

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the most serious challenges facing contemporary Nigeria is religious extremism. Conceptually, religious extremism is the use of force or threat of force to enforce compliance with one's religious creed. It is motivated by the belief that one's religion is the only true religion. Thus, since the unbelievers are considered infidels, ignorant, or sinful, the religious extremist sees it as his or her duty to help them save their souls by compelling them to accept the true faith. This religious position is not new or restricted to any particular religion. Christianity and Islam, the world's most populous religions, have had their fair share of the menace. However, Islamic extremism has assumed alarming proportions in Nigeria. The unwholesome activity of these extremists is provoking reciprocal radicalization of Christians and threatening to plunge the entire country into a Christian-Islamic conflict. Deploying the library research approach and the analytic method for data collection and interpretation respectively, the study uses the theoretical framework of intercultural philosophy to interrogate the philosophical foundations of religious extremism in Nigeria. The paper finds that the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria is rooted in three fundamental mistakes, namely, misinterpretation of the concept of God, poor understanding of the nature of divine revelation and the adoption of an inappropriate criterion for determining true religion. Based on these findings, the paper argues that God is a mystery of who no religion, no matter how sublime can claim an absolute knowledge. If God has revealed himself to a particular religion, it remains possible that he has also revealed himself to others. This possibility of multiple religious revelations undermines any claim of absolute knowledge of God and the attendant extremism that goes with it. Also, the fact that man is made in the image of God suggests that the measure of every true religion should be its respect for human life. Concluding that any faith that advocates the killing of human beings is antithetical to true religion, the paper recommends promoting intercultural philosophy's principles of dialogue and respect as a way of pursuing and establishing peaceful coexistence among people of different religions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religious extremism, Islamic extremism, Intercultural philosophy, Philosophical dialogue, Polylogue, Creed

Introduction

The history of Nigeria is punctuated by different forms of conflict, including political conflicts, ethnic conflicts, and intra- and inter-communal conflicts. However, few of these conflicts have affected the security situation of the country as profoundly as religious conflicts. Arguably, religion has, either directly or indirectly, played a significant role in the motivation and escalation of many conflicts in Nigeria. Some of the most intense and pervasive conflicts that have afflicted the country in recent years possess strong religious undertones. Three examples are particularly noteworthy.

The first is the farmers-herders conflict, which has killed thousands and displaced millions across the country. The severity of the violence led the Global Terrorism Index (2017) to classify Fulani herdsmen as the fourth deadliest militant group in the world. According to Burton (2016), the Fulani or Fula people, who are often identified as the principal actors in many of these attacks, are overwhelmingly Muslim. The farming communities that constitute a significant proportion of the victims are predominantly Christian, thereby giving the conflict an important religious dimension.

The second example is the Boko Haram insurgency, widely regarded as the greatest security challenge Nigeria has faced since the civil war. The insurgency has devastated North-East Nigeria, killing thousands and displacing millions. As Umar (2012) observes, Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram, consistently traced his inspiration for establishing the group to what he perceived as the political and social marginalization of Muslims in Nigeria. Yusuf linked these grievances to the impact of European colonization on the Islamic character of Northern Nigeria through the introduction of Western education, secular law, and liberal democracy. Consequently, he advocated a return to Qur'anic principles and strict implementation of Sharia law. Yusuf also interpreted episodes of Muslim-Christian violence in Nigeria as evidence that Islam was under attack. He therefore regarded jihad as both an obligation and a legitimate means of liberating Nigerian Muslims.

Similarly, rejecting calls for Boko Haram to cease hostilities, Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau, declared:

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out jihad in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the Holy Prophet. We will never accept any system

of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way Muslims can be liberated (Agbese, 2013, p. 105).

Another major conflict with significant religious undertones is the growing narrative of Christian genocide in Nigeria. This narrative gained international attention when Senator Ted Cruz described the situation in Nigeria as “Christian mass murder” and alleged that over 50,000 Christians had been killed since 2009. The issue received further international attention when President Trump authorized U.S. airstrikes against Islamic militants in Northwestern Nigeria on Christmas Day, 2025, accusing the militants of “targeting and viciously killing innocent Christians” in the country (Egbejule, 2025).

