

RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN THE ERA OF SCIENCE: A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This appraises the relevance of religion in this era of science preference. Its focus is to identify and emphasize the positive roles of religion which are catalyst to human and societal growth and development. A multi-dimensional approach to research which include historical, descriptive, analytical and evaluative in addition to secondary sources were adopted. This paper is evaluated using the philosophical theory of pragmatism as the theoretical framework. Thus, the study is examined under four broad headings: the negative effects of science, the place of religion, why the adopted policy of 60:40 ratios in favour of science based disciplines must be reversed and the evaluation of the paper using the theoretical framework of pragmatism. The paper discovers that Nigeria can only achieve appropriate, appreciable and balanced development if the adopted policy of 60:40 ratios is abolished. The paper concludes that because Nigeria is pluralistic in nature in terms of her ethnic groups and culture, religion is a potent force that cannot be ignored or abandoned in her pursuit of development, unity, integration and peace. Therefore, it recommends that because of the unique roles of science and religion in national development, both should be given equal opportunities in the areas of admission into higher institution and employment.

Keywords: Era, Pragmatism, Relevance, Religion and Science

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is considered conventional wisdom in this era to conceive of intellectual enterprise in the humanities and the sciences as belonging to different realms, especially with regard to their contents, methodologies and more importantly, in the perception of their utility values for immediate society and the nations at large. For one thing, the process of scientific investigations are more directly visible, the outcomes of such investigations are easily identified and demonstrated and for evidences of utility values, the tools are developed, skills are acquired and services which employ such skills and their related professional bodies, are everywhere for all to see. Besides, the products of the application of intellectual work in the sciences, in terms of gadgetry, infrastructural services such as roads, water supplies, air travel services, medical service delivery and a host of other benefits of sciences made direct observable impacts on the populace (Makinde Akinola 19).

On the other hand, intellectual works through the humanities have no such dramatic or visibly demonstrable

results to present, vital as the humanities are in the universities and the society at large may appear. Sadly, only a few enlightened individuals could appreciate and recognize their importance in national development. Unfortunately, the preference of science over the humanities is, in a way, a reflection of the superficial appreciation of the meaning and/or purpose of life and living. In other words, it portrays man's switching of focus from his creator to the tools and skills, which are his creation (Olatuji Oloruntimehin 4).

It might interest you to know that the issue of relevance of the humanities scholarship has since become a global problem (Illechukwu 14). What then are the humanities? They are fields of Education (Study) which in different ways are concerned with the protection and optimization of man's humanity. The disciplines are Religion, French Studies, English Studies, African Languages, Foreign Languages, Linguistics, Fine and Applied Arts, History, Philosophy and Theatre and Media Arts (F.I. Emordi 64).

This paper therefore, focuses on "Relevance of Religion" which is one of the disciplines in the Humanities. Relevance simply means what is the importance, usefulness of 'Religion' both as a discipline and as a human phenomenon in this era of Science preference, or globalization. In the hay days of positivism in the Western World, Religion was looked down as past phase in the development of humanity (Obi 426). August Comte (1798 – 1857), the father of the science of sociology believed he had discovered a law that "all human societies passed through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive." According to him, in the first stage, humans believed that events were caused by the actions of gods; in the second, events were held and caused by abstract forces; in the third, scientific rationality triumphed, so that scientific laws formed the basis of explanation (M. Haralambos, M. Holborn and R. Healed. ctd Obi 426). Likewise, Sir James Frazer noted that mankind everywhere sooner or later passes through three stages of intellectual development: magic, religion and science. Therefore, the major conclusion of the positivists is that religion with the coming of the age of science will go out of existence which before now, served as the seductive drug (opium of the people).

