

## **KARL POPPER'S PRINCIPLE OF VERISIMILITUDE: A PANACEA TO ISLAMIC FANATICISM IN NIGERIA**

**Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo, PhD**

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State.

### **Abstract**

*Nigerians are ferociously tethered to different religious sects, particularly Christianity and Islam. This makes the different religions prone to fanaticism. However, religious fanaticism is most pronounced within the Islamic sect in Nigeria. The Country's history is deluged with many religious motivated violent attacks championed by fanatics of Islam. This sect who are driven by the erroneous assumption that Islamic religion is supreme to other religions and that the revealed 'truths' of Islam are manifest, that is, the truths are there for everyone to see. Hence, they become easily threatened and declare the truths of other religions as blasphemy, which they consider contrary to theirs. This has continuously led to violent attacks against those they label infidels. This paper is of the view that Karl Popper's principle of verisimilitude can serve as a solution to this menace. Verisimilitude was a theory developed by Karl Popper to prove that truth is not manifest. In other words, that truth is not bare to all, but something that gradually unfolds as we continue to get closer through the process of conjectures and refutations. This continual evolvment of truth makes it dangerous to hold an absolutist view of it. Since Islamic fanaticism is mainly driven by an absolutist view of the truths of its doctrines, an understanding of Karl Popper's principle of verisimilitude is a panacea to their fanaticism. This paper employs the critical reflection, analysis, evaluation and reasoned prescription method.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Fanaticism, Verisimilitude, Islamic.

### **Introduction.**

Over the years, men have claimed to have the knowledge of the existence of God and even the knowledge of his will. This has caused a lot of bloodshed. Unfortunately, all these claims are built on the foundation of belief which is not interchangeable or similar to knowledge. More unfortunate even, is the fact that since belief is more of a projection of personal view or feeling; it cannot logically pass for an objective standard, since it is relative. How then can one validly make a knowledge claim on matters of belief? This is the major underpinning of religious

violence. Nigeria, a country of individuals ferociously tethered to different religious sects, particularly Christianity and Islam, has become a breeding ground for religious fanatics.

Christianity and Islam are the two major religions that dominate Nigeria's religion (Ede, 2020). There are still other religions in the country, like the African Traditional Religion (ATR) although they are in the minority. These religious sects have large followership across the country. However, one major problem of these different religious sects is their chauvinism. This is the unbridled tendency of the adherents of various religions in Nigeria to see their religion as supreme as and better than others. Ede (2020) strongly avers that this tendency is mostly evidenced among the adherents of Islam. They conceive their religions as the only authentic religion. It is this highfalutin position that breeds religious intolerance and fanaticism, which goads their desperateness to leverage every available means to convert others to their faith or fight those whom they feel, disrespected their faith. The country's history is replete with inexhaustible tales of religious violence, perpetuated by Islamic fanatics, which mainly spins out of perceived disrespect or disagreements on beliefs and doctrines. Since they consider their religion to be superior and the ultimate harbinger of truth, they can go to any length, even killing, to see that others conform to their own beliefs and doctrines. This is evident in the seeming perpetual rancour between Christianity and Islamic sects, wherein, Christians have been the major victims of the fanatics' swords that bay for blood. This goes to show that religious fanaticism is a thing of the mind. It is not all about religion but the tweaked mindsets of some of its adherents who believe their religion is superior and see no reason others do not see it as such. It is this sect of people who become incendiary bombs of irrationality, which explodes as religious violence.

However, the fact that religion is revealed, not to angels, but to imperfect human beings. It follows that whatever is revealed to him, will be received through the lens of his imperfection. Also, the fact that no one has proven beyond reasonable doubt the existence or non-existence of God, none can conclusively claim to know His will as well, for now. It is this position that this paper tries to uphold. It tries to call for more openness as regards matters of faith among different religious sects in Nigeria, particularly, the Islamic sects. Since faith is a matter of belief hinged solely on human interpretations, it is prone to error and its understanding will continually evolve. An understanding of this will lead to increased tolerance and whittle down religious tolerance. Karl Popper's idea of Verisimilitude is therefore a major vehicle for driving home this point.