In addition to being violent, these conflicts have generated dangerous political and religious conspiracy theories. One prominent claim is that attacks by armed herders form part of a long-term Fulani agenda to displace and Islamize the local population (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2016). Similarly, separatist groups in the South-East frequently portray the attacks as part of a northern agenda aimed at overwhelming southern populations and forcefully Islamizing them (ICG, 2015). Although these claims are contested, they continue to breed interfaith distrust and reveal the dangerous potential for religiously charged violence to escalate into broader communal and regional conflicts if left unchecked.

Scholars have also investigated the upsurge in religious violence in Nigeria with a view to proffering solutions to the problem. Some scholars attribute the upsurge to poverty, unemployment, and economic deprivation (Dauda, 2021). Others trace its roots to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Nigeria and the complex interactions among these diverse groups (Roos, 2024). Still others argue that the predatory nature of Nigerian politicians, who exploit religious sentiments to conceal their inefficiency, constitutes a major cause of the problem (Roos, 2024). While these explanations are important, they largely focus on the social, economic, and political dimensions of the crisis.

Thus, although there is an abundance of literature on religious violence in Nigeria from economic, ethnic, and political perspectives, there remains a dearth of scholarship on the deeper nexus between religious violence and religious extremism. The few scholars (Roos, 2025; Bolarin & Lateef, 2025) who explored the relationship between religious violence and religious extremism have done so only superficially, without probing deeply into how religious creed, especially differing conceptions of God can contribute to radicalization and violence. This paper therefore seeks to move beyond the superficial linkage between religious conflict and such factors as economic deprivation, unemployment, and politics by probing more deeply into the relationship between religious extremism and religious creed, particularly the concept of God.

More importantly, extant literature has recommended several measures for addressing religious extremism and violence in Nigeria, including poverty alleviation, employment creation, the secularization of Nigerian politics, and various de-radicalization programmes (Dauda, 2021; Roos, 2025; Bolarin & Lateef, 2025). However, little attention has been given to the potential contribution of intercultural philosophy, particularly its principles of equality, dialogue, and polylogue, to the challenge of religious extremism and violence. Consequently, using documentary and analytical methods, this study examines how intercultural philosophy can help deconstruct and remedy the logic of religious extremism in Nigeria. By emphasizing epistemic humility, mutual recognition, and non-absolutist approaches to truth, intercultural philosophy provides a conceptual framework for challenging extremist consciousness and fostering peaceful coexistence in plural societies such as Nigeria.

Deploying these principles in pursuit of its objectives, the study is divided into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section analyzes the two key concepts central to the study: religious extremism and intercultural philosophy. This conceptual analysis lays the semantic and theoretical foundation for the subsequent discussions. The third section provides a philosophical diagnosis of religious extremism in Nigeria by examining its epistemological and theological foundations. The fourth section reconceptualizes the idea of God within an intercultural framework, arguing that no religious tradition possesses exhaustive access to divine truth and that all human beings share inherent dignity. The fifth section examines how intercultural philosophy can contribute to overcoming religious extremism in Nigeria through epistemic openness, mutual recognition, and non-violent coexistence, while the sixth section reflects on the broader implications of this framework for Nigerian society and interreligious relations.

Conceptual Clarification

Mainstream scholarship often defines religious extremism in terms of: the use or threat of violence, the pursuit of actions outside accepted social, legal, or moral norms, fundamentalism, and the maintenance of rigid religious positions, among others. For instance, Ross (2025, p. 3) defines extremism as “the advocacy or support of radical ideologies, often leading to actions outside social, legal, or moral norms.” Similarly, Rainer (2004) conceives extremism as a form of fanaticism or radicalism that departs from societal norms in order to promote narrowly accepted views. In the same vein, Liebman (2001) understands religious extremism as the desire to expand and

enforce religious laws in both private and public spheres, a tendency capable of generating political conflict and social isolation.

