CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

There is a widespread belief that religion and secularization are incompatible. In other words, one contending view hypothesized the death of religion in a secularized society; the second contending view hypothesized the co-existence of religion and secularization. This paper presents contending perspectives on religion and secularization in global contexts; aiming at examining global perspectives on religion and secularization in contemporary time. The work applies qualitative research with emphasis on the use of secondary sources of data collection. The research concludes that the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need ongoing dialogue; three, systematic dialogue between the secular and religious worlds helps us to recall our roots, improves our understanding of whence we came, and can provide pointers to the paths we ought to follow in the future. The paper recommends the following:- one, multi-religious state should recognize the co-existence of different religious traditions; two, multi-religious state should not allow any religion to take precedence over the other ones.
Key Words: **Religion, Secularization, Dialogue, Typologies, Societies.**

Introduction

Scholars do not agree on whether religion and secularization are compatible in multi-religious societies of current information age. In global context, scholars and writers such as Tahirli (2005), Kang'entu (2017) and Tony Blair Faith Foundation (2013) reported some of the contending perspectives on compatibility and incompatibility of religion and secularization in multi-religious societies globally. For instance, contemporary contending abstraction,

according to Tony Blair Faith Foundation (2013, p.1) asserts that "the 'corrective' role of religion vis-a-vis reason is not always welcomed, though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves".

In addition, "distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion", according to Tony Blair Faith Foundation (2013, p.1). The position above can further be construed as a symbiotic relationship, in which case, religion should purify the secular world of reason as much as principle of secular rationality should assist in structuring religious belief system; this is somehow illustrated in philosophy of religion, when revealed religious traditions subject their belief system to rational analysis, a case in point is systematic theology in Christian religious tradition.

In the symbiotic relationship continuum, the irrationality of the secular world was once put to its extreme during the subjugation of humankind to slavery and slave trade in Africa; Church historians (Diara, 2010), of-course, would remind scholars that it was in the "spirit" of corrective role of religion, that Christian tradition, specifically, fought to exterminate slavery and slave trade in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ukaoha (2013) noted that, "…in England there was a group of Christians made up of politicians, bankers and business men who took up the challenge to abolish slave trade" (p.44). Agha (2013, p.10) remarked that, "the Church Missionary Society was instrumental to the settlement of the Liberated African slaves in Sierra Leone"; moreover, Agha (1999, p.61) argued that an African slave, Ottobah Cugoano, called for the "extension of Christian religion to African because he was convinced that it would be an ally in the fight against slave trade and slavery". Nwadike (2008) stated, "…having liberated the slaves in their territories …the Christian missionaries accompanied these liberated Africans to their new home to minister unto them lest they relapsed into traditional worship"(p.10). The positive role of religion is further exemplified in the work of Gbenda (2010, p.168) thus, "The World Council of Churches… expresses a deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction". As such, the relationship between religion and secular world is supposedly a symbiotic, two-way process. Tony Blair Faith Foundation (2013), further adds,

> …without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century (p.1).

Asobie (2008) critiqued one example of secular political ideology that constituted a distortion (of-course, in dare need of the corrective role of religion, if human dignity is to be preserved). It was an aspect of secular ideologies of Niccolo Machiavelli (in his work, *The Prince*, on the *The Twelfth Law of Power*) thus, "Do not make honesty a principle of governance; rather use selective honesty and generousity to disarm your victim"; in his remarks, Asobie (2008, p. 5) commented that, "once those in authority begin to steal public funds, they start to feel insecure, and then develop a preference for the application of the tactics of intimidation to silence potential critics".

Conversely, some scholars opine that secularization is a global challenge that confronts all religions in all contexts (Kang'entu, 2017, p. iii). This assertion is succinctly exemplified in multi-religious Kenyan society.Kang'entu (2017) recently captured the situation thus,

> There has been an increase of secularism, for instance, in Kenya, that has continued to erode the ecclesiastical authority of late especially in the urban centers. Open criticism of the church by the public, government and atheists were rampant. In this regard, I was motivated to explore how secularism is impacting lives of Christians in Nairobi given that the abovementioned traits are more vivid in the city. Research findings have indicated that various tendencies and factors are responsible for the rising secularism in the country of which has had various effects to the lives of Christians especially in Nairobi, and dichotomizing clearly between sacred and secular remains cumbersome in Kenya (p. iii).

