much more complex. This can be clearly seen in the work of such researchers as Ralph Tanner, Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, or Michael Jerryson. They claim that in man's religious practices there is a temptation to commit evil in the name of some absolute religious claims. But that does not mean that religions are, by their very nature, a source of violence. In this context, there are three main ways of approaching the problem of the relationship between religion and violence. The first standpoint is deterministic – every religion is a source of violence. The second approach may be called dualistic – religions are partly linked to violence and partly helpful in the fight against various forms of enslavement and oppression. The third position draws attention to the instrumental nature of religion, which is sometimes used for employing violence by various social, ethnic, political and military groups.

The author of the dissertation rightly argues that “violence results from how we identify other” (p. 245). If a misunderstanding of religion leads to a hostile division between “us” and “them,” and another human “you” is seen as a threat, then of course it is very easy to move from mistaken religious beliefs to various forms of violence perpetrated in the name of God. The solution to the problem proposed by the Ph.D. Candidate is therefore to emphasize the central position of the human person in all religious traditions. The personalist anthropology, the human person as a central element of religious traditions, and the promotion of an ethics of non-violence are the three most important levels on which to strive for the elimination of various forms of religious violence. Of course, the question remains whether this “personalist correction” may be applied to all religions? Including the radical fractions of Islam or Hinduism?

It seems that identification of the personalist thought as a remedy for religious violence is the most important cognitive contribution of the entire dissertation. Unfortunately, this fundamental issue has been treated by the Ph.D. Candidate rather marginally. A similar charge may be made about his overly simplistic analyses of Rene Girard's theory of mimesis and the relationship between sacrum and violence. In my opinion, the main problem concerns the structure of the dissertation as a whole. The ethical analyses referred to in the title are presented in only one chapter. The other four chapters, on the other hand, are devoted to analyses which are not so much philosophical, but rather

historical, political, sociological, or theological. As a consequence, the dissertation is syncretic in nature and at many points presents information that is commonly available.

While the work carried out by the Ph.D. Candidate should be appreciated, there is a lot of content in the dissertation that has no deeper connection with his strictly philosophical analyses. There was no need to describe various forms of violence in all religions throughout history. From the Ph.D. Candidate's perspective, it would probably have been best to perform an in-depth philosophical analysis of religious violence in Islam in Nigeria and indicate a possible remedy in developing a personalist way of thinking. A more precise definition of the main research thesis, the auxiliary hypotheses, and the research questions would enhance the scientific value of the dissertation as a whole. An exemplification of its syncretic nature is the bibliography which contains several hundred works by very different authors. The bibliography does not include any division into sources, studies and supporting literature. As a result, various thinkers, whose relevance to the crucial issue of the relationship between religion and violence is very different, have been mixed together.

It is a good thing that the Ph.D. Candidate points to the theoretical possibility of escaping the spiral of religious violence. The personalist proposal is indeed a light at the end of the tunnel. This is a very positive element of the dissertation. It should be noted, however, that it offers few convincing answers to questions about the ultimate reasons explaining the causes of religious violence. There is certainly no universal rule applicable to all religions. By comparing various religions of the world, one may identify some common and some differentiating elements in their attitude to violence. A deeper understanding of this issue requires adequate philosophical analyses of the principles of interpreting the sacred writings of particular religions, the performative function of religious language, the relationship of faith and reason, the concept of transcendence and immanence, the relationship of grace to nature, the anthropological basis of religious experience, etc.

When it comes to the radical demand for separating violence from religion and religion from violence, the real Copernican Revolution came with the Polish thinker Paul Vladimiri (1370–1435) – Paweł Włodkowic in Polish. It is a pity that the Ph.D. Candidate does not mention this author, associated with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In 1415, Vladimiri represented Poland at the Council in Constance, Germany, where he delivered a historic speech on the power of the Pope and the Emperor – *Tractatus de potestate papae et imperatoris respectu infidelium* ("Treatise on the Power of the Pope and

the Emperor with Regard to Infidels”). In this landmark speech, he defended the idea that pagan and Christian nations may coexist in peace, and criticized the Teutonic Order for waging a war of aggression on indigenous non-Christian peoples in Prussia and Lithuania.

