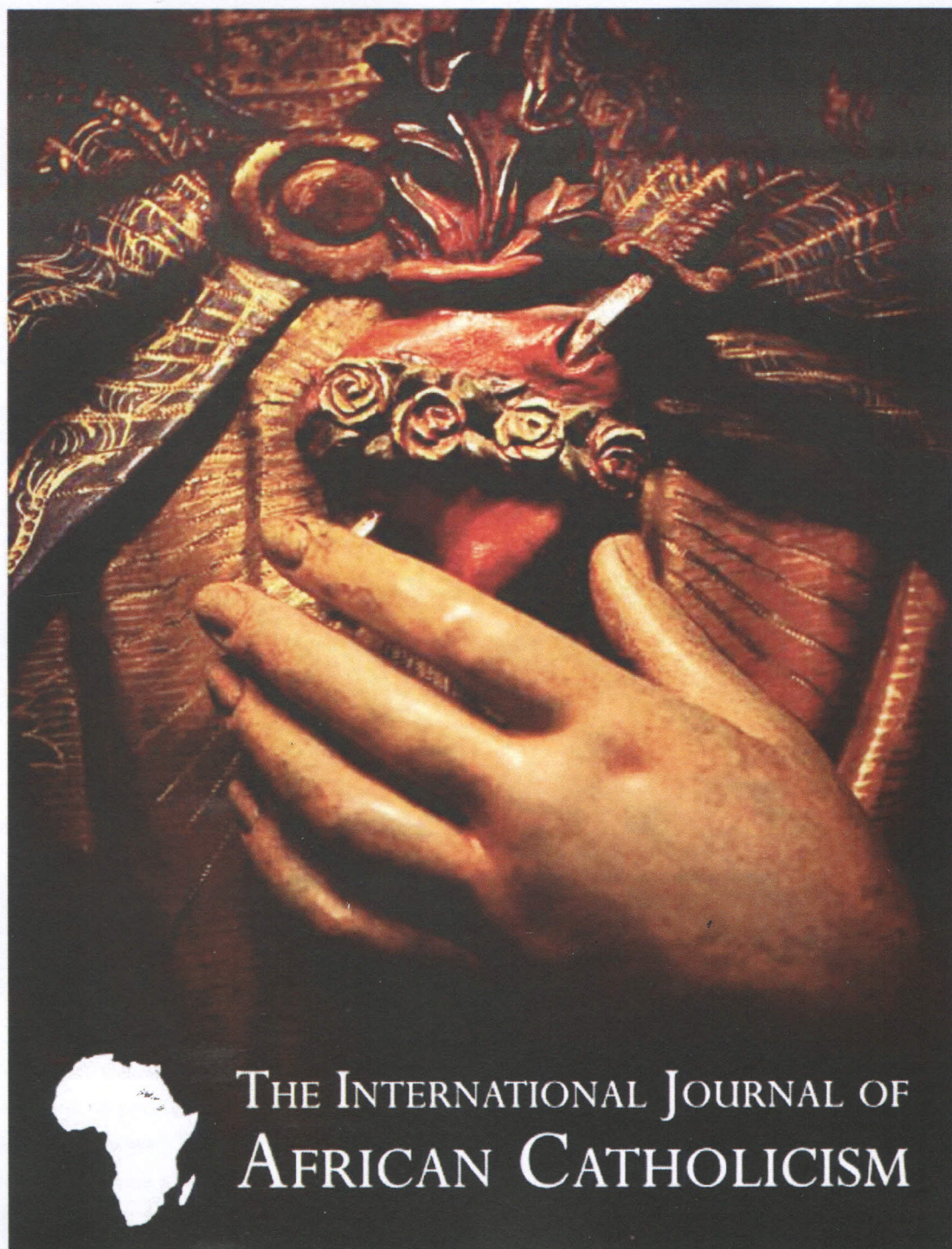


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SPIRITUALITY OF MARTYRDOM IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND
CONTEMPORARY ISLAM: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Patrick U. Nwosu