While these definitions are not entirely incorrect, they are nevertheless narrow and somewhat misleading because they tend to equate religious extremism with its manifestations without sufficiently interrogating the underlying logic that makes extremism both fundamentalist and violence-prone. Such approaches therefore risk reducing religious extremism to external conduct while neglecting its deeper epistemological and theological foundations. Religious extremism is better appreciated when it is distinguished from related concepts, especially violence. Although violence is often its most visible manifestation, extremism fundamentally consists in absolutism, exclusivism, and epistemic closure. Absolutism refers to the belief that one's religious position represents the only valid and unquestionable truth. Exclusivism denotes the conviction that salvation, truth, or divine favour belongs solely to members of one religious tradition, thereby invalidating all others. Epistemic closure refers to the refusal to subject one's beliefs to critical interrogation or dialogue with alternative perspectives. In this sense, religious extremism is characterized by intellectual rigidity that closes off the possibility of mutual understanding and coexistence.

Wibisono, Louis, and Jetten (2019, p. 2561) argue that religious extremism should not be reduced merely to violence because it also involves "different interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes defining extreme religious identity." Extremism therefore begins at the level of ideas and attitudes long before it manifests in violent action. Violent acts are often only the outward expression of deeper theological and ideological commitments rooted in intolerance and dogmatic certainty. Pratt (2007, p. 295) captures this distinction succinctly when he argues that extremism emerges where religious exclusivism develops into "the intentional invalidation of variety." In this regard, extremism is not simply strong belief but rather an aggressive and absolutist disposition that delegitimizes difference itself.

Within the Nigerian context, groups such as Boko Haram have transformed religious absolutism into organized violence through bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on both Christian and Muslim communities. However, extremist attitudes are not confined to insurgent movements alone. They are as well reflected in everyday sectarian suspicions between religious communities, discriminatory political rhetoric, and the tendency to interpret national issues primarily through religious lenses. Consequently, religious extremism in Nigeria cannot be understood merely as a theological issue; it is also a socio-political reality that shapes patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and conflict. The danger lies not only in violent acts themselves but also in the exclusivist mindset and epistemological rigidity that legitimize hostility toward perceived religious others.

Since religious extremism is rooted partly in epistemic rigidity and monopolistic claims to truth, any meaningful philosophical response must involve a framework capable of challenging closed theological systems while fostering openness to plurality and mutual understanding. It is within this context that intercultural philosophy becomes particularly relevant.

Intercultural Philosophy

Intercultural philosophy emerged in the age of globalization, principally as a critique of Eurocentricism or tendency to present European rationality as the sole valid framework for philosophical reflection. It challenges the Eurocentric assumption that philosophy is exclusively a Western enterprise and insists instead on the plurality of rationalities and epistemic traditions. Intercultural philosophy therefore seeks to create a global philosophical space in which different cultural traditions encounter one another in relations of equality and mutual recognition.

According to Mall (2000, p. 15), this orientation in philosophy arose from dissatisfaction with "the monopolistic claim of one philosophical tradition to universality." As a result, intercultural philosophy rejects every attempt to absolutize a single cultural worldview as the exclusive bearer of truth. Its central concern is not the replacement of one dominant tradition with another, but rather to create a framework within which multiple traditions can engage one another critically and constructively. This anti-hegemonic orientation of intercultural philosophy is underscored by Mogobe Ramose (2003, p. 5), who maintains that philosophy must move beyond Eurocentric exclusivism in order to recognize the intellectual legitimacy of non-Western traditions.

Intercultural philosophy is therefore founded on the recognition that no culture, religion, or civilization possesses exhaustive access to truth. Rather than advocating epistemological arrogance, it encourages openness to other perspectives and traditions. This disposition may be described as epistemic humility, which is the acknowledgment that one's worldview, though meaningful and valuable, remains limited and capable of enrichment through encounter with others. Forster (2016, p. 68) captures this orientation succinctly when he states that intercultural philosophy "seeks understanding through engagement with cultural others rather than through their assimilation or negation."