## **Clarification of Concepts**

### **Religion**

Etymologically, the word "religion" derives from three Latin words; 'ligare' (to bind), 'relegare' (to link together) and 'religio' (relationship). From its etymology, we see that religion refers to a sort of relationship between two persons: a relationship between God and man. It is a strong belief that there is a being or creator superior to man; a Being, responsible for man's

being and existence. Therefore, religion can be said to be a relationship that binds one to the divine. It is based on this that Omoregbe (1999) opines that: "religion is essentially a relationship, a link established between two persons, namely, a human person and a divine person believed to exist" p. 3. This is confirmed by Corrigan (2004) when he opined that religion is expected to vertically bind man to God and to horizontally bind man to his fellow man in pure fraternity and love. Ede (2020) cites Bouquet (1941) who defined religion as a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply God.

William Jones (1960, p. 50) defines it as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." James (1901) cited in Isomkwo & Njor (2019) defines religion as the acts, experiences and feelings of the individual in their loneliness so far as they stand about anything they may consider divine. Ejizu (2008, p. 7) defines it as "man's experience of the holy and ultimate reality, as well as the expression of that awareness in concrete life." Badaracco's (2005) definition aligns with this when he defined religion as the belief in God or gods. His view about religion also encompasses the doctrines and the manner of worship of God or gods. He sees religion as part of a belief system, like science, magic and witchcraft, which are considered part of a society's culture.

For Proctor (2005) religion is an attitude. It is an individual and community social or serious conduct or attitude towards the power or powers, which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interest and destinies. Apata (2003) to summarize the various views of religion, asserts that it is the different way man formulates a dependent relationship with God, as a leeway to maintaining peace and unity among men and for the service of God. Durkheim's (1915)'s popular definition of religion states that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community and all those who adhere to them.

However, it must be noted that there is no universally accepted definition of religion. There is no scholarly consensus on the definition of religion (Isomkwo & Njor, 2019). Hence, any attempt to give a straightforward definition of religion will be problematic, just like an attempt to define philosophy, as there would not be a consensus on the definition. This is a result of the divergence in orientations and backgrounds of people who attempt to define it. This is confirmed by Nigosian (1981) who opined:

In modern usage, religion covers a wide spectrum of meanings that reflect the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted. There are diverse ways religion is understood including emphases on the intellectual function, emotional, worship, individual experience and social functions of religion. Religion could therefore be defined as man's attempt to commune with supernatural force(s) as part of man's search for meaning, understanding and explanation of life. By defining religion as a sacred engagement with what is taken to be a spiritual reality, it is possible to consider the importance of religion

in human life without making claims about what it is or ought to be. It is not an object with a single, fixed meaning, or even a zone with clear boundaries. Religion is an aspect of human experience that may intersect, incorporate or transcend other aspects of life and society. It cannot be reduced to any single aspect of human experience. It is a part of individual life but also of group dynamics. Religion includes patterns of behaviour, thought and culture. (p. 2-3)

A look at the above definitions shows that religion is essentially built on the foundation of belief and feeling. But the feeling in question here is a very strong one that often weighs even more than knowledge; moulding and controlling the life of man throughout the ages. This is confirmed by Ediba et al., (2021) who cite Gwamna Dogara (2013) who in defining religion, states that:

Religion has influenced different forms of human civilizations such as in art, architecture, music, poetry, history, philosophy, politics, and other aspects of human engagements. Understanding religion, therefore, requires a multi-dimensional overview of its essence and manifestation. Religion has a forceful factor with the capacity to arouse deep emotions in man and passion towards obedience, commitment and total surrender. Religion creates faith which could be revolutionary, that is, with the capacity to influence change and it could also be transformational in content and goal. However, when religion assumes extreme content in its belief and practice, it leads to fanaticism, extremism, intolerance and unguarded bigotry. (p.17)

This view of Gwamna Dogara (2013) on religion strongly aligns with the context this paper intends to explore about religion.

### **Fanaticism/ Religious Fanaticism**

Like religion, Fanaticism and religious fanaticism are difficult to define. For Ushe (2012) Religious Fanaticism is better described than defined. He cites Iwe (2000) who asserts that:

That religious fanaticism is coterminous with religious extremism and may be descriptively defined as ...an irrational attitude to religion which leads the religionist to the practice of religion beyond the bounds of reason and therefore, without moderation (p. 143).