ABSTRACT

Roman Catholicism and Islam are missionary religions in Nigeria. And the histories of both religions place martyrdom as the supreme form of witnessing to the religious hope of the adherents. In Roman Catholicism, the prospect of martyrdom as a way of imitating the passion of Christ is accepted as noble. This moved Ignatius of Antioch to connect fidelity unto death with a proper understanding of Christ as both divine and human. Similarly, martyrdom is fundamental to the Islamic faith. The initiation into Islam requires the declaration to bear witness to the oneness of God whose messenger is Muhammad. The Qur'an expresses, therefore, that those who are slain while witnessing in God's way are not dead; they are alive and rejoice in the bliss provided by God (Q. 3:169-172). Thus, in both religions, martyrdom is regarded as the execution of adherents condemned to death by the authorities or witnessing unto death because of one's faith. However, how to contextualize the doctrine of martyrdom in both religions and apply it in the daily human interactions in Nigerian society remains very challenging. Given to the numerous cases of faith-inspired violence in northern parts of Nigeria, the power of religious conviction like martyrdom calls for serious academic re-evaluation. The critical questions would be: are those who fall victims of *Boko Haram* bombings in Nigeria martyrs? What are the religious status of the suicide bombers and many others who perish in churches and mosques while engaged in active religious rituals? Could they be regarded as martyrs? Applying historical, comparative and analytical methods, this paper examines the spirituality of martyrdom in the light of Roman Catholicism and Islam in Nigeria. The focus on Nigerian society is informed by the experiences of bombings and agitation for total Islamic system in the Northern parts of the country which has reached a threatening height. The paper concludes with salient suggestions to make the spirituality of martyrdom positively enriching.

Introduction

Religiously motivated bomb blasts in Nigeria, among other things, express in a nutshell the impacts some doctrines being taught by religious organizations make on human minds. Most times the official religious doctrine is misinterpreted by some adherents of the religion to achieve a set goal. The religious organizations in focus are Roman Catholic Church and Islam; and the doctrine at the front burner is martyrdom. Islam and Roman Catholic Church trace their faith back to the Patriarch Abraham. Thus, they belong to the family of Abrahamic religions. Both traditions are monotheistic and they have a long history of doctrinal interaction. For example, Muslims honour Jesus as a sinless prophet, born of a virgin, and is expected again at the last day. The traditions cited by Zahniser (2008) confirm this doctrinal belief. In his effort to resolve the ambiguity of what Islamic scholars call the affirmation and denial verses on the 'descent-of-Jesus traditions' (*muzul'Isa*), he submits, 'in general, they have Jesus returning to earth from heaven in the future, living a family life, performing certain tasks, dying a natural death, and rising again for the last judgment' (2008:46). Islam calls upon its adherents to live morally and be disposed to a spirituality of martyrdom or witnessing when the need arises (cf. Q. 3:83-84). The religion looks forward to the judgment day. All these are as well echoed in Christianity, particularly in Roman Catholicism that has special places for martyrs.

The history of religiously motivated violence and bombings in Nigeria at present revolves around the dreadful sect '*Boko Haram*'. This sect is unleashing terror and mayhem in the North especially in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa.

The country is regaled with tales of mounting violence and insecurity on regular basis depicting a society under siege of fundamentalist extremism.

Boko Haram started as a movement to enforce the Islamic law known as *Sharia* in the Northern part of the country. It metamorphosed afterwards into a bloody terrorist group with its own professed mission to overthrow the Nigerian state and replace it with Islamic state. In pursuance of this cause, it is unleashing mayhem all over the North with the battle cry to kill all Christians and liberal Muslims who are dismissed as unbelievers and traitors (Jimoh 2014:80). No classes of people are spared in their religious campaign-children, women, men, soldiers, police, distinguished personalities and all. They destroy properties, burn churches, mosques and markets and create shadows of towns and villages in their trail.

Boko Haram in Hausa language means “western education is sinful” (Jimoh 2014:80). Originally this group referred to themselves in Arabic as “*Jama-atu Ahis Sunna Lidda-awati Wal jihad*” which means “the sunni organization for the prophet’s teaching and jihad”. The paper would emphasize more on *Boko Haram* in Nigeria later. But it suffices to note here that the group is opposed to western education and is ready to attack the very core of its foundation in the North. They see themselves as martyrs and their violent activities as the norm for afterlife belief in Islam.