Vladimiri anticipated by more than 100 years the analyses of many other authors – Francisco de Vitoria, Bartolome de Las Casas, Hugo Grotius, John Marshall – when it comes to the native peoples’ right to self-determination and firm opposition to violence in the name of God. Vladimiri’s belief that people who thought differently should not be converted to Christianity with a sword was an important anticipation of contemporary theories that people must not be forced to profess a particular religion. One must not kill in the name of God. All nations have the right to self-determination and to live in peace on their land. In advocating such views Vladimiri may be considered an important precursor of cleansing religion of violence.

A major influence on Vladimiri’s views and way of thinking came from his law studies at the University of Padua between 1403 and 1408. At that time, Padua was the main centre of the Renaissance ideas developing in Europe. By combining the Christian religion with humanist thought and some elements of the stoic philosophy, Vladimiri came to a strong conviction that proclamation of the Gospel and conversion of Gentiles cannot justify the use of force and the waging of wars.

It appears that Vladimiri applied new humanistic and Renaissance ideas quite independently to theoretical thought on the problem of just war and the right to religious freedom. At the beginning of the 14th century, the question of forcible conversion of Gentiles was quite alien to the intellectuals of Padua or Florence. The local problem they were concerned with was the extremely difficult task of preventing constant armed conflicts between Christian cities-states such as Padua, Ferrara, Florence and Assisi. Consequently, Vladimiri had to do his own intellectual work to apply humanist ideas to the Polish dispute with the Teutonic Order and doubts about the conversion of Gentiles with the sword and the use of violence in the name of God.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, there is the following passage: „What can one say about the excessive superstitious violence from among Christians in the name of fighting the devil through violent exorcism and deliverance sessions that sometimes lead to the death of the victims who are accused of witchcraft and possessions by demons? The superstitious belief in witchcraft and the devastating danger it brings, make most Christians – especially from Africa, Latin America and Asia – resort to violent allegations, detentions and torture of those accused. (...) In these acts of systematic religious violence, the

perpetrators strongly believe that they are doing a favour to the accused and also saving the community from the calamities. This renewed version of witch-hunting is popular among Pentecostal Christians” (pp. 49-50).

It is a pity that the Ph.D. Candidate did not elaborate more on this issue. Of course, it is important to understand that, from Nigeria’s perspective, the greatest threat is Islamic fundamentalism, the brutal exemplification of which are the military raids of the Boko Haram organisation. That is why the dissertation includes numerous valuable comments concerning religious violence as employed by this dangerous grouping. It is worth emphasizing at this point that Al-Qaeda, which seeks to create a Caliphate in the Middle East and Africa, has objectives similar to those of Boko Haram. To implement them, the Islamic State needs volunteers to join its army. After the attacks on the editorial staff of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January 2015, not only various analysts, but also official Islamic state publications openly said that the attacks were advertising spots aimed at recruiting new army members to fight in Syria and Iraq. The other purpose of those bloody attacks was to cause chaos in some countries so that the police would focus on security and social order and would not “interfere” with the recruitment of new fighters. The July 2015 document of the Islamic State entitled “Muslim Gangs” examines the functioning of criminal groups in certain European cities and points to the need to infiltrate Muslim extremists into these environments, and to create their own gangs to increase the level of violence and crime.

Unfortunately, religious violence is also present in some Christian communities. In African countries such as Uganda, Sudan, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, a major challenge is posed by the Lord’s Resistance Army established in 1987. The founder and leader of the movement, Joseph Kony, is a self-proclaimed prophet who claims to be the voice of the Holy Spirit. The group’s ideology is based on a mixture of Christianity, mysticism, natural African religions, and witchcraft. Their main goal is to establish a theocratic state based on the Ten Commandments and the culture and tradition of the Acholi people. The Lord’s Resistance Army has been charged with extensive abuse of human rights, including murder, kidnapping, mutilation, and sexual slavery of women and children who are then forcibly incorporated into the army.