On the other hand, the problematic nature of defining fanaticism is aptly encapsulated by Chung et al. (2018) who opine that, "Fanaticism and its cognates, 'fan' and 'fanatic,' have been defined in inconsistent, contradictory, and often, non-discriminate ways across disciplines.... There seems to be no consensus among perspectives on fanaticism, and a generally acceptable definition of fanaticism is difficult to find" (p. 3-4). This position is confirmed by Cole (2021) who avers that:

Across disciplines, the term “fanaticism” is a problematic category, primarily used negatively to designate human actions deemed irrational by the observer. Therefore, a person who is regarded as a fanatic is perceived as someone who acts outside of prescribed social bounds. Sometimes, fanaticism can be applied as a condition of occasional actions. Irrational actions in protests can sometimes be seen as virtuous rather than as aggressive. Philosophers like Rousseau have considered this as civic fanaticism. However, to be conciliatory toward such acts of a less malignant fanaticism is to develop a high level of what the fanatics lack — tolerance. Following this paradigm, it is rather difficult to agree on a particular definition of the word even though there are useful denotations which have furthered the understanding of the concept” (p. 3).

Cole (2021) goes further to explore the trajectory of the term fanaticism over the years. According to him:

Historically, the concept of fanaticism is usually featured within the context of politics or religion. However, recent decades have seen the description transformed into wider contexts, and now the term is commonly used in the areas of sport, and the social and economic conditions of consumerism. Terms such as violent, excessive, harmful, irrational, etc., are negative emphases which dominate the description of fanaticism. These terms are often accompanied by paradoxical qualities like loyalty, commitment, and even at times martyrdom (p. 2-3).

Based on this, our conception of the term fanaticism is limited to the religious sphere. It is in line with this that fanaticism can be seen as enthusiasm, albeit, over-enthusiasm. A fanatic is an over-enthusiastic, overzealous, irrational, wild and dangerous person (Omomia (2015) and Asghar (1997) cited by Okoro (2020, p. 55)).

Going from the above definition we can easily infer the meaning of religious fanaticism. We can say that religious fanaticism is the over-enthusiasm and zealousness about a religious belief or faith which may cross all the bounds of reason and may tend to become wild or dangerous. Hence, one’s over-enthusiasm about his or her religious beliefs and practices, even to the detriment of others makes him or her religious fanatic. So, to become a religious fanatic is to be wild and excessive about matters that relate to one’s beliefs (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2007). Enweonwu et al., (2021) capture this well when they summarized the views of Sulaiman (2016), Balogun (1988) and Sulaiman (2014) on religious fanaticism. They aver that religious fanaticism is violent and unreasonable religious enthusiasm; an excessive irrational zeal to defend one’s religion and consequently “become a destructive agent of religious disharmony in the society” (p.1378). Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013) were obviously in agreement with this view when they cited Balogun (1988) who defined religious fanaticism as enthusiasm that has a religious undertone, is devoid of reason and is violent. It is a negative attitude to religion. This is because of the violence birthed by its chauvinistic approach to religion. Iwe (1987 & 2000), in a nutshell, defined religious fanaticism as an:

Irrational attitude to religion which leads the religionist to practice religion beyond the bounds of reason and, therefore, without moderation.... it is essentially a negative and vicious attitude to religion, characterized by exaggeration, excesses and violence. (p. 44 & 11)

The over-enthusiastic nature of a religious fanatic makes his religious teachings a do-or-die affair. So, he goes to any length to proselytize others to join or accept his faith. He can even go to the extent of using violent means to promote their religious faith and teachings.

### **Verisimilitude**

Verisimilitude, as a term, is an offshoot of two Latin words, namely, 'veritas' (truth) and 'similis' (like something). Verisimilitude is, therefore, 'truth-likeness' or 'like the truth' or 'closer to the truth'. The term also has Greek roots 'eikotos', 'eikotos', 'eikos'. The term implies 'approximation to the truth, similar to the truth, or like the truth', ([http://www.vocabulary in science and philosophy](http://www.vocabulary.in-science-and-philosophy)). The term first came about as a result of Karl Popper's attempt to solve the problem regarding the division between science and pseudo-science. It was a theory he developed as a reaction to some philosophical doctrines, especially the doctrines of manifest truth and the conspiracy theory of ignorance. The doctrine of manifest truth holds the position that man can discover, discern or know the truth and acquire knowledge. This is to say that the truth is out there for man to grasp or discover it (Popper, 1972). The conspiracy theory of ignorance holds that ignorance is orchestrated by some sinister power, which poisons our minds and kindles the habit of resistance to knowledge. Hence, for this school of thought, ignorance is not the mere absence or lack of knowledge.