Since the fear of *Boko Haram* and cases of their bombings with religious undertones has literally become a routine in some parts of the country, the intent of this paper is precisely to examine the spirituality of martyrdom in religions and see how to isolate it from the recent violent killings and deaths in Nigeria. Martyrdom is an authentic component of the many doctrines in Islam and Roman Catholicism. Martyrdom is related

to the Muslim affirmation of faith. It means 'witness', as the paper would clarify later; and the concept appears to be a direct appropriation of the Syrian Christian martyr (Segal 2004:658). However, the concept has been misconstrued, misinterpreted and wrongly applied in the present day Nigerian society. For instance, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the young Nigerian convicted by the United States of America (U.S.A) for attempting to blow up a U.S. jet in December, 2009 justified his actions as part of the contents of martyrdom in Islam. According to him, 'the Koran obliges every able Muslim to participate in jihad and fight in the way of Allah.' (Abdulmutallab 2011:4). He further submitted that, 'participation in jihad is... considered among the most virtuous of deeds in Islam and is highly encouraged in the Koran' (Abdulmutallab 2011:4). Could Islam that is a religion of peace at the same time teach that violence is a virtue? Again, during the last general elections in Nigeria, many people, especially youths on National Service Program (NYSC), were killed and the president of the country, Goodluck Jonathan hailed them as martyrs. In the light of the above, is the martyr the witness or does God witness the sacrifice?

Applying historical and analytical methods, the paper makes an overview of the spirituality of martyrdom in Roman Catholic Church and contemporary Islam with focus on Nigeria that is currently facing security challenges and suicide bombings in many parts of the country. It examines the similarities and differences of the concept in both traditions. The study concludes with suggestions as to how the spirituality of martyrdom could be lived out among Muslims and Christians in Nigeria to enhance integral human development rather than the present situation that reflects suicide missions and blatant waste of lives and properties in the country.

The Term "Martyrdom"

Since the history of religions, martyrdom has been regarded as the supreme form of witnessing to a particular religious hope. "Martyrdom is the execution of a believer or believers condemned to death by the authorities because of the faith" (Bria 1987:292). The word 'martyrdom' comes from the Greek, '*martyrion – martyria*,' meaning supreme and triumphant test endured for a greater value and witnessing to the truth of faith (Vigil 2000:136). Thus, the martyr is the witness of value or set of values in any religion. From the Christian perspective, the martyr is the witness to the sufferings of Jesus Christ. One of the earliest instances of martyrdom in Christianity is recorded in the Acts of Apostles 7: 54 – 60 where the deacon Stephen, the first martyr of Christian religion, was stoned and killed for his belief in Jesus Christ.

Given this perspective of martyrdom, the martyr is not merely someone who is killed or who dies for a cause, but one who gives up life, conscious of losing it in order to gain it. In this regard, "the martyrs of the first three centuries of Christianity surrendered their lives by challenging the intolerance of the Roman Empires, which confined them to a hidden existence in the catacombs" (Vigil 2000:136). Since then, men and women have died as a result of various other actions against expressions of religions.

In Islam, '*martyrion – martyria*' is translated as '*shahid*' and its plural form is '*shuhada*'. *Shahid – shuhada* corresponds to the Greek *martyrion-martyria*, meaning to witness. In the Qur'an, one encounters cases that clearly refer to martyrs as witness. For instance, Q.4:69 reports that, 'All who obey Allah and the messenger are in the company

of those on whom is the Grace of Allah – of the prophets, the sincere, the martyrs, and the righteous.’ The Islamic Sacred Scripture presents the sequence of witness. That is, ‘*nabiyyin*’, ‘*Siddiqin*’, and ‘*shuhada*’. ‘*Nabiyyin*’ is the plural of the Arabic word ‘*nabiy*’ and it means prophets. ‘*Siddiqin*’ is likewise the plural of ‘*sidiq*’ and it means the truthful, righteous and morally upright. ‘*Shuhada*’ is the plural of ‘*shahid*’ which means the martyr, those who died in the course of advancing Islam. At the level of the discourse of this paper, the question then is: how can one explain or understand the spirituality of martyrdom that has come to have a place of importance in Roman Catholic Church and Islam particularly in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

The keywords in this paper are ‘spirituality’ and ‘martyrdom’. Earlier, the paper had x-rayed ‘martyrdom’ from the etymological perspective. Consequently, it becomes necessary to highlight the meaning and historical development of spirituality.

