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Monotheism and Fundamentalism: Philosophical Reflections on the Postulations of Jan Assmann

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Abstract:

Can there be monotheism without fundamentalism? Jan Assmann responds to this question in the negative. In his estimation, fundamentalism/fanaticism is the direct product of monotheism. For him, the history of human civilization became stained with feuds over faiths at the inception of monotheism as a way of practicing religion. Thus, in pre-monotheistic times (the time of polytheism), people hardly ever had any reason to fight or quarrel over the question of the superiority of faiths. As such, he sees monotheism as a form of counter-religion. Due to this attack on monotheism, he is often described as one of the horsemen of atheism in contemporary times. This kind of thinking suggests that part of the crises we face in the world today are not purely products of Islam, but a problem of monotheism on the whole. Establishing this point, most especially, at the epistemic level is the aim of this piece. At core, the contention of this paper is that one way to deal with this crisis at the heart of monotheism is by advocating 'monotheism without fundamentalism' and this will warrant the epistemic adjustment of some of our familiar categories.

Keywords: *Epistemology, Fundamentalism, Monotheism, Pluriversality, Truth*

1. Introduction

In assessing the relationship between fundamentalism and national development, the easiest framework for analysis is to argue that where fundamentalism predominates, national development is negatively affected. By implication therefore, fundamentalism stands in an antithetical relationship to national development. The activities of Islam in recent times suggest it to be a religion caught up in fundamentalism hence it is a threat to national development. Some of these activities include: the mayhem of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, the depressing onslaughts of *Al-Shaba* in Kenya, the horrific antics of Islamic State for Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Charlie Hebod tragedy in France. These activities depict Islam to be an intolerant, exclusivist and violent religion. Even at the philosophical level, some scholars have taken pains to establish that Islam is a religion that is particularistic (as against universalistic ones). But the particularism of Islam is not coordinate with the particularist voluntaristic ego of African Traditional Religion and Thought. It is 'rather a universal voluntaristic ego' (Agbakoba 2003: 61). The reason for this submission is that the injunctions of Islam build different levels of attitude to a fellow Muslim and an infidel. It does not advocate equal treatment for all be they Muslims or not.

But a different picture comes to the fore when attention is shifted from Islam as a religion to monotheism as a form of religious practice. At this point, the postulations of Jan Assmann become germane. For him, the tendency to be violent, intolerant and exclusivist are inherent features of monotheism as a form religious practice. As such, he sees monotheism as a form of counter-religion. This kind of thinking suggests that part of the development crises we face in the world today are not purely products of Islam, but a problem of monotheism on the whole. Establishing this point, most especially, at the epistemic level will be core of this piece. Let us first understand the basic concepts for this engagement.

2. Definition of Concepts

The basic concepts here are monotheism and fundamentalism. This section will answer the question: what are these concepts? In so doing, working definitions of these concepts for this paper will also emerge.

2.1. Monotheism

Monotheism is a religion or belief system that involves just one God. Different religions have different numbers and types of gods. Those with no Gods such as Buddhism and Taoism are atheist religions, and Humanism is an atheist philosophy. Those with many Gods are polytheist, including Hinduism, ancient Roman Religions, Wicca, most types of Paganism and old Semite religions. The most famous monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Judaism, Christianity, Islam are called the

'Abrahamic religions' because they share the same set of Hebrew stories featuring Abraham, who may have lived in around the 19th century BCE, although some scholars today question his status as a historical figure. The Bible and the Qur'an contain accounts of Abraham that are 'somewhat different' and there is no archaeological or genetic evidence that any peoples in the Middle East are descended from such a father-figure. Leeming calls him a 'mythical hero and father' (Leeming 2004: 105). Most monotheistic religions have a god that has certain common characteristics. The typical monotheistic god is Omnipotent (infinitely powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), the supreme creator and First Cause of all existence, benevolent (perfectly and purely good-natured) and personal (it cares about, and communicates with, individual people). These are the predominant qualities of this God. Monotheism is quite an ancient form of the practice of religion. It is important to underscore this point because, since monotheism is limited to three religions of the book, one could be tempted to think that this only had its roots in the time of the Abrahamic religions (See, Vexen 2014). This disposition to religion appears in various religions and cultures for thousands of years before the emergence of modern-day monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The idea was codified most clearly in ancient Greece amongst the pagan sages, but long before then it had already appeared in Egypt, 3400 years ago, and perhaps as long as 4000 years ago. In the words of Schroëder (2007: 15),