A key principle of intercultural philosophy is dialogue. Nevertheless, it is not reducible to mere dialogue in the

ordinary conversational sense. Its notion of dialogue involves what Franz Martin Wimmer (2011) describes as “polylogue,” that is, a multidirectional exchange among diverse traditions in which no single tradition is granted privileged authority over others. Wimmer (2011, p. 49) explains this idea in the following terms:

The basic norm of intercultural orientation in philosophy could be called the rule of polylogue: namely, that no philosophical thesis should be accepted if it was developed exclusively within the framework of one cultural tradition.

Polylogue is particularly important for plural societies such as Nigeria where religious communities often exist in mutual suspicion and competition. The principle demands that different religious traditions listen to and learn from one another without attempting to erase their differences. Therefore, the relevance of intercultural philosophy to the present study lies in its capacity to undermine the exclusivist logic that sustains religious extremism. By promoting epistemic humility, mutual recognition, and polylogical engagement, intercultural philosophy provides a conceptual framework for overcoming closed religious consciousness and fostering peaceful coexistence in a religiously plural society such as Nigeria.

Religious Extremism in Nigeria: A Philosophical Diagnosis

Religious extremism in Nigeria is often explained in terms of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, political manipulation, weak institutions, and social marginalization. These factors undoubtedly contribute to the conditions under which extremist ideologies flourish. However, such explanations remain insufficient because they primarily describe the socio-political environment that enables radicalization without adequately interrogating the ideological and philosophical structures that sustain extremist consciousness itself. The persistence of religious extremism in Nigeria ultimately rests upon deeper epistemological and theological assumptions grounded in absolutism, exclusivism, and epistemic closure. These assumptions create rigid distinctions between truth and falsehood, believers and unbelievers, purity and corruption, thereby producing forms of religious consciousness that are hostile to plurality, dialogue, and coexistence.

One of the earliest manifestations of extremist religious consciousness in postcolonial Nigeria was the Maitatsine movement founded by Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine in Kano in the 1970s. Maitatsine rejected not only secular authority but also mainstream Islamic interpretations which he regarded as corrupt and compromised. His teachings reflected a rigid absolutism that claimed exclusive access to authentic religious truth while condemning alternative interpretations as deviations from divine will. The movement opposed Western education, modern technology, and state institutions, regarding them as symbols of moral corruption and ungodliness. Followers were discouraged from using items such as watches, bicycles, radios, and automobiles because they were considered incompatible with true religion (Isichei, 1987).

The philosophical significance of the Maitatsine movement lies in its epistemic closure. Epistemic closure refers to the refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of alternative perspectives or interpretations. Within the Maitatsine worldview, truth was conceived as fixed, final, and exclusively possessed by the sect. Consequently, disagreement was not interpreted as a legitimate difference of opinion but as rebellion against divine authority. This absolutist orientation transformed theological dissent into moral hostility and justified violent confrontation with both the state and other Muslims.

Isichei (1987) observes that Maitatsine “claimed to be a prophet superior to Muhammad” (p. 198), a claim that not only challenged orthodox Islamic theology but also reflected the radical monopolization of spiritual authority characteristic of extremist movements. The violent uprisings associated with the movement, particularly the 1980 Kano riots which claimed thousands of lives, revealed the dangers inherent in religious ideologies grounded in absolutism and intolerance. The Maitatsine crisis therefore represented more than a social disturbance; it was an expression of extremist consciousness rooted in dogmatism, exclusivism, and the rejection of dialogical engagement.