Today, it is interesting to note that a new world order is emerging in which the United Nations (UN) is playing a key role which attest to the fact that, from the unfolding world events, Religion is coming up again without it, there will be no social order ((Obi 426). In other words, it is viewed as a basic social institution. Haven tried all manner of science ideas, weapons or strategies in the Middle East to no avail, religion is being explored to chart path of peace. Sequel to this, United Nations (UN) summit on Monday June 20, 2011, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Pastor Enoch Adeboye asserted that peace in the middle East would remain a mirage without the intervention of the Creator of the universe (Akande 64).

It is also to be noted that this is the first time the Clergy men of all grades, ages and titles, have converged with the inter-parliamentary coalition for Global Ethics to bring together religious, academic and diplomatic leaders to a summit at the UN Forum with the sole purpose of agreeing to work together collectively to implement the UN resolutions, developing a culture of peace through education, communication and legislation which is expected to serve as a milestone to achieving peace in the Middle East Region. The focus of this paper is to clearly identify the unique roles of religion, to critically examine the consequences of science/technology, to argue that the 60:40 ratios in preference of the sciences is detrimental to personal and national development and finally, the paper is evaluated using the theoretical frame work of pragmatism.

1.2 NEGATIVE SIDES OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION IN NIGERIA

It is a common place belief that the advancement of the physical sciences which gave birth to technology has created a lot of social problems which the social sciences and the humanities are ill-prepared to handle. In this connection, the changes brought about by science and technology on our perception of social reality and their effects on behavior in modern societies are well known. This is reflected in such works that have been written on the scientific and technological revolution, social effects and prospects in modern societies. For instance, it is generally admitted that the scientific and technological revolution in its social aspects, already command worldwide interests and concerns. Its problems are of concerns not only to scientists but the public at large. It is actively invading the social, economic, political, and religious lives of Nigerians and at the same time, affecting all classes, government systems, mass media, educational system and the humanities in general (Akande 64).

Science and technology have grown through the development of modern science and human scientific intelligence. It has done everything to make life easier and at the same time more complicated. It has prolonged life yet, it has created avenues for miseries and potentials for accelerated destruction of man and society, and even the human race. This, surely, is the paradox of science and technological revolution – a

double edged sword. With man as an instrument of scientific and technological change, we see that the advancement of science which led to the innovation in the area of theoretical physics produced a genius like Albert Einstein whose scientific development led to the perfection of atomic energy and nuclear destructive weapons. The advancement of science and technology also led to the high industrial complexities, environmental pollution and all the hazards (Makinde Akinola 19).

The development of gun powder, dynamite and bombs of different kinds and sizes further adds to the environmental and human threats. Nigeria in particular has suffered from all this through the use of sophisticated guns by criminals to kill their fellow men/women and the destruction of property either through armed robbery, hired assassination, kidnapping or accidental discharge of bullet by policemen. Since 2011 to date, it is on record that terrorist group, the BOKO HARAM has maintained a steady rate of bombings and gun attacks striking a wide range of targets many times a week in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria (internet source, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/bokoharam>) creating fear, panic and insecurity day and night. The same kind of weapons was also readily available for the militants and abductors in the oil-rich Niger Delta along with its by-products of raping of women/young female adults, moral decadence, general lawlessness and family disintegration. (Makinde Akinola 19-21)

In Nigeria, it was science/technology that contributed to societal change (positive and negative), especially since the aftermath of the civil war which led to the proliferation of arms and ammunitions that were readily available to the young and old in the society, a thing that was not known to the society before that time. Science/technological revolution are also the cause of individualism where everybody becomes self-centered, self-motivated and self-interested and tries to acquire wealth and other material things especially with the coming of oil boom in the 1970s and 1980s (Makinde Akinola 23-24). This further led to the excessive hunger to acquire other high minded luxuries, exotic cars, private jets, luxurious mansions etc. Lawlessness immorality, insensitivity to the needs of the masses and corruption of various kinds and magnitude became the order of the day (Makinde 21). Therefore, in a bid to acquire all that, different kinds of crimes emanated namely – bank robbery, fraudulent practices in public offices, rituals killings, embezzlement through manipulation of figures, internet fraud etc. Truth, honesty, patriotism, transparency, love, respect for law, respect for constituted authorities and elders became very scarce.