- Monotheism probably owes its origins to ancient Egypt. From 1379BC to 1362BC, during the time that the Israelites lived there, the country was ruled by Amenhotep IV. He substituted a universal and virtually exclusive supreme god, Aten, for the traditional polytheistic pantheon [...]. So, convinced was Amenhotep of the existence of this supreme deity that he changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning literally, 'raising the high name of Aten'.
- No icon of this super-deity was allowed but, in Akhenaten's imagination, the god was symbolized by the disc of the sun, first winged and with outstretched hands in imagery made famous by various Hollywood movies, and then more stylized with the cobra symbol of the goddess Wadjet. [...] The god Aten and the notion of the pharaoh returning to his creator, the Sun, was in use in at least 2000 BC.

Freke and Gandy (2000: 95) continue further that, 'Five hundred years before Christ, Xenophanes had already written: "There is one God, always still and at rest, who moves all things with the thoughts of his mind." The legendary Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus is credited with teaching: 'Do you think there are many Gods? That's absurd - God is one.' [...] The Pagan sage Maximus of Tyre declared: "The one doctrine upon which all the world is united is that one God is king of all and father".'

Furthermore, Pythagoras, the famous mathematician and leader of a pagan religion, preached single-god pantheism as part of a mystery religion. Jewish monotheism was not present at the inception of Judaism – early Jewish texts indicate that 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' was seen as the most powerful among the many gods and goddesses [...] but by about 700 BCE, belief in the existence of only one God (monotheism) had become common in Judaism. Christianity started out diverse, with a various number of gods, but from the 4th century the idea of the Trinity was made prominent. The confusion and battles between polytheistic Christians and Trinitarian ones led to an opening into which a new religion quickly spread. This new religion was clear, unambiguous and stern about how many Gods there were: exactly one. Islam converted nearly half the Roman Empire, and the Qur'an specifically condemns the Trinity as non-monotheistic (Crabtree 2014).

2.2. Fundamentalism

Earlier in the 1970s 'fundamentalist' referred only to those groups that also engaged in political or militant behaviour. Curtis Lee Laws 'coined the term in 1920' to create distance from the negative connotations of the word 'conservative', but since then fundamentalism soon became a very extreme form of conservatism. Talk of a return to the fundamentals of religion had been around for some preceding decades, although of course throughout all time, there have been groups and peoples who have been fundamentalist in the modern use of the world (Harris 2004: 409).

In the context of monotheism, fundamentalism is the type of religious behaviour that embraces a central religious text and places it in such a holy, sacred place that it becomes considered *infallible* and *from God* rather than from man. For example, in Islam, the scribes who eventually wrote down Muhammad's recitations wrote that it was not Muhammad who wrote the Qur'an. They said that he merely recited the copy of it that Allah created in Heaven. Fundamentalists take the tenets of their religion so seriously that Earthly evidence will not dissuade them from their religious views, and morality itself pales in comparison to what they think God's will is. Fundamentalism is often seen as violent, intolerant, stubbornly backwards, sometimes inhuman, godly and sectarian. It often involves an obsession with controlling female sexuality (Ruthven 2007). These traits arise because the 'fundamentals' of a religion are held to be those morals, behaviours and beliefs held by the earliest followers, hence, fundamentalist ideas tend to clash with modern society and modern morality.

Terrorism and fundamentalism are not synonymous. There are many fundamentalist groups that are completely free from any hints of terrorism; for example, Amish Christians. And there are many acts of terrorism that are more likely sourced from insanity than personal religiosity. Often, a group's religious identity is not truly the main impetus behind acts of illegal violence. So, it will be appropriate not to confuse *all* religious violence with terrorism.

- Similar tensions between ideological purists [... and] realists [...] in all political and cultural [...] movements. [...] Virtually every movement, from animal rights to feminism, will embrace a spectrum ranging from uncompromising radicalism or extremism, to pragmatic accommodationism (Ruthven 2007: 21-22).

But then, it will not be out of place to observe that fundamentalism and all forms of terrorism share a similar disposition, which is intolerance and ardent exclusivist tendency. It is on this ground that Crabtree links monotheism with violence. In his words,

- Monotheistic religions such as Islam and Christianity are the undisputed champions of historical evil, and their class of religion smashes the bloodiest and most barbaric records throughout history. Theirs is a history of wars, genocides, internal

witch hunts, oppression, lack of freedom of thought and lack of freedom of religion. Large denominations of monotheistic religions have eradicated smaller denominations for simply believing the wrong things. No other class of religion compares with monotheism in its tendency for intolerant violence (Crabtree 2012).