In Christian understanding, spirituality is related to “how people subjectively appropriate traditional beliefs about God, the human person, creation, and their interrelationship, and then express them in worship, basic values and lifestyle” (Sheldrake 1998:34-35). In other words, spirituality, in Christian view, is the whole human efforts to live in the light of conscious relationship with God, in Jesus through the Holy Spirit and within a faith community. Christian Spirituality involves living out what Jesus most valued. Thus, it is about discipleship and living out the values of the kingdom of God, “and generating a community transformed by the love of God and others” (Groody 2007:241).

The scholars that contributed significantly to the development of Christian spirituality are Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430), Gregory the Great (540 - 604), and Bernard of Clairvux (1090 - 1153). For want of space the paper highlights only the contributions of Augustine and Gregory to the development of Christian spirituality.

For Augustine of Hippo, the knowledge of divine things was not separated from the love of God deepened in prayer. He notes that God is known not by objectification and analysis; but by experience of love and desire. In his famous work titled: *Confession*, he writes, "late have I loved you.... And behold, you were within me and I was outside...., you were with me, and I was not with you" (Augustine 1967:40). Augustine was making reference to the grace of God in the hearts of persons and the insufficiency of human nature. Thus, his greatest contribution to Christian spirituality is in the area of grace.

Gregory the Great (540 - 604) made effort to synthesize ethics, spirituality, and doctrine. According to him, theology itself is inseparable from contemplation and it is mystical in the sense that its overall aim is to portray the divine mystery (Lossky 1973:82-83). Hence, Gregory opines that true theologians are those who experience the contents of their theology. In other words, Christian spirituality is related to witnessing in the context of creed spoken publicly like an oath.

The Islamic perspective of spirituality hangs on *Sharia*. Put another way, spirituality in Islam reflects "the movement to Islamization..., a shift away from the secular... to the acceptance of the Islamic law as the social norm" (Armour 2004:172). Thus, many Muslims express their spirituality by accepting and making *sharia* their system of law. For instance, Abu Qaqa, the spokesman of Islamic sect, *Boko Haram*

noted that “*sharia* is a complete way of life (Oyebade 2011:21). Even though it is always difficult to use the vocabulary of one religion to describe the characteristics of another, Armour (2004) notes that Islamic spirituality increasingly brings about “renewed commitment... and certitude of Islamic values and truth” (2004:173). A clear instance of this expression of Islamic spirituality is seen in several Northern states of Nigeria where some people want the reestablishment of Islamic society they had before colonialism. The effort to achieve this has resulted to occasional violence punctuated by long standing ethnic conflicts. In this regard, Esposito (1996) summarized Islamic spirituality as the overarching value system. According to him, “In Islamic spirituality, rights are given by God that is granted through the Qur’an and traditional Islamic law. The supreme authority is God, and humans are his agents, even his vice-regents, but they cannot be sovereign” (Esposito 1996:6). In the light of the foregoing, Islam teaches that spirituality that ended in martyrdom attracts a specially prepared pleasure-garden. Cf. Q. 56:1-26. Among other things, this implies that there is a special heavenly place reserved for martyrs while they await the Day of Judgment (Segal 2004:659).

The Role of Martyrs in Roman Catholicism

Martyrdom is one of the most efficacious instruments in the propagation of a faith leading to a new religious and social order. The term “martyr” as used in Roman Catholic Church means “witness”. A martyr, in the Catholic Tradition, is a witness not to an idea but to an event, to the faith in the crucified and risen Christ. In this regard, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* states, “Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united in charity. He bears witness to the truth of

the faith and of Christian doctrine' (CCC 2473). The forgoing follows what the author of I John writes, "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands... we proclaim also to you..." (1 Jn. 1:1).

In apostolic and post apostolic Catholicism, martyrdom was considered to be an individual work of piety and resistance to evil and struggle for justice. The Roman Catholic Church as an institution aids in this understanding of martyrdom through the spiritual formation of the clergy and the laity. The cases of the woman and her seven sons in 4th Maccabees 8:3ff and the three young men in Daniel chapter 3 are powerful liturgical symbols in Catholic theology of martyrdom. The aim of martyrdom in Roman Catholicism is essentially to perfect the victim and edify the Christian community; and this is carried out within an eschatological framework. The elements of witnessing to one's faith and fortitude in the face of persecution dominate the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church in the issue of martyrdom. Thus, we read in the account of *Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador* that, "the spirit breathes in many ways, and supreme among them is the disposition to give one's life for others, whether by tireless daily commitment or by the sacrifice of a violent death" (Sobrino, Ellacuria, et al, 1990:63).

