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PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

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Abstract

Since independence, Nigeria continues to struggle with cultural and religious identity crisis. Overtime, there have been a plethora of religious clashes among Nigerians who identify themselves first as Muslims or Christians before even classifying themselves as humans. In recent times, several religious and ethnic crises abound which often result in the denigration of national values, identity and ultimately, humanism. This paper identifies, as a result of recurrent religious crisis, the decay of our humanism and the corruption of patriotism, hard work and national values. This paper attempts to evaluate the peculiarity of religious fundamentalism as a bane to national development. It, however, does not attempt to go against the idea of religion, but it attempts to objectively discuss the debate between faith and reason as philosophers in the medieval era interrogated the activities of religious fundamentalists in their era. However, humanism is a philosophical activity that emphasises universal human dignity, respect for individual freedom, and happiness. This paper argues that since the immense influence of the medieval era on the activities of religious fundamentalists in the modern era cannot be overemphasised, there is an urgent call on religious fundamentalists on the need to move away from the rigidity of religious fundamentalism and embrace religious humanism.

Key Words: Philosophy, Religion, Fundamentalism and Humanism

Introduction

Human existence is believed to be a multi-faceted reality that can be understood in various contexts. In these contexts, we find the concepts of society, politics, education and religion. Since human life is wrapped around these concepts, man is unable to avoid them. For instance, religion proposes to make life more meaningful in terms of the purpose, significance, fulfilment, and satisfaction of life. Often times, religious doctrines are very difficult to shed off. Religion acknowledges the Supreme Being, who is The Absolute Other. In religion, there is a practice of worship, which plays a unified role in societies. Also, most human values have religious imports. Indeed, religion authenticates human experiences and legitimises what we do and how we live. While religion educates and informs human experiences, it also helps to make informed choices.

Looking at the core values of philosophy and its interconnectedness to other disciplines, one can argue, for example, that a habit of analytical ability as well as rational inquiry would enhance individuals to cope with the challenges of life. It is also pertinent to state that both religion and philosophy are concerned with how we live. However, the idea of dogmatism is quite prominent in religion with its practices. This idea is one of the prejudices of human existence that philosophy tries to fight. Now, a sort of divide between the ideals of philosophy and religion is being established. Although this divide does not necessarily lead to a problem but it becomes an issue when there is a use of brutish force from a part of the divide against the other. Even though the term, religious fundamentalism, did not become so prominent until the 1920s, religious antagonism and dogmatism have posed lot of problems to philosophy. This is traceable to a period in the History of Philosophy known as the medieval period. Religion did not only oppose philosophy; it refutes any form of enlightening ideas including science and innovations, which it had no ontological control of their affairs. During this period, this divide was conceptualised as the debate

between Faith and Reason.

The aim of this paper is not to go against the idea of religion, but an attempt to objectively discuss the debate between faith and reason; including the import of philosophers in the medieval era. In order to do this, an attempt is made towards a thorough conceptualisation of the two components of this paper namely: “Philosophy” and “Religious Fundamentalism”. Further attempt focusses on the dichotomy between faith and reason in the medieval era by taking into cognizance the activities of religious fundamentalists in this era. The activities of religious fundamentalism in the modern era are also investigated. The paper calls for the need to move away from the rigidity of religious fundamentalism and embrace religious humanism.

Conceptualising Religious Fundamentalism

Defining religious fundamentalism sometimes proves an important problem. For Western liberals, religious fundamentalism is believed to be an empty and meaningless term. It refers to a broad spectrum of religious phenomena with nothing in common.¹ The reason for this is that fundamentalism is often regarded as a stand against modernism, rationalism, liberalism, and secularism. All these have disregard for religious authority. This, however, cannot be the case as historical facts and events bear witnesses to the fact that tyrannical rulers are more comfortable with man as “homo religious”², the religious man then *ashomosapiens* and the reflexive man; the thinking man.

Thus, religion, like culture, is a phenomenon that is concerned with the “other”. It is a promise to bring man face to face with the idea of either a certain Divine Being or Divine Beings. Religion also recognises this Divine or Supreme Being. For instance, the idea of ‘God’ as the Absolute and the mysterious side of human experience evinces a religious belief. The practice of religion has the duty to unite men, as it is an integral part of society. However, this is not wholly the case as we have had wars fought in the

name of religion.³

The reason for this is fanaticism and religious fundamentalism. This is due to the fact that religion is sometimes manipulated and misused. Used by a Baptist journalist in 1920, the term “fundamentalist” was used as a badge of honour for Christians who championed the cause of the fundamental beliefs such as inerrancy of scriptures, original sin, the virgin birth, atonement, resurrection, second coming of Christ and so on.⁴ Claiming to be a corpus of universal and eternal truths, fundamentalists and religious fanatics exhibit certain traits. One of such traits is the acceptance of the view that the existence of other worlds does not permit the regard that religion is the custodian of absolute authority, which excludes others.