The same philosophical foundations are even more evident in the ideology of Boko Haram and its affiliated groups such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in the early 2000s, Boko Haram emerged from a radical rejection of Western education, secular governance, and religious plurality. The group’s popular name, “Boko Haram,” roughly translates as “Western education is forbidden,” reflecting its hostility toward alternative epistemological systems. Boko Haram’s ideology is grounded in the belief that only its interpretation of Islam represents authentic divine truth, while all competing worldviews are regarded as corrupt, sinful, or unbelieving. In one of his sermons, Mohammed Yusuf declared, “This civilization is not compatible with Islam... Western education should be forbidden. Women should only receive religious education” (cited in Walker, 2012, p. 6).

This statement illustrates the epistemically closed nature of Boko Haram’s ideology. Western education is rejected

not merely as a political system but as an illegitimate source of knowledge altogether. Such a worldview reflects what can be described philosophically as epistemic absolutism—the belief that one possesses unquestionable and final truth while all alternative perspectives are false or morally corrupt. Within this framework, dialogue becomes unnecessary because truth is presumed to have already been fully attained.

Boko Haram's extremist consciousness also manifests in its practice of *takfir*, the declaration that other Muslims are unbelievers or apostates. Muslims who cooperate with the Nigerian state, participate in democratic institutions, or reject Boko Haram's ideology are frequently treated as enemies deserving death. This demonstrates how exclusivist religious thought can lead to the dehumanization of the religious other. Once individuals are perceived as enemies of God rather than fellow human beings, violence against them becomes morally justified. Juergensmeyer (2003, p. 12) explains this phenomenon in the following terms:

What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such acts on a spiritual plane. Violating secular standards of morality, they have justified their actions by the higher moral sanction of defending the absolute.

This insight is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context where extremist violence is frequently legitimized through appeals to divine command and sacred obligation. Boko Haram's attacks on churches, mosques, schools, markets, and public institutions reveal how violence becomes sacralized within extremist ideology. Killing is no longer perceived as morally wrong because it is interpreted as service to divine truth. The emergence of ISWAP, despite its strategic differences from Boko Haram, reflects continuity in this extremist logic. Both groups are united by absolutist interpretations of religion, hostility toward pluralism, and the monopolization of divine authority.

Beyond organized insurgent groups, extremist consciousness has increasingly permeated sections of popular religious life in Nigeria. This is evident in mob actions carried out in the name of defending religion, particularly in cases involving allegations of blasphemy. The killing of Miss Deborah Samuel in Sokoto State in 2022 provides a disturbing example. Deborah, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, was accused of making comments considered offensive to Islam. Without recourse to legal procedures or rational dialogue, an enraged mob lynched and burnt her to death.

The philosophical significance of this incident lies not merely in the violence itself but in the underlying consciousness that legitimized it. The mob acted from the assumption that perceived religious offense automatically nullified Deborah's humanity and legal rights. Such actions reflect an absolutist moral framework in which religious identity supersedes universal ethical principles such as justice, dignity, and the sanctity of human life. In this context, violence becomes sanctified because it is perceived as defending the sacred.

Similarly, in 2023, Ahmad Usman, a vigilante in Lugbe, Abuja, was reportedly killed by a religious mob over allegations connected to blasphemy. The incident demonstrated that extremist religious consciousness is not restricted to insurgent enclaves in northeastern Nigeria but has penetrated broader social spaces, including cosmopolitan urban centres. The readiness of individuals to engage in collective violence over perceived religious transgressions reveals the extent to which exclusivist and intolerant forms of religious consciousness have become normalized in certain contexts.

These mob killings demonstrate the collapse of dialogical reason within extremist religious consciousness. Rather than resolving disagreement through persuasion, legal mechanisms, or intercultural engagement, extremists resort to coercion and violence because they perceive themselves as defenders of unquestionable sacred truth. The religious other is therefore no longer encountered as a fellow human being deserving understanding and dignity but as a threat that must be eliminated.