In the kerygma of the martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna, written about 155 C.E., witnessing in faith to the humanity and suffering of the son of God was highlighted as a concept (Richardson, et al, 1953:120). In the Leonine letters of about 170 C.E; the term martyr, in the Catholic Church, signified persecution leading to the shedding of blood for Christ. The example of Stephen was used as a proof case. In *The Shepherd of Hermas*, this imitation of Christ through martyrdom earns the martyr's salvation and a share in the

glory of Christ. In other words, "those who suffered for the name of the son of God are glorious. All their sins have been taken away" (Staniforth 1976:78).

An elaborate cultus evolved out of the religious regard for martyrdom and the veneration accorded martyrs. From the early time, martyrs of the Catholic faith who were put in prison were asked to pray for the health, well – being and salvation of church members. It was a natural development that such requests for prayers came to be renewed after the martyr's death. This pious disposition led to controversial tension between worship of the dead and the veneration of martyrs. The cult of martyrs, with its relics and shrines, attracted the criticism of the players of the Protestant Reformation. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church constantly defines her theology of martyrdom, insisting that they are witnesses to the event of the incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, in 1984 John Paul II spoke of the Korean Christian Church in the light of the number of martyrs they had. He said, "This fledgling Church, so young and yet so strong in faith, withstood wave after wave of fierce persecution. Thus, in less than a century, it could already boast of some ten thousand martyrs... all gladly died for the sake of Christ" (John Paul 2008). Buttressing the above point, Morrison (2005) reported a clear principled martyrdom of Bonhoeffer as that fraught with unanswered questions and contradictions. He notes, "the Christian is not called to a life apart from, or over against, the world, even though the call is in the name of holiness and principle. The danger of this call is the Christian ghetto. Yet neither is the Christian called to condone and bless godlessness in the name of grace. The danger of this call is accommodation. The calling of the Christian is to plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with veneer of religion" (2005:265). That is to say that a

Christian whose spirituality ends in martyrdom lived a 'worldly' life and so participated in the suffering of Christ. Catholic Tradition, therefore, enjoins adherents to live a truly worldly life with all its duties, challenges, success and failures without fear of martyrdom, which is losing one's life for what one believes.

Martyrs in Islam

In Islam the cult of martyrs remain limited to *Shi'i* tradition and it has a meaning that relates to justice for oppressed souls. In this regards, Enayat (2006) says that, "In *Shi'i* history, the drama of the martyrdom of Husayn ... ranks next only to the prophet's investiture of 'Ali as his successor at the Ghadir of Khumm. The legend of Husayan gives rise to an essentially political aspiration of justice..." (Enayat 2006:265-266). The popularization of cult of martyrs by *Shi'i* dynasty has resulted to the existence of Passion play in Islam called "*ta' Ziyah*" and the recitation of the sufferings of holy martyrs, "*rawdah Khani*."

The *Shi'ite* element within Islam captures a basic rupture in the body of the religion. It began as a political struggle over the leadership of Islam but later took on theological colouration. Muhammad left no clear message regarding who succeeds him. Based on this, three of his close aids laid claim to the caliphate. However, some Muslims believed that Muhammad named Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, as his successor (Hopfe & Woodward 1998:378). Ali was finally named Caliph in 656 but gradually lost control of the Muslim world. He was killed in 661 and the *Umayyad* dynasty took over the Caliphate. Ali's youngest son, Husayn, challenged the *Umayyad* Caliphs in 680 but was silenced at the battle of Karbala in Iraq. Husayn with some of his family members was killed in the battle. They are considered martyrs by the *Shi'ites*.

The *Shi'ites* differs from the other groups in Islam in the following ways:

- while revelation ended with Muhammad and the glorious Qur'an, in later generation there were divinely inspired figures called imams in *Shi'ite* tradition;
- they believe in the existence of a messiah figure who would one day appear on earth and lead the world into an era of justice;
- because of the importance of the martyrdom of Husayn, *Shi'ites* tend to esteem martyrdom; and the traditional *Summi* reading and interpretation of the Qur'an is mistrusted by *Shi'ites*. They tend to favour those they think have not compromised their faith to accept the secular order (Hopfe & Woodward 1998:379).