The implication of this is that they do not understand the fact that not accepting the plurality of religious beliefs means they do not acknowledge our collective humanism. This now makes them to kill those they tag as “infidels”. Fanatics believe that it is acceptable to their “most merciful and compassionate God”. It is also believed that Liberals began to use the word, fundamentalism, as a term of abuse by associating it with blind ignorance and obscurantism.⁵ The term identifies the forms of religious practices found in different religions. Thus, we now speak of Hindu Fundamentalism, Islamic Fundamentalism, and so on.

The quest to propagate and defend the truth of one’s religious views is what led to the term “fundamentalism”. Applied to strong anti-modernist’s reaffirmation of any faith. Fundamentalists are also known to oppose modernist and liberal views of their religions, and defend fundamental doctrines like the literal infallibility of their religious authority; they refer to their rivals as infidels, unbelievers, heretics or apostates. Also, central to fundamentalism is the element of faith. Fundamentalism is often viewed with religious intolerance, violence and terrorism, which arise from unchecked fideism, exclusivist sentiments, based on fanaticism and extremism. Religion creates and encourages a

receptive attitude and it demands a sort of blind obedience, which is explicated in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, as presented in the Bible, for the Christians.⁶ A critically thinking man, however, is independent-minded and may at least likely obey without asking questions first.

It is worthy to note that no religion out rightly preaches fanaticism. However, there is a very narrow line between piety and fanaticism. Many fundamentalists have been known to give reference to their religion as they are taught. For them, it is rewarding to do this. We can find this in the confidence with which Islamic fanatics are confident in battle as they hold strongly to the promise of “paradise” with “certain number of virgins” when they die battling infidels. This also goes for the Christian fanatics in their numerous crusades, not just against apostates and heretics, but also against people of the Islamic faith in order to regain lands. This supports our claim that there have always been inter-religion conflicts. In short, fundamentalism undermines reason. It can be likened to a revolution without an ideology as it seeks to craze for power. This can be seen in the uprising in the North Eastern and North Central geo-political zones in Nigeria. The uprising is anti-development, anti-God and irrational. One question that comes to mind at this juncture is, does fundamentalism represent the inability of the mind to understand and communicate the divine or transcendental reality to other minds? Let us attempt an answer through philosophy.

Conceptualising Philosophy

Definitions of philosophy are varied and rooted in different scholarly traditions or orientations. Coined from two Greek words, “*philia*” meaning “the love of” and “*Sophia*” which means “wisdom”, which translates to philosophy meaning “the love of wisdom”. The complexities of philosophical studies make it difficult to give acceptable definition of philosophy. However, as history continues to develop, more thinkers put their idea of philosophy into acceptable definitions. For the purpose

of this paper, the definition given by H.S. Staniland is adopted. According to Staniland, philosophy is the criticism of the ideas we live by. This definition is encompassing as it presents an idea of philosophy, which even to the layman is not abstract. It shows that philosophy is practical to life. Philosophy puts under close examination the intellectual foundation of life, using the best form of knowledge, interaction and reflection. It is also a tool for learning, un-learning and re-learning the ideas we communicate daily.

Looking at the works and ideas of many philosophers overtime, it is noticeable that philosophy further gives better ways of thinking and coming up with critical evaluation of situations. For instance, philosophy is known to interact with various disciplines and by doing this, it (philosophy) discovers the good and ills and produces better ideas or ways of doing them. Staniland's definition gives two basic terms namely: "criticism" and "ideas". Accordingly, the word "criticism" as implied in the philosophical endeavour, does not mean a negative evaluation of ideas.⁷ Rather, it means a neutral form of assessing ideas. That is, criticism helps to treat all ideas equally and free it from undue bias or preconceived opinions. Also, being critical of our ideas does not imply we have to jettison these ideas. Further, it entails the application of one's entire capacity for intellectual and imaginative engagement in order to search for an answer whether the idea in question should be accepted, rejected, or modified.

On the other hand, the term "idea" includes destiny, God, reincarnation, faith, freedom, justice, equality, development, religion, science, art, reality and other ideas we go through in life. Therefore, philosophy seeks to subject these ideas to proper critical evaluation to see if they should be accepted, rejected or modified. In Staniland's opinion, "philosophising only occur (sic) when one is engaged in a train of thought with the ultimate purpose of criticism of certain vitally important ideas."⁸ This, therefore, means that the people who engage in the activity of critical evaluation of basic ideas are definitely philosophising.

However, it should be noted that there is the activity of philosophy in the professional sense as an academic discipline and philosophy in the ordinary sense as a view of life that every person has.⁹ All philosophers are thinkers but not all thinkers are philosophers. The reason for this distinction is because philosophy and philosophising carries with it some tools which are quite technical in their application. Thus, ordinary thinkers may themselves think about some certain ideas which may, of course, be of great importance and value to human well-being, yet they cannot be referred to as philosophers.