The contending perspective of Kimathi as it relates to multi-religious Kenyan society is indicative of the negative perception of the role of religion, which is quite contrary to the positive corrective role of religion asserted by Tony Blair Faith Foundation (2013) earlier stated above. Why religion is under attack of secularism and secularization remains a task for investigative study as its being attempted in this paper.

Similarly, other scholars argue that there is a widespread belief among many researchers that religion and secularization are incompatible (Tahirli, 2005, p.3).Tahirli(2005) equally exemplified this claim with incidences observed in some countries of the Middle East thus,

> Obviously, in the Eastern world and in Muslim countries in particular, the problematic relationship betweenreligion and democracy still shows itself intensively. The current lack of democracy in most Muslimcountries derives in part from this mindset contending that Islam is incompatible with secularization. So theapplication of the concept of

secularization to studies of the Muslim countries in the Middle East has often been moreproblematic than enlightening (p.3).

The instances illustrating contending perspectives on religion and secularization cut across varied cultures, countries and continents of the world, thus justifying this investigation in a global context; it is worthy to note that the western societies of Europe, United Kingdom and United States of Americado have similar experience. It isnot certain if sufficient examinations of these issues had been done in the recent past with cross-cultural scope in mind.This study, therefore, presents varied perspectives on religion and secularization in global context; aiming at examining the issues to great details.

The paper applies qualitative research method with emphasis on the use of secondary sources of data collection; materials used included internet materials, journals, encyclopedia, theological dictionary,and field reports on research in religion, social and political development. The method accords with the view ofEjisu (2013, p. 29) on the use of multi-dimensional technique in qualitative research thus, "since reality is complex and people have differing viewpoints, the multi-dimensional approach seeks … many perspectives as possible in the effort to expose fully the different layers of meaning and explanation of all sides". In like manner, Janvier (2013) emphasized the importance of textual analysis in qualitative research method, which was equally applied in this work. This form of textual analysis is what Okpoko and Ezeh (2005, p.81) refer to as "documentary research", which involves analysis of written sources of information beyond mere published work. In the same vein, it was what Marcionis (1989) also termed secondary analysis, which entails "independent analysis of data originally collected by other researchers' (p.52).

Contending Perspectives on Religion and Secularization

This section articulates the contrasting views on religion and secularization. One contending view hypothesized the death of religion in a secularized society; the second contending view hypothesized the co-existence of religion and secularization.An attempt is made to examine the prediction of the death of religion by some 19th century social science scholars against the background of the continued existence of religion and co-existence model of secularization in post-modern information age; thus indicative of the failure of the postulations of social thinkers concerning the death of religion. Most of the earliest social thinkers (such as Auguste Comte, HerbertSpencer, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud) of the nineteenth century believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society; in the same vein, Spencer (2003), of

Harvard University, USA, reviewed secularization debate in which he stated that,

> They were far from alone; ever since the Age of the Enlightenment, leading figures in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology have postulated that theological superstitions, symbolic liturgical rituals, and sacred practices are the product of the past that will be outgrown in the modern era.The death of religion was the conventional wisdom in the social sciences duringmost of the twentieth century; indeed it has been regarded as themaster model of sociologicalinquiry, where secularization was ranked with bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanizationas the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations (p.1).

It must be noted, however, that Max Weber took a different position, according to Tomalin (2007, p. 3), "Weber, however, was reluctant to posit any definition that imposed any 'outsider' understanding upon the meaning of religious behavior for individual". In other words, Weber took to exception in constrast to the ideologies of some of the earliest social thinkers (Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx).

Similarly, Mills (as cited in Spencer, 2003) summarized the hypothesized process of secularization thus,

> Once the world was filled with the sacred –in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forcesof modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process,loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogetherexcept, possibly, in the private realm. (p.1).