In spite the force of this position, we are of the opinion that Assmann produces a more nuanced understanding of this relationship between monotheism's fundamentalism and violence. This we shall now turn to.

3. Monotheism and Fundamentalism: Assmann's Case

The ideas of Assmann with regard to monotheism were formulated in his early work *Moses the Egyptian* (1997). Series of reaction followed the work and he responded to these reactions in yet another work; *The Price of Monotheism* (2008). These works established his reputation as one of the world's foremost Egyptologist and inadvertently, one of the world's latest atheists. Broadly conceived, Assmann divides religions into two types: primary and secondary religions. The primary religions were the religions of the ancients; religions which had room for the idea of numerous god; religions hinged on cult practices. These are primary in the sense that they were at the preceding phase of man's search for the sacred within his existence. Some of the practices from these cultic religions were to structure out the nature of the religious aura in the succeeding phases of man's quest for the divine. On the other hand, there are secondary religions; religions that did away with the idea of numerous gods and stuck strictly to the one-God disposition. These are the religions of the book. Assmann deals with this issue quite well under the sub-heading 'from the cult to the book'. The cult here refers to primary religions and secondary religions referred to religions of the book. These religions are secondary because they came after the primary and owed a lot in their essence to primary religions. While the numerous cult religions of the ancient East were primary religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are secondary religions. Also, we can classify the numerous religions within the African Traditional setting as belonging to the realm of the primary religions so described.

From the foregoing, the secondary religions are monotheistic and it is these religions that are engulfed in the crises Assmann identifies. For Assmann, the crisis at the heart of monotheism begins at the point of the Mosaic distinction. This distinction resides in the difference Moses drew between true and false religions (Assmann 2008: 23). This process begins from when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness and climaxes with the banning of graven images. Assmann still notes that, 'with this ban on images, the distinction between true and false in the divine world, and with it the distinction between reason and madness enters religion for the first time' (Assmann 2008: 103). By this banning of graven images, only an illusory status is granted to iconoclastic religions. Thus, all religions in which images are worshipped were considered as illusions. The one and true God could not be adequately captured in images. Anyone who tried to do so was violating His (God's) essence and engaging in false religion. Little wonder the second commandment says 'Thou shall worship no other god but me.'

Following from the above, this religion of the Jews which was developed by Moses sticks to the idea of one God (monotheism) and by so doing renders the religious practice of numerous gods, a false religion. For this reason, Assmann considers this first experiment in monotheism (the religion of the exiled Jews from Egypt) as having a huge stockpile of negating potentials inside it. This negating potential is what gives monotheism its character as a form of counter-religion. Though this new religion (Judaism) abolished some forms of violence as practiced within primary religions, it did bring new forms of hatred into the world; 'hatred for pagans, heretics, idolater and their temple, rites and gods' (Assmann 2008: 16). Various shades of this form of hatred have been manifested by each of the secondary monotheistic religions in the world leading to a situation of exclusion among them.

For the Jews, their belief that they are God's chosen people require them to exclude themselves. The Christian obligation to evangelize and the Muslim obligation to compel submission require that they both exclude the other. In the case of the former, the Israelites left (excluded themselves) Egypt as God's chosen people; for the latter, the Christians and Muslims expelled (excluded others) heretics and infidels from their midst. Assmann further maintains that, 'in choosing Israel to be his people, God marks it out from other people and forbids it to adopt the customs of the environment. By commanding Christians and Muslims to spread the truth to all four corners of the earth, God ensures that those who close their minds to this truth will be shut out' (Assmann 2008: 18). Given this injunction, the intolerance of monotheism takes on a violent turn he thinks.

Within the context of Judaism and Old Testament Christianity, the story of monotheism unfolds as a history of violence punctuated by a series of massacres. In this regard Assmann writes that, "I have in mind the massacre following the scene with the Gold Calf (Ex. 32-34), the slaughter of the priests of Baal after the sacrificial contest with Elijah (1 Kgs. 18), the bloody implementation of the reforms of Joash (2Kgs. 23: 1-27), and the forced termination of mixed marriages (Ez. 9:1-4; 10:1-17) ..." (Assmann 2008: 21-22). All these are instances from the Bible; the Scriptures for the Jews and the Old Testament for the Christian Scriptures. Though, within the Christian faith and following the injunctions of New Testament theology, some of these positions seem to have been enormously moderated with the teachings of Christ about 'loving the enemy and praying for those that hates you'. But the phase of human history when heretics were violently attended to and even the crusade signals the manifestation of the suppressed tendency to violence, intolerance and exclusion within Christianity.