However, some scholars, particularly Omar, a professor of Islamic Studies at Marquette University, disapprove the cult of martyrs on account of its dogma. The main purpose of the cult of martyrs in Islam is to perform the lamentation in a way to cause greatest amount of weeping. Several prophetic sayings recommend weeping during prayer and within this context *Shi'i* Islam introduced the virtue of weeping in memory of the imams, particularly Husayn, who is known as the Lord of the martyrs (Enayat 2006:267). In this regard, each year, on the tenth of the month of *Muharran*, the passion of Husayn is reenacted. The site of his martyrdom and other locations that were important in his life time are, today, places of special pilgrimages for the *Shi'ite* Muslims. But Omar (2007) argues that "the imam's role is far greater than simply that of martyr" (2007:83).

A martyr, in Islam, is classified among those who have found favour with God. It is one who witnessed to 'the oneness of God, the apostleship of Muhammad, and the truth of the faith' (Mceternna 2003:67). Omar (2007), quoting Ibn Ali as commenting on

Q.57:19 notes, "One may fight for one of five reasons: booty; a show of bravery; or a show before others; in defense of wealth, family or land and out of anger. Any one of these could in itself be praiseworthy or the opposite. So long as the main purpose remains that the word of God be uppermost (defending the cause of Islam) it matters not what other reasons may exist as secondary causes" (Omar 2007:83).

The history of Islam reveals that the term 'martyr' was not limited to the person who is killed in the way of God in the battlefield. Martyrdom is simply an act of striving in the way of God. As Omar (2007) notes, more basic is the striving against evil in one's soul and in society. It is this inner purity resulting from the jihad of the soul that creates the right intention of serving the cause of truth in whatever way possible.

In all, the true martyr in Islam is the one who is slain in the way of God; or in the cause of defending Islam. In other words, a martyr in Islam is the victim of aggression and not the aggressor. However, it is the prerogative of the Islamic jurist to determine "the principle according to which a man or woman may be considered to be a martyr" (Omar 2007:84). Islam recognizes martyrs of this world, martyrs of this world and the world to come, and martyrs only of the other world.

The martyrs of this world are those who died for worldly causes other than of faith. Martyrs of this world and the next world are those slain for no other reasons than that the word of God to be uppermost. In the light of the foregoing, Islam teaches that in the end, God will reward them according to their acts and intentions. Omar (2007), in strong terms, notes that Muslims are encouraged to be peace loving. But that if any group transgresses against another, that such group must be fought until it returns to the right path (Q.49:9). This encouragement leads to the spirituality of martyrdom which has

continued till date, even though it is now abused both internationally and locally. This gross abuse of religious doctrine raises the question of the case of *Boko Haram* menace in Nigeria. Is this sect propelled by the doctrine of the spirituality of martyrdom? This question begs for answers from Islamic jurists especially when the activists of *Boko Haram* claim that they do not have any personal demand but to protect Islam and make the word of God uppermost. According to Abu Qaqa (2011:21), "*Boko Haram*" clamour "is fundamentally on how to safeguard religion and that is why we resolved to sacrifice all what we have including our lives for the sake of protecting Islam."

Boko Haram in Nigeria

The root word *Boko* still remains suspect in Nigeria. Some people say that *Boko* is a corruption of *Boka*, which means "witchcraft" (Kukah 2010:1). According to this school of thought, the word was used to convey the notion that western education or system was as derogatory as witchcraft and was therefore to be avoided. Since its player was the 'foe', it was naturally considered with suspicion as a means of destroying Islam in the way the colonial masters had destroyed the Islamic polity in the North. Another school of thought says that *Boko* had always been used to refer to a counterfeit.

Thus, *Boko Haram* in Nigeria is an Islamic fundamentalist who follow a program aimed at destroying the political and social structures in the Northern part of the country and replacing these with an Islamic state, as noted earlier (Jimoh 2014:80). Their targets are government agencies and Christian institutions. They operate in all the states in the North. *Boko Haram* could be described as the products of the irony of a modern economy which had not fully developed to accommodate these youths that studied in various *Koranic* schools. The education they received in the *Koranic* schools in the Northern

parts of Nigeria seem to be for a world that had already vanished and the new world of globalization seems to have no place for them.

