

ABSTRACT

One of the common euphemisms today is: "Religion is inherently violent, the cause of all major wars in history". The interlocutors accuse religion without remembering that the last two world wars were fought not on account of religion, but, because of other interrelated social, material and ideological factors, the chief of which being competition for scarce resources. Yet, when the observers cite the Crusades, the Inquisition and wars of religion of the 16th and 17th centuries, not to mention the recent spate of terrorism committed in the name of religion, it is hard to belittle euphemism. Like religion, terrorism is difficult to define. Generally, however, it is a deliberate use of violence or threat of its use against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating them specifically or others into a course of action they could not otherwise take. Terrorism is fundamentally political, even when other motives-religious, economic or social are involved. It is about power, acquiring it or keeping it. This is probably why, the discussion of apparent tension between Christians and Muslims here in Kenya can hardly be discussed without due consideration of the role of Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda. The association of Islam with terrorism in the recent past first came to global attention with the assassination of Anwar Sadat in Cairo, the then president of Egypt. This wave of violence claiming religious justification became more rampant in the 1980s finally culminating in the atrocity of September 11, 2001, in New York. Here in Kenya, there have been attacks against public institutions, bus stops and markets; an action of hostility which threatens amicable relationship between the two religions. This is why; critics of religion acknowledge that monotheism is prone to violence and intolerance. If however, there is one thing we can reliably predict about this century, it is that, an increasing share of Kenya's people is going to identify with either Christianity or Islam. And, examples of disastrous accounts of conflict can hardly enhance amicable coherence even if done in the name of religion. To meet the challenges of our time and create a desirable Kenyan society, we need to accurately assess our religious affiliations. It is not enough to assume the nature of these two Abrahamic religious traditions and their roles in Kenya. The central question this paper asks and attempts to answer is: If religion can be used as an instrument of destruction, how come it has continued to survive as the most influential social phenomenon? To facilitate our discussion the paper adopts theories of Emile Durkheim and Myerson to explain the functional relationship between religion and violence; and cultural interpretation of violence. The paper therefore, examines the following three objectives:

Ambivalent nature of religion,
Existential justification for hermeneutic of suspicion and,
Abrahamic tradition: A basis for interfaith dialogue.