More interesting about this tendency to violence within monotheism is the fact that it does not just perpetuate violence, but also preaches that followers should exhibit a remarkable ability to endure violence as well. The idea of martyrdom as enshrined in the teachings of monotheistic religions capture quite aptly this unique aspect of the violence of monotheism. Choice, suffering and conviction constitute vital elements in martyrdom. Thus, 'choosing to suffer and die rather than give up one's faith or principles, being tortured or killed because of one's convictions and suffering great pain or misery for a long time' (Weiner and Weiner 1990: 9) all constitute the core of martyrdom and a show of resolute religious rectitude. Thus, when one avoids situations of having to suffer for one's faith, such a person is not a faithful follower of the religious tenet. Though this phenomenon seems to have its roots in Judaism, Christianity shares quiet deeply in such an approach to the practice of its faith, but the most recent practitioners of such acts is Islam.

Ward (2014: 54) in discussing Today's Martyr's opines that, 'of necessity, much of the discussion will focus on the writings and actions of Muslims as the vast percentage of 'martyrdom' events are undertaken by Muslims.' Even the statistics produced by Ward (2014: 37) shows this also. Between 1983 and 2008 91% of the variety of death belongs to Islam. This makes Islam indeed the bulk of Today's martyrs. But the point to underscore is that violence in monotheistic traditions are not just other directed, but there is also this strong emphasis on being able to endure suffering as an adherent of the monotheistic traditions. Assmann also underscore this point when he contends that, "Once it is realized that the intolerance inherent to monotheism, which flows directly from the Mosaic distinction, initially appears in a passive or martyrological guise ... then the problem of 'monotheism and violence' can be seen to have as much to do with enduring violence as with perpetrating it" (Assmann 2008: 21).

One limitation of Assmann's discourse is the fact that he limits his discourse to just the nexus of the fundamentalism of monotheism and the violence it spines. But recent discussions have taken the discourse further. For Sherlock, monotheism is a fertile ground for a form of violence he calls 'sacred or religious terrorism' (2014: 25). Terrorism as used here has the following features: (i) the target of their violence being neither political nor military targets; (ii) the goal is political, that is, changing either the whole political order or some significant part; (iii) its means must be that which will create the greatest fear in the target population. In most cases this will require means that injure or kill the largest number of people (Sherlock 2014: 23). In the case of Assmann, he conceives the violence in monotheism as directed predominantly at non-conformists to the ideals of such a faith. In line with this position of Sherlock, the real question is not whether such a relationship exists, but why it is so (Sherlock 2014: 21). Having done a succinct analysis of Kant and Hobbes in this regard, part of his conclusion reads thus,

- Monotheism provides fertile grounds for a certain form of terrorism, religious terrorism. These traditions provide the possibilities of both the reason and the motivation for acts that go against our most fundamental convictions (Sherlock 2014: 31).

By so doing, room is also created to react violently when such fundamentals are violated or when acts that violate them are committed. In spite of Sherlock's wonderful analysis of the why of such tendencies within monotheistic religions, his discourse is limited to the realm of morality alone. He turns to Kant's moral philosophy (Sherlock 2014: 26) in order to firmly establish his case which we have already summarized in stating part of his conclusion before. Epistemic reasons can also be alluded to for such a relationship between the fundamentalism of monotheism and the violence it spines. This will form the core of the discussions in the next section.

4. Epistemic Implications of Assmann's Case

An enormous epistemic implication resides in the dialectics between monotheism and fundamentalism as surmised above. This implication resides at the level of the contest for the status of truth within each of the spheres of these models of monotheism. The basis for this contest can further be located in the epistemic frames that grounds the conception of truth within which these models operate. Assmann hints at this fact when he contends that,

- What all of these religions have in common is an emphatic concept of truth. They all rest on a distinction between true and false religion, proclaiming a truth that does not stand in a complementary relationship to other truths, but consigns all traditional or rival truths to the realm of falsehood. This exclusive truth is something genuinely new, and its novel, exclusive and exclusionary character is clearly reflected in the manner in which it is communicated and codified (2008: 3).