Consequently, sensing their inability to access the tools of modernization and nervous about the future of their religion in the 21st century Nigeria, members of *Boko Haram* now embrace the spirituality of martyrdom which they seem to consider as a source of greater strength than looking outwards by means of acquiring western education and other instruments of secularism. Kukah (2010) describes the situation thus:

Today, ordinary Muslims feel overwhelmed by the tornado of changes around them. Unable to access the tools of modernization, they have remained largely outside the loop of power. Even in the inner recesses of their own major cities in the entire region, almost all forms of businesses are conducted by people they consider foreigners. These are almost all Southern traders and they are almost all Christians too. Their habits of alcohol intake, partying and the adoption of a lifestyle that they have come to consider as being dysfunctional has made ordinary Muslims nervous about the future of their families and faith (2010:3).

Yusuf, the former leader of *Boko Haram*, who was killed by the men of Nigerian Police Force, cashed in on this social situation in the Northern part of Nigeria by arguing that turning inward to embrace the spirituality of physical martyrdom was a greater source of strength than acquiring western education and other tools of secularism. Yusuf's argument made a lot of sense for graduates of the Islamic education system that could not fit into secular society.

Be that as it may, martyrdom, in Roman Catholicism and Islam is essentially operational at the spiritual realm. At that level adherents are challenged to live out their spirituality in accordance with the will of God and the values of his kingdom. Therefore, the association of martyrdom with the use of the sword, engaging in suicide bombing,

and violence, as the case may be in Nigeria, is undeniably more socio-political than religious.

Similarities and Differences in the Doctrine of Martyrdom

There is no doubt that the political situation in Nigeria has changed since the advent of democracy in 1999. For the first time since 1999, the presidency has been in the hands of Christian South except for the brief period of Musa Yar'dua who later died in office. Based on this political changes, many Muslims particularly in the North, feel marginalized on all sides; politically, economically, socially, and religiously. This situation has led a large part of the Muslim youth to develop a spirituality of martyrdom predicated on voluntary fight to death of "the foe." Thus, a mysticism of militancy in the name of Islam has developed in Nigeria in order to defend the Northern states from being over-run by Christian influence and secularism. This situation arose out of the understanding that, in Islam, there is no separation between the political, social, economic and religious spheres of life. Islam is a way of being that is all embracing. Kung (1986) describes it as an "all-embracing view of life, an all-involving attitude towards life, an all-determining way of life" (1986:22). Hence, the country's president from Christian extraction triggered *Boko Haram* insurgency for which some prominent political figures like Olusegun Obasanjo, former Nigerian president, think that the way to solve Nigerian security problem is to return power to the North. It is important therefore, to outline the similarities and differences observable in Islam and Roman Catholic Church concerning martyrdom.

In Roman Catholic Church, the first martyr was Stephen. He imitated the gesture of Christ (Act, 7). His death did not involve any act of violence against anybody.

Specifically, Stephen accepted the violence of other people and he took it upon himself in order to destroy violence, hatred, and sin. This follows what Christ says that whoever uses the sword, will die by the sword (Mt. 26:52). So, within the context of nonviolence and love of God, the blood of martyrs is seen as the root or foundation of the Church.

As in Roman Catholicism, the blood of the martyr in Islam washes away sins. Islam views heaven as the dwelling place of God. Roman Catholicism and Islam agree that only those who lived according to divine will can gain entry into the presence of God (Ring, Nash, MacDonald & Glennon, (eds) 2012:195). Hence, the basis of spirituality of martyrdom in Islam hangs on Q. 3:169-172. The passage gives a description of a martyr's life after death as immediate entry to the Garden of Eden where they will recline on couches savouring meats, fruits and other things. There they would remain until the resurrection day. Even though women are excused from actual fighting for various reasons, the first martyr in Islam was a woman named Sumayya. She was tortured to death with her husband by the Makkan Arabs before the conquest of the city. The instruction to let the blood of the martyrs be their purification is said to have been given by the Prophet concerning those slain in the battle of Uhud (Zahniser 2008:49). In this regard, Q.3:169 states that, "those who are slain in the way of God are not to be reckoned as dead; rather, they are alive with their Lord sustained."