It is sad to note that the wealth and great comfort provided by science and technological revolution in the areas of agriculture and food production, transportation, machinery, technological gadgets and luxuries, medicine and information technology seemed to have changed people's perception about life and meaning of human existence. The measure of people's importance and social recognition are now tied to individual's economic strength acquired through primitive and dubious means. This perception of man in modern technological society has become the rule rather than the exception, in home, politics, private/corporate businesses, social organizations as well as religious organizations. (Makinde 29).

This was not so in the past. In traditional Nigerian society the people lived in simple environments where life was safe, protected and highly value. Then human beings were not suspicious of one another physically, financially and/or spiritually. Then, everybody was his/her neighbour's keeper. People lived in "communalism." "community, spirit" or "familyhood" which Nyerere advocated for (Nyerere 25), where nobody would be too rich or too poor because the rich would share their wealth with the poor, a position which was bluntly rejected by Awolowo and Nkruma (Awolowo ctd Makinde 20). The critical question that this paper seeks to answer is, in the midst of the pains of science and technology in Nigeria today, should religion continue to go into hiding, continue to feel inferior before the sciences or be intimidated by the sciences?

1.3 RELIGION AS A CONCEPT

With respect to acceptable definition (s) of Religion, scholars agreed that it is impossible to reach a consensus since each definition is influenced one way or the other, by the back ground of the author, in addition to the complex nature of Religion itself. However, some scholars have attempted to categorize the various definitions of Religion into: etymological, sociological, psychological, moral, acculturistic (culturally based), mystical and/or divine oriented definitions (Aderibigbe and Aiyegboyin 7-15, Onimhawo and Ottuh 29-48). A few examples of such definitions will do here. According to Durkheim, Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. That is, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called church, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim 47). Idowu defines Religion as "The means by which God as a Spirit and man's essential self-communicate" (75). Francis Cardinal Arinze in his study of Igbo Religion, defines Religion subjectively and objectively thus: as "The consciousness of one's dependence on a transcendent being, and the tendency to worship him" and as the body of truth, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being" respectively (90).

From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Greertz sees Religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating concepts of a general order of existence (90). For Rudolf Otto, Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to experience of the holy in its various aspects (np). Lastly, from a phenomenological perspective, Lawrence Cunningham atel, Religion is defined as “Those ways of viewing the world which refers to (1) a notion of sacred reality (2) made manifest in human experience (3) a way as to produce long-lasting ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (4) with respect to problem of ordering and understanding existence and many more (12-26). From the above definitions, we come to the conclusion that there are six dimensions of Religion namely: ritual, doctrinal beliefs, social, ethical, mythological and experiential. In sociological terms, religion is regarded essentially as a group phenomenon (Lawrence Cunningham atel 12-26).

1.4 RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN THIS ERA OF SCIENCE.

The uniqueness of Religion as a phenomenon of human concern lies in the fact that unlike other spheres of human concern, everybody is interested in religion, be he a believer to whom his faith is a matter of ultimate concern or a person who thinks he does not believe and cannot believe in the supernatural ruler ship of the universe (Wototgbe-Weneka 1).

This is why Idowu is of the view that religion is very much and always with man. It is with man at every moment of life in his innermost being and with regard to the great or minor events of life, it is discussed daily in the electronic and print media, and in our conversations. It has, however, been observed by Wototgbe-Weneka, that man is the only universally established and acknowledged being that has something to do with religion in terms of beliefs and practices associated with the belief (viii).

Similarly, James Living Stone has attributed the religiosity of man to man’s capacity for “self transcendence” a capacity denied other lower animals (3). In other words, man is the only religiously conscious being through his ability to reflect and ponder over and around his environment and is thus able to extrapolate into a “Being” or “Force” higher than himself which demands his loyalty and worship. Thus, man raises and answers fundamental questions about human existence which cannot be asked or answered in any other disciplines other than religion (3). Other roles of religion are as discussed below.