At bottom, the notion of truth operative here is based exclusively on the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction: a thing could not be true and not true in the same way at the same time. Truth is defined by way of exclusion; A is A because it could be shown not to be not-A. Truth is thus understood to be absolute, static, exclusivistically either-or. This is a *classicist* or *absolutist* view of truth (Swidler 2004: 23-4).

This understanding of truth functions through an ontology of polarized units. Derrida's assessment of what he calls the 'Metaphysics of Presence' captures the point quite well. Commenting on Derrida's opinion in this context, Bradley submits that

- the 'metaphysics of presence' historically operates by erecting a series of binary oppositions between concepts, values or terms where, in each case, one concept is identified as the bearer of presence itself whereas the other is identified with the falling away, or loss of, that presence: the transcendental is privileged as more present than the empirical, the ideal is championed over the material, the soul over the body, the masculine over the feminine and so on ad infinitum (2008: 6-7).

Here, one discovers that reality has been erected into binary poles and without any possibility of a meeting point between these poles. The point that is identified as the bearer of presence is considered to be the truth in which those considered to be falling or have fallen away from presence cannot participate. This creates a situation of perpetual struggle and a constant triumph of presence over absence. Thus, presence is the truth and absence is falsehood. The rigidity with which these differences are placed creates a situation in which such a metaphysics is unable to 'offer enough grounds to mediate successfully in situations of conflict that demand equilibrating those tensions caused by difference, disparities or asymmetries' (Asozu 2007: 154). As such, in those cases where we discriminate based on such categories, the mind easily fails to grasp the intrinsic mutual relationship between categories of reality, such that it treats them as if they belong to diverse regions of being. This kind of illusion if not addressed and possibly eliminated will always offer the very instruments with which its basic assumptions can be undermined (see, Asozu 2007: 155).

This kind of ontology and the epistemology it spins culminates in 'the logic of the One' which grounds the theology of monotheism and which abhors any form of the theology of multiplicity. In this context, the position that lays claim to the truth arrogates a sense of superiority to its position and grants a subaltern status to other positions. This epistemic outlook is what grounds monotheistic religions and the exclusivist mode of their operations. In the words of Jaffee, 'Elective monotheism . . . is not primarily about God as he is in himself or in relationship to the created order of nature. It is much more about God as he is in relationship to historical human

communities—a relationship characterized by the opposition of love and hate’ (2001: 34). Thus, those communities that do not share in the relationship with God lack any form of presence and should be treated with hate.

5. Monotheism without Fundamentalism: A Pluriversal Perspective

From the epistemic discussions above, it is clear that monotheistic religions go as far as to claim that their positions are most appropriate and hence the most *universal* and should be adopted by all. They claim to have an exclusive reserve to the truth and whoever does not follow is doomed. Each model of monotheism tends to be very certain that it alone has the complete ‘explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly’. The pluriversal perspective rethinks this attitude predominantly. The essence of the pluriversal perspective is in the rise of the global consciousness. Given the immense contact between cultures in recent times, the pluriversal perspective holds that one culture can no longer speak and others will just listen and not raise their voices. Universality can no longer be determined from just one point of view; we now live in a multi/pluri-verse and the visions from all these universes challenge and call to question the one-dimensional truth base for universality on the grounds that a voice or position cannot be universal when it has left other voices behind and out of the dialogue. The task of a new universal or understanding of universality has to be ‘pluriversality as a universal project’.

This pluriversal consciousness is speedily generating the mounting consensus that cultures can no longer operate in isolation. With this consciousness, also, the limitedness of all statements about the meaning of things began to dawn on isolated thinkers, and then increasingly on the middle and even grass-roots levels of humankind. Now it is more and more understood that the Muslim, Christian, secularist, Buddhist, etc. perception of the meaning of things is necessarily limited. The disposition now can no longer be the drive to replace, or at least dominate, all other religions, ideologies, cultures, but to be drawn to enter into dialogue with them, so as to expand, deepen, enrich each of their necessarily limited perceptions of the meaning of things (Swidler 2004: 30).