Popper (1972) considers these theories as mere myths. For if the truth is out there for everyone to grasp, that is, if the truth is manifest, how then can we explain our tendency to fall into error? Why is it that what appears true to me is does not appear true to another person? So, whose truth then is the ultimate truth, since we see the truth from different lenses? So, what we have is a mere approximation of the truth. The truth is not clearly defined; we come to the truth through the process of trial and error. The history of the growth of any form of knowledge throughout the thousands of years of the history of man has often been that of trial and error, or from our mistakes (Popper, 1972).

### **Religious Fanaticism: A Closer Look at Islamic Fanaticism in Nigeria**

A critical look at the definitions of religion underscores one undeniable fact, which is that religion is primarily anchored on belief and feeling. However, this feeling has such a domineering force which often flays off the power of knowledge; thereby moulding and controlling to a large extent, the bearing of an individual or a people. This was aptly captured by Omoregbe (1999), when he opined that:

Religion has aided world progress, educational development, interpersonal and international cooperation as well as mutual understanding among people. On

the other hand, religion has also been the underlying force behind conflicts, civil as well as international wars, social stagnation or retrogression... it has also produced fanatics; men who have done incalculable damage to mankind, men who slaughtered their fellow men in hundreds and thousands in the name of the Good God! (p. 1)

This evidences the fact that religion has a lot of influence on man. Nigeria is so much religious inclined, as revealed by the religiosity index released by the Pew Research Centers Forum on Religion and Public Life (2019), which indicates that Nigeria is a deeply religious country, committed to Christianity and Islam. Evident in the outright exhibition of religious buildings, symbols, zeal, fervour, gestures and practices (Ediba et al., 2021), Nigeria is highly susceptible to the influence of religion. With individuals that are incurably religious, evident in a large number of adherents to the Islamic, Christian and traditional religions, fanaticism is a given.

The two major dominating religious faiths in Africa are Christianity and Islam, (Okpa et al., 2018). These two faiths exist diametrically in Nigeria; with Christianity popular and highly practised in Southern Nigeria, likewise Islam in the North, (Ajah et al., 2017). These two faith groups are well-steeped in the practice of their faith. However, the malignant chauvinistic tendency among the adherents of these religions and other religions in Nigeria to lay claim to the supremacy of their faith or religion over that of others is one of the sinister traits of religion, which leads to intolerance, fanaticism and finally violence (Ede, 2020). Ede goes further to aver that this tendency to perpetuate violence is mostly evident among the adherents of Islam. This is because most adherents tethered to the Islamic faith, often see their faith with an absolutist lens. They consider their faith as the authentic religion and the repository of all the revealed truths. It is with this myopic mindset that the truth of their faith is manifest, and as such, every “sensible” person should see and believe it, that births their desperateness in utilizing every possible means to proselytize others to join their faith. It is this situation that Ede (2020) avers, degenerates into extremism and rigidity in religious beliefs, which eventually leads to violence. Ede’s stance on the proneness of adherents of Islam to cause violence is well captured by the Qur’an (the holy book of the Muslims) as translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali,

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter, he will be in the ranks of those who have lost all spiritual good... Of such, the reward is that on them (rests) the curse of Allah, of His angels and all mankind. (Surah 3, Al Imran, 85/87)

However, it must be noted that the above absolutist stance is not limited to the Muslims and their Qur’an, it is also found among radical Christians who recognize the Bible as the only source of salvation with the implication that other believers are discriminated against and ridiculed as well. Those, for instance, who do not believe in Yahweh, in the words of Isaiah the prophet are, ‘the people that walked in darkness who need the light (Is. 9:2).

These absolutist views are what incensed religious fanaticism as it justifies all the acts performed in a bid to convert others who do not share these views. In Nigeria this is most

evident in the religious conflicts that do spring up and the constant loggerheads between the adherents of the Christian and Islamic religion. This situation is aptly captured by Andrew Rutasi (2005) when he opined that "The cooperation of Christians with Islam and Muslim leaders is not common because in some countries such as Sudan and Nigeria, Muslims and Christians remain unfriendly, suspicious of each other, and, at times, visceral enemies" (p. 325).