Another form of religious violence, referring to syncretic Christian fundamentalism, is represented by some of the aforementioned dangerous practices by Pentecostal Christians. Unfounded accusations of witchcraft, making people believe they are possessed, forcing Christians to engage in harmful practices to free themselves from evil powers,

accusing innocent people of acting on behalf of evil spirits, torturing those allegedly possessed – such practices represent new forms of religious violence today that have spread across the Christian world in recent years. They are a manifestation of two global processes: desecularization and Pentecostalization. It is a pity that the Ph.D. Candidate has failed to note these phenomena and their significant contribution to the increase in various forms of religious violence over the last 25 years.

The global process of desecularization has been discussed since the mid-1990s by the American religious sociologist Peter Berger. Over the past 25 years, the theory of secularization, formed at the beginning of the last century based on solutions developed by August Comte, Emil Durkheim and Max Weber, has collapsed. The theory of secularization which dominated the Western world's thinking about religion in the 20th century includes the claim that the processes of global modernization and the development of science and technology inevitably lead, on all continents, to the emergence of atheist or religiously indifferent societies.

Since the end of the last century, many philosophers of religion, anthropologists, historians of ideas and sociologists have clearly spoken out about the falsehood of this conviction. The collapse of the theory of secularization today means a greater interest in various forms of religion and an increase in the importance of religious issues in the public sphere. The specificity of today's approach to religion in many countries is not so much a rejection or undermining of its rationality or credibility, but a return of various religious phenomena in a new form. In this context, it is not the demise of religion that is increasingly being talked about – as postulated by the advocates of secularisation in the last century – but a change in its essential functions in social life. The global religious revival of recent years often leads to a strengthening of the political function of religion and the promotion of fanatical and fundamentalist attitudes. One consequence of these changes is an increase in the incidence of religious violence.

The essence of the global process of Pentecostalization, on the other hand, is the creation of new Pentecostal communities and the transformation of other churches and religious associations into a single syncretic variation of charismatic Christianity of planetary dimensions. As a result of the process of Pentecostalization – especially in Africa, Asia or South America – new communities, religious associations, prayer groups or Pentecost sects have emerged. The process of profound transformation at the level of the doctrine they preach also takes place within many traditional denominations. In recent years, the global process of Pentecostalization has become the subject of extensive

interdisciplinary research in many countries. Interesting scientific conferences and lectures are organised at universities in the USA, Norway, the UK, Italy and Germany. Research projects are underway in many countries aimed at a better understanding of different models of Pentecostalization in Africa, Asia or South America.

An important doctrinal element of the process of Pentecostalization is the exaggeration of the role of Satan, evil spirits, possession, exorcism, rituals of deliverance from evil powers, etc. Unfortunately, one of the negative consequences of this pandemonic vision of the world are also the new forms of religious violence which the Ph.D. Candidate mentions briefly in the first chapter of his dissertation. At this point it is worth stressing once again that at the beginning of the 21st century no fair account of the issue of religious violence can be given without noting two global processes: desecularisation and Pentecostalization, which in a sense change the current religious order of the world and make the highly strengthened political function of religion quite often combine with dangerous fanaticism and fundamentalism, leading to new forms of religious violence.

Pursuant to the requirements of the *Act on scientific degrees and title and on degrees and title in arts* (Journal of Laws 2003 No. 65 item 595, as amended, Article 13 Section 1), in order for a doctoral dissertation to “represent an original solution to a scientific problem or an original artistic performance, and demonstrate the candidate’s general theoretical knowledge in a particular discipline of science or arts and the ability to carry out scientific or artistic work independently,” I confirm that the dissertation presented by Anthony Chukwuebuka Ohaekwusi, despite certain reservations, meets the statutory requirements, and I hereby request that the Ph.D. Candidate be admitted to the subsequent stages of the doctoral dissertation programme.

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