1.5 RELIGION AND SOCIAL COHESION

The role of religion in terms of social cohesion was highly emphasized by Durkheim. He asserts that religion promotes social cohesion, uniting members of a society through shared values and norms. For Durkheim, social life is impossible without shared values and moral beliefs that form the collective conscience of the people. In their absence, there would be no social order, control and solidarity. Religion, in his view, reinforces the collective conscience and strengthens the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of their social life. By defining them as sacred, religion provides them with greater power to direct human actions, guides daily decisions and other social behaviours (Obi 437).

1.6 RELIGION AND CULTURALISM

Religion is a central and fundamentally important aspect of culture. It concretizes and secularizes culture. Its concrete content may be in harmony or in conflict with situations existing in or transformation in progress in a society. A consideration of religion as a vital global player in culture will help man to believe in the human significance of religion. Religion, like culture is a symbolic transformer of experiences. Religion helps to defend man against vexing doubts, anxieties and aggressions.” (Omhmawo and Ottuh 476). As a protector and preserver of culture, religion consciously or unconsciously mitigates the fears and aggression generated within individuals and societies. Being central to culture, religion seems to represent the ultimate and sacred aspects of culture (Omhmawo and Ottuh 476).

1.7 RELIGION AND SOCIALIZATION

In the ongoing war against poverty, drug abuse, family disruption, and other manifestations of social disarray, the religions in the world are playing important roles. Apart from being philanthropic, religions have emerged as major agents of social change and service delivery. Thus, offering a shining array of programmes that encompass education, day care services for working mothers, counseling committee/units/organizations, referral agency, women empowerment and other forms of social out-reaches (Onimhawo and Ottuh 476). In the inner city and poor rural communities, religion numbers among the few visible organizations with the capacity to induce planned change and community development.

1.8 RELIGION AND POLITICS

The potential contributions of religion to massive political participation in global societies are highly fruitful and commendable in the studies of democratic societies. Religion has shown significance tendency in encouraging citizen's participation in societal and global politicization (Onihmawo and Adamu 312). Religion may unintentionally stimulate political activities by providing social support for community activism and by placing the individual in an extended social network through which, political mobilization may be spread. Considering the fact that religions are by far the widest spread form of voluntary organizations in organized societies, the potential for political education is impressive Onimhawo and Ottuh 476. Other areas of relevance of religion in this era of science include peacemaking, the development of commerce and liberalism.

1.9 EVERYBODY CANNOT BE SCIENTIFICALLY INCLINED

Education is expected to occupy the most strategic and central position in government policies both in developed, developing and under-developed nations. Ironically, this is not so. In the word of Okeh, (ctd Emordi):

Education is the answer to many societal problems. It reduces inequalities, gives economic empowerment, saves the rank and file from poverty, createa individual and group awareness and is the surest avenue to decent material comfort. In short, education alone is capable of producing healthy minds in health bodies (66).

Today, it is not only that education is not receiving enough attention in developing and under-developed nations of the world, within the educational sector; there is serious discrimination (66) which runs across senior secondary through the tertiary institutions. These days, the Sciences are favoured more than the Arts disciplines, including Religions Studies. In furtherance of this obnoxious idea, a standing policy of 60:40 in University Admission Quotas in favour of the Sciences was put in place up till date. This in a way, has since translated into superior/inferior status quo between Science and Arts based students (Emordi 66).

“Education” has been defined as a process that is meant to inspire a student to learn more and become more of what he/she already is. It is believed that one of the important jobs of a parent(s) and teacher is to find the educational process that brings out child's best gifts and this best in the child might be in Music, Gardening, Medicine, Art, Law, etc (Robert T. Kiyosaki 64). In the words of Fuller R. Buckminister: “Everyone is born a genius, but the process of life de-geniuses us” (Kiyosaki preliminary page). In a similar view, Albert Einstein, says: “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree; it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid” (Kiyosaki Introduction page). It is most important that the educational process inspires the child and brings out the best genius, rather than punishing the child for not doing well on test and making he/her feel stupid. If you motivate externally rather than inspire internally, motivation becomes manipulation (Kiyosaki 78).