The above goes to show that religious fanaticism is not a new thing in Nigeria. According to Ushe (2012), religious fanaticism has a long history that dates to pre-Christian and pre-Islamic eras. He lays credence to this by citing Iwe (2000) who, given the enormity of religious fanaticism in Nigeria, opines that the history of religious fanaticism in Nigeria can best be studied in seven perspectives, namely; overt religious fanaticism, covert or hidden religious fanaticism, mild religious fanaticism, violent religious fanaticism, personal religious fanaticism, group religious fanaticism and institutional religious fanaticism. Going further, he cites Russel (1963) who summarizes these perspectives by categorizing them into two groups, Islamic fanaticism and Christian fanaticism, which comprises the major religious sect in Nigeria. However, our major focus is Islamic fanaticism in Nigeria, so we will proceed to have a closer look at it.

### **A Closer Look at Islamic Fanaticism in Nigeria**

Religious fanaticism seems even worse with Islam and its violent tenets. According to Mark A. Gabriel, a former professor of Islamic history at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt,

One of the most important Islamic teachings is about fate. Islam teaches that Allah controls a person's fate whether a person experiences good or evil, and the hour of death. No amount of human effort can change fate. The Qur'an says, 'No person can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed term' (Surah 3:145). Therefore, say the radicals, death is nothing to fear because it is under Allah's control (p. 108).

And, driven by such ideology as the above, the radicals can fight with a type of courage that knows no fear. Madumere et al., (2020) aver that terrorism, religious intolerance, crisis and violent demonstration and confrontation all come under the umbrella of religious fanaticism. Nigerian history is littered with these incidents. Going further they cite Mezieobi, Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2013) who noted that in 1980 alone, about 4177 lives and property worth millions of naira were lost to religious extremism and its attendant terrorism. Madumere et al., cite Nwokoye (2006) who avers that it was the Muslim move to introduce Sharia law into the Nigerian legal code in the middle and late 1970s that birthed religious terrorism. The Northern political elites in a bid to make Islam the national religion of the country, moved for the elevation of Islam over and above Christianity. Historically, this is the major reason all religious crises are not unconnected to the Sharia crises. sharia law was forcefully introduced into the legal codes of states like Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara, with no consideration of how such a

decision affected non-Muslims in those states. This was the major crux of the crisis that raged in Northern states, which threatened national unity (Madumere, 2020).

According to Ushe (2012) “The main goal of Islamic fanaticism is to reform and revive the Muslim community by education and force” (p. 145). This is the group that believes they have to revive the ancient glory of Islam, which was lost due to the failure of Muslim adherents to uphold the true bases of Islam. Rodney & Finka (2002) as cited by Ushe (2012) considers these bases to be the doctrinal teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet. It is these convictions that birthed reform movements comprising of young and old men who, believing they are privy to the truths of the sacred text, wrought violent acts of destruction on the pretext that God is on their side. The group’s “inflated sense of personal rectitude, moral certainty, and ideological purity is a tendency to dehumanize and even demonize those who oppose them” (Ushe, 2012, p.145).

Ushe (2012) considers this, "religious fanaticism", a disorder. However, those with this disorder according to him,

Need not appear wild-eyed or deranged but can present themselves as thoughtful and responsible inspired by the loftiest of ideas. Nevertheless, their absolute confidence in themselves, their cause, their willingness to create massive destruction for a supposed higher good and their dehumanization of their opponents all indicate the imbalance of a personality disorder. (p. 145)

The Boko Haram sect and the recent ‘unknown gunmen’ have been linked to Islamic fanatics due to their inhumane activities against religion, of which Christians are major victims of its brunt. Although their dastard acts show they are deranged they do not see themselves as such. However, many examples abound of varying degrees of violence meted out to non-muslims in Nigeria, particularly Christians.

This is evidenced by Madumere et al., (2020) who citing Onukwusi, Igbokwe & Anene (2012) report how Boko Haram, an Islamic extremist (fanatics) sect unleashed terror on residents of Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe, particularly Christians from 26-30 July 2009. This led to the killing and displacing of over 700 and 3,500 persons, respectively. In 2009 again, there was a resurgence of religious terrorism in Jos, the state capital of Plateau. This led to over 40,000 persons, who were mainly Christians being rendered homeless. According to police records of the incident declared by the police, at least 320 persons were killed. However, the health workers and local leaders placed the death toll at over 550. In 2012, the Boko Haram terrorist attack at the Bayero University in Kano on Catholic and Protestant worshippers at the Sports Hall and Open Air Theatre respectively led to the death of Professor Jerome Ayodele and Andre Leo Ogbonyomi and thirteen other Christian worshippers, Madumere et al., (2020). They go further to cite the report of Tanu (2012) who reported how a photo journalist with Independent Newspaper, who covered a Bokoharam terrorist attack in Kaduna State, at Christ the King Catholic Church, Evangelical Church of West Africa and Shalom Church at Trikania, wherein

24 persons were killed and 130 persons were injured was macheted to death because he professed Christianity when he was asked to identify himself.