The Nigerian experience therefore demonstrates that religious extremism is fundamentally more than a socio-economic or political problem. Although poverty, corruption, unemployment, and weak governance may create conditions conducive to radicalization, the ideological persistence of extremism depends upon deeper philosophical structures rooted in absolutism, exclusivism, and epistemic closure. These structures transform contingent religious interpretations into unquestionable truths, deny the legitimacy of alternative perspectives, and dehumanize those perceived as religious outsiders or offenders. Consequently, religious extremism in Nigeria represents a profound crisis of dialogue, epistemic humility, and coexistence. Any meaningful response to the crisis must therefore move beyond military operations and economic reforms toward an intercultural philosophical framework grounded in openness, mutual recognition, and dialogical engagement.

Rethinking God and Religious Truth in an Intercultural Framework

At the heart of religious extremism lies not merely political frustration or social alienation, but a deficient theology of certainty. Extremist consciousness is sustained by the conviction that God can be fully comprehended,

exhaustively represented, and exclusively possessed by a particular religious tradition. Such a conception transforms finite human interpretations into absolute and unquestionable truths. The consequence is epistemological arrogance, intolerance toward alternative perspectives, and ultimately violence against those perceived as standing outside divine favour. The problem of religious extremism in Nigeria must therefore be understood partly as a theological crisis arising from distorted assumptions about the nature of God, revelation, and human access to truth.

Intercultural philosophy provides an important framework for challenging this absolutist orientation because it rejects monopolistic claims to truth and insists on the finitude and situatedness of all human knowledge. From an intercultural perspective, no religious tradition possesses exhaustive access to divine reality. Rather, every religious tradition encounters and interprets transcendence through historically and culturally conditioned categories. This does not imply that religious truth is meaningless or purely subjective; instead, it recognizes that the Infinite always exceeds the conceptual grasp of finite human beings.

The first major implication of this framework is the understanding of God as mystery beyond exhaustive human comprehension. Across many religious and philosophical traditions, God is conceived not as an object fully capturable by human language and doctrine, but as transcendent mystery surpassing complete intellectual mastery. This conception undermines dogmatic certainty because it recognizes the limits of human knowledge in matters concerning the divine. Karl Jaspers expresses this point forcefully when he argues that transcendence can never be fully objectified within human concepts. According to him, “God is not an object of knowledge like objects in the world” (Jaspers, 1957, p. 47). Hence, if God transcends exhaustive human comprehension, then no individual or religious community can legitimately claim total possession of divine truth. Every theological system becomes necessarily partial, interpretive, and open to humility. Extremism emerges precisely when humans forget their own finitude and elevate themselves into unquestionable certainties.

The second major implication of rethinking the idea of God concerns theological anthropology, particularly the notion of shared human dignity. One of the gravest dangers of religious extremism is its tendency to dehumanize the religious “other.” Once individuals outside one’s creed are perceived as spiritually inferior, impure, or condemned, violence against them becomes easier to justify. Extremism therefore thrives upon a fractured understanding of humanity. Against this tendency, intercultural philosophy emphasizes a shared theological anthropology rooted in the intrinsic dignity of every human being. Within the Christian tradition, this idea is captured in the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). To violate human dignity is therefore, in a deeper sense, to violate the divine image reflected in humanity.

Similar ethical orientations can be found in Islam, African communal thought, and other religious traditions that emphasize the sacredness and worth of human life. Intercultural philosophy therefore seeks not to erase doctrinal differences but to identify ethical convergences capable of sustaining peaceful coexistence. This shared theological anthropology provides an important ethical restraint against violence. If all persons possess inherent dignity, then no religious cause can legitimately justify indiscriminate violence, coercion, or dehumanization. The religious other ceases to be an enemy to eliminate and becomes instead a fellow human being deserving recognition and moral respect.

Importantly, this argument should not be misconstrued as an attempt to revise or homogenize religious doctrines. Intercultural philosophy does not propose the abandonment of distinctive theological identities. Rather, it advances a philosophical reinterpretation across traditions aimed at exposing the epistemological dangers of absolutism while highlighting shared ethical resources capable of resisting extremism. By reconceiving God as mystery beyond exhaustive human grasp and humanity as united by shared dignity, the absolutist logic underpinning religious extremism is significantly weakened. The struggle against religious extremism in Nigeria must therefore involve not only political reforms and security measures, but also a deeper philosophical and theological reorientation concerning the nature of God, truth, and human existence.