Within this context too, the concept of truth operative within traditional objectivist/universalist epistemology is undergoing profound shifts as well. Before the nineteenth century in Europe; truth, that is, *a statement about reality*, was conceived in quite an absolute, static, exclusivistic either-or manner. If something was true at one time, it was always true; not only empirical facts but also the meaning of things or the oughtness that was said to flow from them were thought of in this way. But now, ‘our understanding of truth and reality has been undergoing a radical shift. This new paradigm which is being born understands all statements about reality, especially about the meaning of things, to be historical, intentional, perspectival, partial, interpretive and dialogic. What is common to all these qualities is the notion of *relationality*, that is, that all expressions or understandings of reality are in some fundamental way related to the speaker or knower’ (Swidler 2004: 23) This new understanding of truth undermines the ‘either...or logic’ and the idea of relationality within this new understanding of truth operates within the parameters of what Warayuth Sriwarakuel calls the ‘both...and’ logic which can integrate the past, present and future together’ (2008: 65). Beyond the perspective of time (past, present and future) as mentioned by Sriwarakuel, this new logic also helps to weld together the various perspective of truth that emerges from within multifarious human experiences.

6. African Ontology and the Rethinking of the Theology of the One

Schneider narrows this framework more precisely into the discourse of monotheism in his idea of ‘a theology of multiplicity’; which is aimed at moving beyond monotheism. It is the opinion of the present discourse that this theology represents a concrete scholarly example of building a more mature metaphysics that can moderate the excesses of the ontology of the One. Most especially as it relates to monotheism and the violence its fundamentalism can spin. Taking off from Tertullian’s discourse of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead, Schneider seeks to establish the role of relationality as a constitutive core of the essence of the Godhead. In Tertullian’s conception of trinity, he admits ‘of plurality without division’ in the Godhead. In his own words, ‘Everything that proceeds from something must of necessity be another beside that from which it proceeds, but it is not for that reason separated from it’ (Tertullianus 1948: 139-40). Thus, that the Son proceeds from the Father makes the Son another besides the Father, but that does not mean the Son and Spirit are separated from the Father. This creates a kind of ontological multiplicity in the Godhead. Here, Tertullian espouses, within the Godhead, a kind of disposition in which ‘oneness is unintelligible outside of communality; in which matrices of belonging are more essential or primary than separable individuality’ (Tertullianus 1948: 1). The sense of relation is what constitutes the core of the Godhead in this context

Ogbonaya’s idea of a ‘communal divinity’ also bears the mark of the ideas espoused here. Ogbonaya coins the term ‘communotheism’ to capture his concept. In his opinion,

- Tertullian’s historical-cultural situation allowed him to develop a particular conception of the Divine as community—one which enhances ontological equality, personal distinctiveness within the Divine, and a functional subordination among the persons of the Trinity that is temporal rather than ontological (1994: xiii).

For Schneider, reading Tertullian in this light ‘lifts up those aspects of his argument that tilt away from the closures required by strict monotheism in favor of relationality in divinity that cannot be reduced to numbers or to absolutes’ (2008: 66). Schneider continues further that,

- Such a reading suggests leaks in the otherwise unrelenting logic of the One, even in the earliest moments of Christian doctrinal formulation. The sharing of substance for which Tertullian argues in *Adversus Praxean* stands against the monotheism–polytheism divide, for it is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic. Ogbonaya’s ‘communotheism’ may be a good alternative. It is a multiplicity that cannot be reduced to the One, nor can it be divided into separate ones, or the many. The singularity of the Persons of the Trinity is made possible by their ontological sociality, their belonging. Each is because they are. Each belongs, and therefore is (2008: 66-67).

This is indeed a classic reading of the African ontology of belongingness into the Godhead. Thus, if the Godhead exhibits belongingness and relationality, why not those who practice any form of monotheism?

7. Conclusion

From all the analyses in the foregoing, it will be wrong to designate Islam as fundamentalist in its religious outlook. This is the case because all the models of monotheism share similar features. All that Islam has been unable to do is to reduce its own form of fundamentalism from the violent to the non-violent form. At root, also is the exclusivist understanding and claim to the truth which each of these models uphold. Today, the world cries out against Boko Haram, Al-Shaba and ISIS not from any form of excluded perspective, but from the point of the violation of the human conscience and essence that the activities of these groups signify. This indeed is a pluriversal approach; an approach that works with all to achieve the common good and appreciates diversity. This is not to abhor the normative role of the idea of 'the One' in the human affairs. "Put another way, this is not a flight from the story of the One but a more careful listening to the multiplicity it reveals" (Scheider 2008 117). The refusal of monotheism to listen to the multiplicity 'the One' reveals is part of what makes violence constitutive of its essence. This is what has kept violence and fundamentalist tendencies alive in Islam today.

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