On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022, Okediji Prosper, through an article in The Sun Nigeria, reported how Deborah Samuel, a 200-level student of Economics at Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, was on 12<sup>th</sup> May brutally murdered (lynched) by Islamic extremists and set ablaze after she advised her classmates against posting religious materials on their Whatsapp page. She was accused of blaspheming against the prophet Mohammed and subsequently mobbed to death. If a mere WhatsApp message in a group chat could rouse a certain group so much as to take another's life, then one is left to imagine the magnitude of consequences that could erupt in graver situations.

Enweonwu et al., (2021) confirm this when they cited Ugwuoke et al., (2021) who reports that In July 2016, a Nigerian Islamic cleric purportedly ordered his followers to kill a Christian woman who does early morning preaching in her neighbourhood. They go further to cite Sahara Reporters (2016), which reported that although both religions are unique in understandings of God and the meaning of sanctity in human conduct, the cleric believed the ways of Islam to be supreme and was deeply irritated by the Christian woman's understandings of God The cleric mounted light warnings and then proceeded to order the woman to death. Enweonwu et al., cite World Watch Monitor, (2018) which reports that in the same local government in which the woman was killed that 15 predominately Christian communities came under intense attack from an armed Moslem group in August 2018. Egbegi et al., 2018 and Anthony et al., (2021) noted that in that attack, they were over 230 death casualties and more than 11,500 refugees who fled their homes. And also a Christian reverend, his wife and children were particularly burnt alive in their church building.

Tales of violent attacks by Islamic Fanatics are inexhaustible. However, from the above one easily notices that even practitioners of Islam are not always exempt from the attacks of the fanatics of Islam. This goes to show that fanaticism is a privation, an irrational derail from the status quo. It now becomes pertinent to look at how Karl Popper's principle of verisimilitude can serve as a cure for this irrationality. To do this, there is a need to have an understanding of what the principle of verisimilitude is all about.

### **An Overview of Karl Popper's Principle of Verisimilitude**

According to Karl Popper (1972), as new problems confront us every day, solutions should be sought by establishing new theories which are a little closer or nearer to the truth than those of our forebears. Popper's concept of truth is not something we can stumble upon and recognize as such but as something that gradually unfolds as we continue to get closer through the process of conjectures and refutations. This then, is the fons et origo of his theory of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude, as a term, is an offshoot of two Latin words, namely, 'veritas' (truth) and 'similis' (like something). Verisimilitude is, therefore, 'truth-likeness' or 'like the truth' or 'closer to the truth'. This led Popper to the rejection of the three traditional epistemological

theories of truth. Verisimilitude, according to Popper, is the best and surest path towards the growth of human knowledge since through it, we arrive at the falsification of other hitherto existing theories which, though they were wrong, have however been held as true. This process of constant overthrow of scientific theories and their replacement by better or more satisfactory ones is for Popper, the secret behind the growth of scientific knowledge. The falsification of such theories brings us to the erection of new ones which are closer to the truth. Hence, for Popper, truth is not manifest and the growth of our knowledge cannot come by stumbling upon the truth but through the gradual process of Conjectures and Refutations

Karl Popper developed this theory of verisimilitude as a reaction to some philosophical doctrines, especially the doctrines of manifest truth and the conspiracy theory of ignorance. The former makes an optimistic claim of man's power to discern truth and to acquire knowledge while the latter interprets ignorance, not as a mere lack of knowledge but as the work of some sinister power, the source of impure and evil influences which pervert and poison our minds and instill in us, the habit of resistance to knowledge. The theory of manifest truth holds that truth may perhaps be veiled but it may reveal itself and if it doesn't reveal itself, it may be revealed by us. Unveiling the truth, for this theory, may not be easy but once the naked truth stands revealed before our eyes, we have the power to see it, distinguish it from falsehood and know that it is truth. According to Spinoza, 'Indeed, as light manifests itself and darkness, so with truth: it is its standard and that of falsity' (Popper, 1972, p. 5) Hence, truth, if put before us naked, is always recognizable as truth since we have been given the eyes to see the truth and the natural light of reason to see it by.