Again, the Catholic eschatology is as well echoed in that of Islam that has always been expressed in the language and the social framework of this material life. That is to say that no one can experience paradise without first passing through the present life. Hence, in Catholic and Islamic traditions, martyrs are depicted as having great pleasure in heaven after bearing witness while in material life (Kathir 1970:153-160). Malik Ibn

Anas related that the Prophet said: "No one who enters paradise would wish to return to this world, even if he were to possess all that is in it, except the martyr. He would desire to return to the world to be killed ten times because of the great honour which he sees in this act." In a similar way, the Book of Revelation mentions the souls of all the people who had been killed on account of the word of God, for witnessing to it as having received the crown of glory (Rev.6:9). The passage could be seen as that which inspired the four U.S. martyrs, Kazel, Donovan, Ford and Clarke. In testimony before death, they note, "we know that death is not the last word. We treasure it in our hearts. And, to the extent that we try to follow the example set before us a decade ago, we honour the Christ who comes to us in many forms (Morrison 2005:265).

Just as some Muslims have made the spirituality of martyrdom and suffering a basic principle of their faith and piety, so in Roman Catholic Church, we have monks and nuns that follow Jesus Christ in the experience of passion and death. Thus, the Catholic Church teaches that "the martyr is always in a state of prayer and intercession for all, for the whole world. And because it is Christ who suffers in the martyrs and with them, they try not only to save themselves but to save all people and all Churches (Bria 1987:294).

In the light of the above, the spirituality of martyrdom in Islam and Roman Catholicism stands for two visions which are very different kinds of love for God. It is a vision in which a Christian bears witness to this love by forgoing all violence in order to cast out hatred and conquer sin in the manner of Christ. On the other hand, a Muslim bears witness to the love of God by fighting as far as the self sacrifice is for the name of Allah. As it stands, the doctrine has become a matter of choice, noting that the word "martyrdom," in Islam and Roman Catholicism is essentially spiritual in meaning. Its

association with the use of the sword, engagement in suicide bombings, and violence is undoubtedly political and social. Hence, Prophet Muhammad talked about "the minor *jihad* (war) and the major *jihad* (self-control and betterment)" (Hathout 1996:108-109).

Conclusion

Today, in Roman Catholicism, the original meaning of martyrdom at a point was distorted so much so that the ideal was not the impetus unlike in the early church. This is because martyrdom was a glorious experience until the time of Constantine, whose rule lasted from A.D. 312 to 337. When martyrdom turned to be a banner under which political wars were waged, the spirituality became subject to question and doubt.

In Islam, the ideal martyr is someone who strives in the way of righteousness with his/her whole self. Religious justification for fighting given in the Sacred Book is rooted in the historical injustice that was done to Muhammad and his followers when they were in Mecca. Thus, McTernan (2003) argues that, "in principle Muslims were only to fight to right an injustice, to defend and to protect religion from destructive forces (2003:70).

Since the spirituality of martyrdom is considered to be broader than military violence both in Roman Catholicism and Islam, emphasis, in the 21st century, should be given to the martyrdom of the heart, the effort to sanctify oneself and to be obedient to the will of God in addition to authentic teachings of one's religion. For example, the Book of Micah 6:8 enjoins people, "to do what is right, love loyalty and to walk humbly with God." This represents the individual struggle with evil, commitment to promote what is right, and to correct what is wrong. No religion would object to this noble social value. Following this path in Nigeria would result to limited violence and avoidance of acting out of anger or revenge.

Furthermore, Islam advocates a regulated struggle for the good and resistance against evil. As war was a collective responsibility, it was to be declared only by the caliph. No war was to be started.... before the enemy was invited to enter into a peace agreement, the use of poisoned weapons, the killing of non – combatants, ethnic cleansing ... were outlawed (Zawati 2001:41-45). This injunction should renew the Islamic and Catholic acknowledgements of the essential unity of humanity and therefore, highlight the peace that was God's original intent for all human beings. The obligation to promote peace is universal. And this makes forgiveness more desirable than revenge.

In contemporary Nigeria, poverty and political awareness are now most important phenomenon. This situation challenges religious minded people to network and care for the sick, feed the hungry, and defend the wronged in prison. These acts dispose people to inherit the kingdom of God. Finally, stereotyping of religions or faith traditions, particularly in Nigeria should be avoided. It is not in the interest of human society for some people to engage in activities designed to discredit one religion or the other. Discrimination in any form should be eschewed. In addition, outright lawlessness and criminality which are daily mistaken in Nigeria as religious conflicts need to be balanced with good governance. This would, in turn, isolate lust for violence and loot from any genuine sense of religious idealism.

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