Contrary to the views on the proposed death of religion, Rahim (2011), while commenting on Post-Islamist Religious Secularism in the Muslim World, stated that,

> An overwhelming number of Muslims support democracy believing that it is the key to a more just society and to progress. Muslims indicate that the lack of political freedom is what they least admire about the Islamic and Arab world.The majority of Muslims would like to see a religious form of democracy with the sharia as one source of legislation, albeit a restricted source.Most Muslims desire a system of government in which religious principles and democratic values co-exist. A significant majority in many Muslim

countries say religious leaders should play no direct role in drafting a country's constitution, writing national legislation, determining foreign policy, deciding how women dress in public or what is published in newspapers.Most Muslims do not want a rigidly secular or Islamic state (p.8).

Contrasting Marx, Durkheim and Weber's Conceptions of Religion

Aclear understanding of the usage of the term religion, in the context of this paper, will facilitate meaningfulness of the foregoing debate and issues under investigation. The works of Marx(1818-1883), Durkheim (1858-1917) and Weber (1864-1920) in sociology of religion (Anyacho, 2005; Madu, 1996) become a good set of sources of reference points in defining religion for the purpose of this paper.Religion, as cited in Tomalin (2007) can be defined in various ways according to the aforementioned scholars. Marx sees religion as the opium of the people, a human invention that binds people to the source of their oppression while protecting the interest of the oppressor; as such, Marx hypothesized that religion would wither in socialist society while secularization will not only become desirable but would be inevitable replacement of religion. Ngbea (2012) remarks on negative attitude to religion that, "a general misconception is that religion and development do not mix" (p.103).Odetola and Ademola (1985) had long observed that the like of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) "had a great expectation for a new science which would disagree with...religious tenets of the traditional church"(p.16). Odudele&Akinlade (2006) noted what serves as illustration to the background of a social thinker (Auguste Comte) with negative attitude to religion,

> Comte created sociology at a period when religion had a prominent influence in society. In the educational curriculum at that time, religion was a fundamental academic discipline. Thus, the students of History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Biology and other sciences had to do some courses in theology. It was in this context that Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882), a student of the University of Cambridge, had to pass an examination on William Paley's Natural Theology before he was admitted for his B.Sc. degree in Biology. If Biology had a theological considerations sociology could not have been exempted. Because Auguste Comte did not want to subject sociology to any theological control, he launched a total attack on religion. He argued that religion has to be eliminated if sociology would flourish. This

was the background to Comte's negative attitude to religion (p.178).

Natural theology, as conceived then, "teaches that the Christian religion consists solely of what nature and reason teach unaided" (Diara, 2009, p.67). In the same vein, Okwueze (2012, p.75) asserted thus, "…the danger is that in embracing scientific knowledge and its application, human beings erroneously think and act as if religion has become old fashioned and useless yet the most advanced societies have not been spared the corresponding challenges of developed societies". He contended that,…if it (developed societies are not) is not ravaged by corruption it may be ravaged by floods, tsunamis and tornadoes, windstorm and cyclones. Moreover, Okwueze (2012) noted that, "human problems are never completely eliminated by scientific advancement and economic empowerment' (p.75).

ForYinger (as cited in Ibenwa, 2011), religion is "…a system of beliefs and practice by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal…to give up in the face of frustration...." (p.50).Durkheim conceives religion as "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 called Church, all those who adhere to them"(Agha, 2012, p.61). For Durkheim, the religious or sacred and the social or profane or secular are dependent on one another. Cicero (as cited in Bucks, p.746) traced the concept of religion to its Latin root, rilegere, which means "to re-consider"; forServius (as cited in Bucks, p. 746), the Latin word,*Religare* means "to bind fast"; hence Bucks noted that, "if the Ciceronian etymology be the trueone, the word religion will denote the diligent study (of) whatever pertains to the worship of God,… that obligation which we feel on our minds from the relationin which we stand to some superior power" (p.746).