Descartes, according to Popper, based his optimistic epistemology on the important theory of the *veritas dei*: what we clearly and distinctly see to be true must indeed be true; for otherwise, God would be deceiving us. Thus, the truthfulness of God must make truth manifest. The question that confronts the above position is the question of the criteria for the judgment of truth. For what appears to be true for one person may not be so for another. Hence, through whose lens can truth be aptly viewed and judged as such? And if such a thing as an objective truth exists, how do we recognize it when it appears before us?

According to Popper (1972):

Truth is often hard to come by, and once found, it may easily be lost again. Erroneous beliefs may have an astonishing power to survive for thousands of years, in defiance of experience with or without the aid of any conspiracy. The history of science and especially of medicine could furnish us with several good examples. One example is, indeed, the general conspiracy theory itself. (p. 5)

Popper considers the theory of manifest truth a myth, just as the conspiracy theory of ignorance, which is a dangerous outgrowth of the former. For how can we ever fall into error if the truth is manifest? The answer to this question, according to those that hold the view is that it is through our sinful refusal to see the manifest truth or a result of prejudices which our minds harbor as a result of education or tradition or some other influences that may have corrupted

the originally pure and innocent minds. Hence, if the manifest truth does not prevail, then it must have been maliciously suppressed, due to the evil will of an evil power.

In its Marxian expression, the conspiracy manifests in the form of the capitalist press which perverts and suppresses truth and fills the workers' minds with false ideologies; prominent among which were the doctrines of religion. We equally find a similar idea in Francis Bacon's doctrine of *veracitas naturae* (the truthfulness of nature) in which he sees nature as an open book which cannot be misread except by one whose mind is poisoned by prejudice. He refers to the prejudices as idols. The idols, for Bacon, are the prejudices and preconceptions that colour and distort our view of things and the interpretation of our experience. The four idols namely; the idols of the tribe (gullibility or the tendency to take things as they appear at first sight without investigation), the idols of the cave (errors arising from the individual's biases such as temperament, education, likes and dislikes), the idols of the market place (errors due to the influence of language which gives fixed meanings to things just as they are commonly perceived) and the idols of the theatre (the speculative systems of the past) blind our eyes and stop them from seeing the manifest truth.

### **Karl Popper's Principle of Verisimilitude: A Panacea to Religious (Islam) Fanaticism in Nigeria**

A critical reflection on Karl Popper's principle of Verisimilitude reveals the fact that it is not exclusive to the field of science. Men have, over the years, claimed the knowledge of the existence of God and even the knowledge of his will and this has caused a lot of bloodshed. Almost every religion claims to have this knowledge (of the truth) and naturally holds on tenaciously to what it believes as such. Unfortunately, these claims have no standard of verification since they are often simply based on revelation (written or unwritten). These claims are anchored on belief, which is parallel to knowledge. More unfortunate even, is the fact that since belief is more of a personal view or feeling, it cannot pass for an objective standard, since there are bound to be as many perspectives as there are individuals in the world. How then can one validly make a knowledge claim on matters of belief? This is the primary cause of religious violence. According to Nwanaju (2015) religious violence occurs:

When the rational basis of any religious orientation is lost by any person or a group of persons, then disorder takes over the affected persons or people. Eventually, the whole society is rendered barbaric through wanton killings of people and destruction of property, as is presently witnessed in Nigeria with the issue of Boko Haram (western education is haram or forbidden). (p. 216)

Among the various religious sects in Nigeria, the Muslims undoubtedly are more vocal in their violence birthed by religious fanaticism. It is in line with this that Dr Sariah (2006) wrote that:

Everyone who objects to the judgments of Islam or is not satisfied with them is an infidel; therefore all those who have written anything against the legal limits

of Islam, by labelling the cutting of the hand of the thief or stoning of the adulterer, as regression or as degenerative and the likes of these descriptions, and those who demand the annulment of punishment by execution, and object to the prohibition of alcohol, or anything that might be considered an objection to the judgments of Allah, are straight infidels, whose blood is spilt, his wife would be divorced from him, and he will not be prayed over and will not be buried in the graves of the Muslims, and he does not inherit, nor is allowed to leave an inheritance (p. 82).