Besides, Kiyosaki emphatically states that human beings are categorized into two brain hemispheres-left brain-dominant and right brain-dominant. According to him, if a person is described as “right-brain dominant”, the person is more artistic, creative, and more free-flowing are their approach to life. On the other hand, if a person is described as “left – brain dominant” the person is more bookish, less creative and more linear. The left brain is where speech reading, writing and math skills and aptitudes are said and to come from (78).

Unfortunately, the Government who gave preference to science based disciplines appears to have ignored or over sighted this seemingly all important facts that form the basis of what individuals eventually becomes in life. The government did not understand that the Sciences and the Arts, including Religion are different disciplines in their own rights; and they also have different unique and complementary roles to play vis-à-vis the lives of the citizens and the development of any nation.

This is why today the craze to train almost everybody as a scientist by the Nigerian Government, has consequently resulted to almost total abandonment of the primary role of the Arts to the humanity as has been pointed out above. This of course, is what accounted for the increasing rate of unemployment of youths globally. Kiyosaki observes that since 2007, millions of young people have been unable to find meaningful employment or have been underemployed. Failure to develop in line with one's natural inclination can adversely affect the rest of one's life. Global youth unemployment will continue to be and is a greater problem than just young people “not finding a job” (84). This is because they are not properly trained for the future.

1.10 THEORETICAL FRAME WORK—WHAT IS PRAGMATISM?

Pragmatism is a method for solving or evaluating intellectual problems and a theory about the kinds of

knowledge humans should acquire. The prominent authorities are Williams James Charles Sandwes Peirce and John Dewey (Richard H. Popkin and Avrum 328). The theoretical framework chosen for assessing this paper is pragmatism as advocated by John Dewey. This theoretical framework is considered appropriate because of the head-knowledge nature of the Nigerian educational system and the visible social problems emanating from science and technology that presently are calling for urgent attention from both the leaders and the led.

1.11 JOHN DEWEY'S PRAGMATISM

In the twentieth century, the form of the pragmatic view which was most prevalent was constructed by John Dewey, a view sometimes called instrumentalism. Dewey, who was perhaps the most influential American thinker in recent times, developed a theory of knowledge, essentially in terms of the biological and psychological role that the knowing process plays in human affairs, and then tried to employ this concept as a guide in directing the application of human intellectual activities to the contemporary social problems (Popkin and Stro11 332).

According to Dewey, what constitutes "human brute experience" is the interaction between a biological organism and its environment. Experience is not an object known, but rather an action performed in the course of the organism's activities, when it encounters situations in which it can no longer act. Therefore, thinking arises according to him, as a means for dealing with these disturbing situations, by working out hypotheses, or guides to future actions. The merit of these intellectual acts are determined by a practical criterion, by whether the organism can now function satisfactorily again or not. Thought, especially scientific, is instrumental in problem-solving. The occurrence of problems in Dewey's view, sets off a chain reaction of mental activity directed towards discovering a functional solution to the difficulties that confront the organism claimed, is actually a hindrance to the task of problem solving. (Popkin and Stroll 332).

1.12 THE RELEVANCE OF PRAGMATISM TO THE NIGERIA SITUATION

John Dewey regarded his type of pragmatism as having far-reaching applications in human society. One such employment of his theory was in the realm of education. Previous educational techniques, Dewey felt, were aimed primarily at inculcating a mass of factual information into students, without giving them any means of utilizing it. They were "crammed with the experiences of the past rather than prepared them to meet the problems of the future."