Intercultural Philosophy and the Possibility of Overcoming Religious Extremism in Nigeria

The relevance of intercultural philosophy to the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria is clearer when one considers the epistemological structure upon which extremism itself rests. As already argued, religious extremism thrives on dogmatic certainty, monopolization of divine knowledge, and the dehumanization of religious others. Consequently, overcoming religious extremism requires more than military intervention, political reform, or economic reconstruction. It demands a transformative reorientation of consciousness capable of challenging the exclusivist logic that sustains extremist thinking. It is precisely at this point that intercultural philosophy becomes profoundly relevant.

Intercultural philosophy destabilizes exclusivist epistemologies by questioning the assumption that any culture possesses exhaustive and unquestionable access to truth. It rejects epistemological monopolies and insists that all human knowledge is culturally mediated. In this way, intercultural philosophy undermines the intellectual

arrogance upon which extremist consciousness depends. Franz Martin Wimmer (2011, p. 52) argues that intercultural philosophy seeks to overcome “the centrism of thought” that elevate one tradition above all others. By exposing the finitude and situatedness of every human perspective, intercultural philosophy weakens the certainty that often legitimizes intolerance and violence.

This epistemic openness does not entail relativism or the abandonment of religious conviction. Rather, it encourages what may be described as epistemic humility, the recognition that one’s understanding of truth, however meaningful, remains incomplete. Such humility creates the possibility of learning from others without surrendering one’s identity. In plural societies such as Nigeria, this orientation is particularly important because peaceful coexistence cannot be sustained where communities regard themselves as exclusive possessors of divine truth.

Intercultural philosophy also contributes to overcoming extremism by re-humanizing the religious “other.” One of the most dangerous consequences of extremist ideology is the reduction of outsiders to enemies, infidels, or threats to sacred order. Once individuals are stripped of their humanity, violence against them becomes morally conceivable and sometimes even religiously justified. Against this logic, intercultural philosophy insists upon mutual recognition and the ethical dignity of all persons. This insight is crucial because it dismantles the theological and cultural arrogance that frequently underlies extremist consciousness. If no tradition can claim absolute supremacy over humanity, then the religious other can no longer be treated merely as an object of conversion, domination, or elimination. Instead, the other becomes a participant in a shared human search for meaning and truth.

The re-humanization of the other is especially significant within the Nigerian context where religious identities have increasingly become politicized and weaponized. Suspicion between Christians and Muslims often rests upon inherited stereotypes and mutual fears reinforced by historical violence. Intercultural philosophy seeks to interrupt this cycle by fostering recognition rather than hostility. It encourages communities to encounter one another first as human beings sharing common dignity before approaching one another as religious competitors.

In addition, intercultural philosophy opens space for non-violent coexistence by replacing antagonistic relations with dialogical and polylogical engagement. Its emphasis on dialogue is not merely strategic or diplomatic; it is rooted in the philosophical conviction that human beings and cultures achieve fuller understanding through encounter with difference. The implications of this framework for Nigeria are profound. If religious extremism is partly sustained by rigid and absolutist modes of thought, then education becomes a critical site for cultivating alternative forms of rationality. This does not simply mean increasing religious content in school curricula, but rather fostering philosophical literacy that encourages critical reflection, openness to difference, and awareness of the limits of one’s own perspective. An intercultural orientation in education would therefore emphasize reflective thinking, comparative engagement with religious traditions, and the cultivation of empathy across difference.