They are major advocates of the manifest truths of their religion and can go to any extent to proselytize, defend and even persecute others who fail to do so. In his narrow-mindedness, the fanatic, according to Omoregbe (1999):

Thinks that his own beliefs are the 'true' beliefs and his religion, the true religion. The religious fanatic is not broad-minded enough to realize that just as God has no favourite language, no favourite culture, no favourite race, so does he not have any favourite religion. (p. xi)

Mahatma Gandhi seems to echo the same opinion when he declared that, 'The soul of religion is one but encased in a multitude of forms' (Nigosian, 1974, p. 1). Ignorance is therefore the reason for the existence of such words as "pagan", "idolatry", "heathen", "infidel" and "superstition". They are nothing but derogatory terms for describing a belief that contradicts ours.

Given the menace of religious violence birthed by religious fanaticism in Nigeria, especially among the Islamic sect, a deep understanding of Karl Popper's principle of verisimilitude will go a long way to ameliorate religious fanaticism. For Karl Popper, truth is continually unfolding, and as such, we cannot make an absolutist statement on truths we know within a particular moment, since there is every tendency that it will evolve beyond what we know at the present. Popper developed the theory of verisimilitude as a rebuttal of the doctrine of manifest truth. He argues that it is the stance that truth is manifest that leads to all forms of fanaticism. This is because the doctrine of manifest truth gives an absolutist view of truth, thereby becoming unyielding to other truths that unseat the previously held truths. This is the leading cause of violence. On manifest truth, Popper (1972) opines that:

This false epistemology has also led to disastrous consequences. The theory that truth is manifest- that it is there for everyone to see if only he wants to see it- this theory is the basis of almost every kind of fanaticism. Only the most depraved wickedness can refuse to see the manifest truth; only those who have reason to fear truth conspire to suppress it. Yet the theory that truth is manifest not only breeds fanatics- men possessed by the conviction that all those who do not see the manifest truth must be possessed by the devil- but it may also lead, though perhaps less directly than does a pessimistic epistemology, to

authoritarianism. This is so, simply because, truth is not manifest as a rule. (p. 8)

The problem with the manifest theology of Islamic fanatics is the false assumption that what they see is the truth and must be perceived the same way by everyone. This erroneous chauvinistic assumption is coloured by nothing other than shallow-mindedness and cancerous ethnocentricity. This eclipses and beclouds their mind from recognizing the fact that there is nothing essentially different from their religion and that of others; that since they are all based on belief rather than knowledge, then none can make a knowledge claim as to which is the right one. Popper's principle of verisimilitude calls for a tentative approach towards truth. This will make us less absolutist in our views about the truths of our faith but open and more receptive to a newer truth, which falsifies our previously cherished belief. Karl Popper is not calling for a radical relativism, a situation where anything goes rather, he is calling for a prudent approach to our beliefs. Hence, while we hold our beliefs, we should be conscious that it is not absolute or manifest, expecting everyone to accept them with open hands and see them from the same lens as us. It is only this approach that can cure Islamic (religious) fanaticism.

## **Conclusion**

Religious fanaticism is not primarily caused by religion but by a perverted understanding of religion or misinterpretations of its creed and doctrine. The different instances of religious fanaticism listed above clearly show that fanaticism has always stayed from misconception, which births erroneous assumptions that ultimately lead to violence. This is well captured by Okpa et al., (2018) as cited by Enweonwu et al., (2021) when they affirmed that:

In each of these cases, Nigeria was not at war and neither was Islam at war with Christianity. Each was a case of a group of people who misconstrued the teachings of Islam and were motivated by this error to behave violently against other people. (p. 1379)

It is this error in assumption that their faith is the embodiment of manifest truth that divides Nigeria and humanity along the volatile and fragile religious infidels and faithful. Hence, those who practiced Islam according to their dictates or terms are considered faithful and every other person is an infidel – Christians, traditional worshippers, atheists, other Muslims, et cetera (Enweonwu et al., 2021). However, since the issue of the existence and nonexistence of God is yet to be proven beyond reasonable doubt, our major working tool in terms of religion are primarily beliefs and opinions but not knowledge in its true sense, since knowledge presupposes certitude? Hence, the various beliefs we hold are conjectures which may with time, be falsified. Hence, an understanding and subsequent implementation of Karl Popper's principle of verisimilitude in matters of faith will offer a major reorientation, especially to Islamic fanatics. This will not prevent them from believing in the revealed truths of their faith. However, since truths of faith are not something that is revealed or understood once, it will help them maintain a tentative attitude towards the truths of their faith. It will also curb their

tendency towards an absolutist view of the truths of their faith, widen their capacity for tolerance of other religious sects and finally lead to the growth of knowledge.

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