Meanwhile, Weber does not consider religion as the product of collective social consciousness or product of class interest; for Weber, "any definition of religion that imposed an outsider understanding upon the meaning of religious behaviourfor the individual" should be rejected (Tomalin, 2007, p.3). In other words, Marxian conception of religion and that of Durkheim amounted to reductionism and an imposition of outsider's view on religion aside empirical or experiential evidence for appropriate conception of religion. The implications are numerous but suggest that the perceived incompatibility of religion and secularization is wrongly placed; this is to say that secularization does not necessarily needs to push religion to level of irrelevance in social scheme if the proper meaning of religion is understood. Furthermore, Weber emphasized the impact of religious values on the society; for instance, his examination of Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Tomalin, 2007) stipulates that,

Religion was one factor explaining differences between occidental and oriental cultures. He attempted to show that Protestantism, particularly Calvanism, 'was part of the causal chain that led to the development of world-system dominance [and dominated] by Anglo-American capitalism'….He compared protestant(Calvinist) Britain with Protestant(Lutheran) Germany and Catholic Italy and Spain to test his view that ideas have an independent and determining role in society. He demonstrated that economic development was greater in Protestant than Catholic [Roman Catholic] countries, arguing that some link existed between Protestantism and capitalism. Moreover, the Lutheran view of German Protestantism was not conducive to capitalist development, since the individual was required to accept his/her position in life and to look forward to rewards in heaven. It was the Calvanist doctrine, by contrast, that fostered a this-worldly emphasis upon hard work that stimulated capitalist growth in Britain(p.5).

Explicating Typologies/Models of Secularization

Hornby (2000, p.1063) conceives of the word secular as an adjective meaning "not connected with spiritual or religious matter"; the term secularism, refers to the "belief that religion should not be involved in the organization of society, education, etc"; in the same vein, secularization means the "act or process of removing the influence or power that religion has over something". For Hornby, to secularize, therefore, means to "remove something from the control or influence of religion" (p.1063).It was Lubbe (as cited in Swator, Jr., 1975) who once noted that secularization is "a controversial concept because of its distinct use in different disciplines, such as philosophy, social sciences, theology, canon law (para. 1).The term secularization (or secularisation)refers to transformation of a society from close identification and affiliation with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions; which means the belief that as societies progress, particularly through modernizationand rationalization, religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance. This can be explained as the historical process in which religious belief and institutions lose social and cultural relevance in human society; or stated differently as a situation whereby religious organizations lose their authority and ecclesiastical power. Tomalin (2007) outlined four categories (otherwise termed typologies or models) of secularization thus,

(i). **Disappearance Model** – this is otherwise known as hard version of secularization which holds the view that religion will disappear as societies modernise.

(ii). **Differentiation Model** - this is otherwise known as soft version of secularization which holds the view that religion will be less influential in the public domain such as in science, medicine and economy, though will still remain important in private lives of individuals as they search for meaning in their private lives.

(iii). **De-intensification Model** – this thesis proposes that religion will remain in weak position as societies modernise, in which case the regulated style of traditional religious traditions in pre-modern societies will permanently become loose and lost; instead, liberal style of religiousity will replace the former.

(iv). **Co-existence Model** – this model contended over the following; -one, that religion is central to processes of social change; two, that religion and secularization will continue to co-exist rather than decline; three, that religion has gained renew interest in recent times both in developing and developed societies; that while secularization takes place in certain circumstances religion retains its vitality in some other contexts.

Conceptualizing Dialogue in the Context of Religion and Secularization

Anyacho (2009) conceives dialogue as talk between two or more people or parties (p.46). It is a combined effort of persons belonging to different systems of belief to arrive at a working consensus on conceptions of transcendental and human values and ideals that may be responsive to the religious aspirations and concerns of contemporary man (Alfred de Souza as cited in Anyacho, 2009, p.46). For Umaru (as cited in Anyacho, 2009, p.47), inter-religious dialogue involves "the exchange of ideas, views or opinions…, it is the exchange of religious experience by people that have faith in their religious traditions for mutual enrichment; it entails a willingness to question one's self-understanding and openness to understand others".

Dialogue, as used in this paper, refers to exchange of ideas on contending views on religion and secularization.It presupposes a basic need for sharing ideas on co-existence model of secularization in contemporary multi-religious societies.

Religion, Secularization and the Need for Dialogue

Spencer (2003) is of the opinion that, "there is no question that the traditional secularization thesis needs updating. It is obvious that religion has not disappeared from the world, nor does it seem likely to do so" (p.2). Achunike (2017, p.4) has this to say, "…it had become obvious that instead of the 'death of God' some theologians pronounced not many years ago, or the waning of religion that sociologists had extrapolated, something   quite

different has taken place". This justify the position of this paper, that, religion and secularization need dialogue; the issues presented below are meant to elucidate on this position.