This can be likened to what obtains presently in Nigerian educational system where almost everybody is compelled to study science which brought about the 60:40 ratios in favour of science based disciplines. This is also why, the so-called science biased individuals are not gearing toward production or manufacturing anything but pass examinations by all means in order to obtain paper qualification. This has induced encouraged examination malpractices of all shades and shapes from junior secondary through tertiary institutions. On the basis of this, Nigeria is today a major consumer of science and technology products.

Instead, Dewey proposed that educational system should try to develop methods for problem-solving. That, if the student learned how to solve problems, presumably he/she would be better fit for living in the contemporary society that is "ever-changing with its manifold perplexities and ever-new problems" (Popkins and Stroll 334). Although John Dewey's initial intentions is science based disciplines, this technique can be extended to the Arts disciplines in general and religious studies/knowledge.

Rather than stuffing students with the stories of Jesus Christ and Mohammed birth, suffering and death, such teachings should be related to the societal challenges and how such knowledge and information can help the students handle present day problems on personal and societal levels and live a better life, by making necessary "adjustments" in his/her environment.

This type of education as suggested by Dewey and as is being proposed here for the Nigerian nation, would train people living in a democratic society, like Nigeria to be well informed, prepared and at the same time strengthen the development of an ideal type of social and political organizations the nation is clamouring for. This is the only training that can re-orient the minds of politicians and the electorates rather than the present attitudes of rigging, fraud, embezzlements, looting, and impoverishing/devastating the nation's economy for personal interest and gains. This new orientation is the only thing that can guarantee the liberation of Nigerians particularly the youths, who are seen and use as ready instrument for self and national destruction. Besides, students trained in problem-solving will be active citizens of such a society, utilizing their techniques for dealing with unresolved problems in co-operation with the larger social group in their common search for satisfactory ways of dealing with practical difficulties, which hinder the "best functioning of society" (Popkin and Stroll 334).

There are some criticisms against pragmatism in spite of its apparent success and the wide range of its application in Nigeria. Some philosophers and individuals have attacked the basic conception of what constitutes "true knowledge", and asked if ideas can really be evaluated in terms of "what works" and The demanded to know how one can tell if an idea has worked or not. Using the case of robbing the bank to solve personal financial problem, they say, it will be difficult to conclude that such a solution is not "right" since there have been occasions on which it has "worked." The pragmatists in response insist that one should take account not only of the immediate consequences, but also, the "long- run effects." The critics argued that the so-called "long-run effects" may be delayed or may never come. They are also of the view that the pragmatists ought to provide some criteria to form the yardsticks for such evaluation. Another attack on pragmatism is the absence of 'moral frame' work, some idea of what is good and bad, desirable and undesirable, some notion of aims and objectives, in order to know what is meant by 'what works' or not. The pragmatists appeal to the "cash value" and see 'good' itself, as synonymous with "what works." Another criticism is that the pragmatists are confusing the human problems and feelings that are involved in human attitudes toward various ideas. The pragmatists' response is that there is no way of investigating the truth or falsehood of theories and beliefs except in terms of how they affect the human persons, and that their critics are the ones introducing abstruse and artificial stand.

1.13 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was argued in this paper that although science and technology have made tremendous advances in air and land travel, modern reproductive technology, artificial insemination, gene therapy, organ transplanting, information technology and much more, there are numerous negative impacts that have created social, cultural, moral and economic challenges that are difficult to combat. Besides, it was also argued that the relevance of religion in the society and human life is irrefutable and its place in Nigeria developmental agenda cannot be ignored or compromised. The paper ends on a note that the pragmatic and logical pathway to tread on the nation's search for national integration, peace, security and development is to explore and deplore the vast potentials of the three religions in Nigeria.

The paper therefore, recommends as follows: that the offensive 60:40 ratios in favour of Science disciplines admission quotas be abolished without any further delay; that equal job opportunities should be provided to both Science and Arts specialists; that both the content and methods of Religious Studies should reviewed pragmatically; that the Arts and Humanities should encourage and motivate their students to participate in the social and academic activities and programmes within and outside their universities.

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