Intercultural philosophy also challenges the antagonistic forms of public discourse through which religious identities are frequently constructed in Nigeria. Political rhetoric, media representation, and communal narratives often reinforce rigid distinctions between “us” and “them,” thereby deepening suspicion and hostility. Against such binaries, intercultural philosophy encourages a more nuanced understanding of identity as relational, dynamic, and plural. Individuals are not defined solely by religious affiliation but by a complex intersection of historical, ethical, cultural, and social experiences. Recognizing this complexity weakens the appeal of absolutist narratives that reduce identity to a single religious marker.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that intercultural philosophy does not offer a quick or simplistic solution to religious extremism. Extremism is deeply rooted in historical grievances, political manipulation, economic inequalities, and entrenched theological assumptions. Consequently, intercultural philosophy cannot eliminate extremism overnight through abstract intellectual arguments alone. Rather, what it offers is a transformative reorientation of thinking. It seeks gradually to reshape the epistemological and ethical foundations upon which interreligious relations are constructed. Its significance lies in its ability to cultivate habits of humility, openness, mutual recognition, and critical self-reflection. Such transformation is necessarily long-term because it involves changing not merely institutions or policies, but modes of consciousness.

The struggle against religious extremism in Nigeria must therefore move beyond security-centered approaches toward deeper philosophical engagement with the ideas and assumptions that sustain violence. Military force may suppress extremist movements temporarily, but it cannot by itself dismantle the exclusivist worldview that continuously reproduces extremism. Intercultural philosophy addresses this deeper level by challenging dogmatic epistemologies, restoring the humanity of religious others, and opening conceptual space for peaceful coexistence amidst difference. Ultimately, the promise of intercultural philosophy lies not in abolishing religious diversity, but in creating the conditions under which diversity can exist without degenerating into violence. In this sense, intercultural philosophy represents not merely a strategy for conflict management, but a profound ethical and

epistemological reimagining of interreligious existence in contemporary Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a multi-religious country dominated, almost on equal strength by Christianity and Islam. As a result, these two religions have been involved in rivalry and contest of supremacy. However, in recent years, especially from 2002 when the Islamic group, Boko Haram emerged, extremist driven activities among Muslims have intensified leading to farmers'-herders' conflict, banditry, kidnapping and many more, which have resulted in the killing of mostly Christians. However, the most dangerous side of this evolving conflict, is that the activities of these Islamic militants are inspiring reciprocal radicalization of Christian groups who see it as their responsibilities to protect Christians creating the possibility that this could degenerate into wide conflict between Christians and Muslims and the attendant dangers that engenders.

This paper examines the causes and remedies of religious extremism in Nigeria. The paper finds that religious extremism is caused fundamentally by three ontic and epistemic mistakes, namely, misinterpretation of the concept of God, poor understanding of the nature of divine revelation the consequent limitation of human knowledge and the application of a wrong criterion in determining the essence of true religion. In order words, religious extremism is the result of defective assumptions that a comprehensive knowledge of the deity can be attained and that religious fervour and charity consist in imposing the implication of that knowledge on those identified as non-believers.

Having discovered that foundation of religious extremism is fundamentally onto-epistemological, the study applies two important principles of intercultural philosophy to deconstruct and remedy the problem. The first is the principle of critical assessment, which sees no aspect of cultural norms and religious creed as immune from the probing light of critical evaluation. Under this principle, no aspect of religion is considered too sacred that it cannot be questioned using the natural light of human reasoning. The role of this principle is to enable the devotees of the two major religions in Nigeria to question some aspects of their religion, particularly those aspects that are likely to come into conflict merely with members of the same religion but with other religions and the Nigerian community in general.

The second principle is the principle of equality, dialogue and respect of other cultures and creeds. This principle accepted that in a multi-religious and ethnic country like Nigeria, there is bound to be tension and conflicts. However, conflicts and misunderstandings need not degenerate into violence but should be resolved through the understanding that members of every religion are equal in their pursuit of truth and should hence engage in respectful dialogue in order to form a decent, respectful and peaceful society. The paper concludes by recommending the application of these principles of intercultural philosophy in the Nigerian education system and through the national orientation agencies in the country. The purpose of this application is not just to demythologize and de-glamorize those aspects of religious creeds that inspire violence in Nigeria but more importantly, encourage the spirit of respectful dialogue that build a healthy and beloved society, where religious beliefs do not interfere with or undermine the common humanity of all men.

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