(a). Co-Existence Model of Secularization in Nigerian Experience

Yesufu (2016) did a study on the impact of religion on a secular state, Nigerian experience; in which he noted the following:

(i). Muslims and Christians live together within the same community in Southern Nigeria. (ii). Over time, central government of Nigeria practically changed its policy of non-interference in religious matters to that of regulating the number of people performing Islamic and Christian rites inside and outside Nigeria.

(iii). Government interfered with religious freedom in other to have political control of the citizens by using religion as a weapon.

(iv). Government violated the constitutional provision of non-interference in the religious affairs ofthe people of Nigeria.Enem (2008, p.78) lent support to this when he remarked that, "Nigerian membership of O.I.C (Organization of Islamic Conference) was welcomed by the muslims…It sounded sour to non-muslims. For them the secular state of Nigeria has been put in jeopardy".

(v). Consequently, the Islamic faith protected her Islamic and political interests by setting up JamaatuNasril Islam (JNI) for the propagation of Islam in northern Nigeria, and to embark on an aggressive conversion of non-Muslims to Islam.

(vi). Similarly, Christian faith formed the Northern Christian Association (NCA) to shield the Christians (who were in the minority in the north) from the impact of an Islamic conversion campaign; later renamed Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN);"covering all Christians in Nigeria as a way of providing a platform for a national association capable of providing avenues for common interest, enlistment of strong bargaining power, generating more resources, and establishing a uniting bloc"(Yesufu, 2016, p.4).

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that both CAN and JNI as religious tools have grown to capitalize on 2011Constitution of Nigeria, as amended(Section 10) to advocate and protect freedom of worship and non-imposition of State Religion; the Constitution states that, "The Government of the Federationor of a State shall not adopt any religion as a State Religion". This, by implication means that, there isprohibition of State Religion whose authority revolves around the term 'secularism'of the Nigerian State.

(b). Need for Dialogue between Adherents of Religion and Secularism in Multi-Religious Societies

While it is true that, sometimes, religion can be seen to create serious social problems; the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief really need ongoing dialogue. It is apt to note at this juncture what Warren (as cited in Chinweokwu, 2018) observes thus, "…to make the most of your life, you must keep the vision of eternity continually in your mind and the value of it

in your heart. There is more to life than just here and now" (p.20). In the same vein, Parrinder (as cited in Ugwu, 2014, p.10) had long asserted that "religion still wields greater power in the modern world"; just the same way Leonard (as cited in Ugwu, 2014, p.9) had remarked that African "...are a truly religious people of whom it can be said as it has been said about the Hindus that they eat religiously, dress religiously...religion is their existence and existence is their religion" (p.9). Systematicdialogue between the secular and religious worldshas the potential to help in recalling our roots, improves our understanding of whence we came, and can provide pointers to the paths we ought to follow in the future.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

(i). Multi-religious state should recognize the co-existence of different religious traditions. (ii). Multi-religious state should not allow any religion to take precedence over the other ones.

(iii). Contemporary social thinkers should embark on empirical research on state of secularization in post-modern societies, globally, so as to update and revise their hypothesis on the death of religion, which, no longer holds today.

(iv). Social scientists should update themselves with trend of events in the phenomenal growth of churches in contemporary society.

(v). Social researchers should do a re-appraisal of renewed interest in religion as obtained globally.

(vi). Further studies should examine how religion and secularization could enhance human wellbeing and societal development.

(vii). There is no need for apathy toward religion; rather,science, secularism, democracy and religion should remain focused on social, economic, moral, political and religious development of man.

Conclusion

The paper examined contending perspectives on religion and secularization in global context, considering contemporary scholarlyopinion that secularization is a global challenge that confronts all religions in all contexts. It was argued that religion and secularization adherents need to dialogue towards promoting co-existence model of secularization; moreover, that the hypothesis of earliest social thinkers on the death of religion is outdated and deserve revision in the light of empirical evidences pointing to renew interest and growth of religion in many cultures and countries of the world in recent past till date. Similarly, it was pointed out that multi-religious societies should uphold co-existence typology of secularization.

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