The fundamental distinguishing factor between philosophers and ordinary thinkers is the application of the tools for philosophising. These tools include a critical analysis, which deals with the application of one's entire capacity for intellectual and imaginative intelligence to search for an answer whether the idea in question should be accepted, rejected or improved upon. There is also the tool of rationality; which entails the ability to justify an idea or a belief in such a way that it is logical and consistent. Then, there is conceptual analysis; which deals with the clarification of a number of concepts used in an argument by separating compound terms into various parts thereby analysing them and then recombining them more clearly.

Religious Fundamentalism in the History of Philosophy

The word "fundamentalism" was not coined until the 1900s. This, however, does not deny the fact that elements of fundamentalism exist in the history of philosophy. This period in the history of philosophy is known as the Medieval period. This period was also known to have embodied the period known as the Dark Ages. It was a period, which was ushered in by wars and the fall of various empires. What was also prominent was that in the midst of the wars, uprising and unsettlement, the Catholic Church was an institution that was still able to stand the test of time.¹⁰ The Church in this period retained its cohesion and preserved its character as a central organisation and universal institution.

The Church also had the organisational structure of a monarchy by declaring the Bishop of Rome, the “Father of the Church” or the “Pope” which translates from the word “Papa”. The Church, being the only institution, which is strong enough to endure the changes, had the responsibility of preserving the past and shaping the future. It also took over the responsibility of collecting taxes, handling food supply, repairing the city walls, maintaining courts of criminal law, hospital and inn among others. Furthermore, it became the centre of education, which was only limited to the clergy and monks. With so much authority, the Church controlled the institutions of the state and education and there was a feature of autonomy from the Church on every aspect of life.

Although, historians have tagged this period the least development was experienced, the medieval period is not without its own achievement. Historians also posited that the reason for slow development, especially in the area of thought during this period was not only due to philosophical texts of ancient scholars being discovered quite late. It was also due to the Church serving as a stiff opposition to critical thinking and trying to fight the controversies between orthodoxy and heresies, which arose. The church used her authority to shut down this controversy.¹¹ Although there was philosophical activity during this period, it was under the close scrutiny and authority of the Church.

One of such influences can be found in the practice of selling indulgences to raise money to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Pope Leo X sent John Tetzel, a Dominican friar and papal commissioner, to preach about the importance of indulgence; he went propagating the sale of indulgence instead of emphasising its importance. An indulgence was the remission of punishment due for sins, which had already been confessed, absolution given and forgiveness granted by God.¹² The practice of selling indulgence was condemned by Martin Luther, a former member of the Order of St Augustine of the Catholic Church. Luther was ex-communicated by the Church for speaking against what was not even a doctrine of the Church. The pope did not order John

Tetzel to sell indulgence. Historians have attributed the education and knowledge of the language of the Church in that period to a privileged few who understood Luther's ability to see the church as corrupt.

Luther's discovery made him wrote a scholastic objection protesting against the Church's practice of indulgency known as the 95 theses, where he denied the ability or the right of the Pope to forgive sins. He nailed a copy to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The theses translated from German into Latin, were printed and distributed across Europe. Pope Leo X, however, dismissed Luther as "a drunken German" who "when sober will change his mind".¹³ Even with the threat of ex-communication, he did not recant until the latter stage of his life, where his actions proved that the words of Pope Leo X were true. He was not only ex-communicated; he was declared an outlaw. One might ask, why the reference to the medieval period?

Although fundamentalism was not used in the medieval era, the event exemplified above occurred at various points in this period. The antagonism and dogmatism, which religion posed against philosophy and any form of enlightenment could be seen in the medieval era. Apart from the instance of the Church against Martin Luther explained above, various instances of the Church stifling Enlightenment were highlighted at various times in this era. To understand the "Unquestioned Authority" of the Church against reasoning is also to make reference to the brutish manner, which the life of Hypatia, the Alexandrian female philosopher was taken to escape the wrath of the Church. She, in her willingness not to denounce her belief in Philosophy as opposed to the Church, had to pay with her life. Same fate almost befell Galileo but for his willingness to recant. To better understand the workings of religious fundamentalism in the medieval era, instances of the church displaying features that are likened to the concept of religious fundamentalism will be highlighted in subsequent headings.

Orthodoxy

Literally, the term “orthodoxy” means right belief.¹⁴ One of the elements of fundamentalism that is seen throughout history is orthodoxy. This stands against anti-religious advances. Although orthodoxy merely connotes traditional beliefs, fundamentalism is the radical unconditional acceptance of traditional beliefs. This feature allowed the Church to reject any doctrine, which went against her originally chosen beliefs as heresies and termed such dangerous or false opinion. We can find a handful of these heretical declarations in history. Among such controversies is the nature of God and the Arian heresy, the problem of freewill and sin: the Pelagian heresy. Although the issue of the Arian heresy poses a lot of conflict, the orthodoxy, which generated the Nicene Creed, is still what is used in various churches today.

Absolutist Ethics

There is the recognition of certain authoritative source of ethics in fundamentalism like the canonical texts or by tradition - set of beliefs, customs, and practices in the medieval era. An example of this is pointed out in the controversy between the Church and Martin Luther as mentioned earlier. Today, churches, which extort churchgoers, use the idea of absolutist ethics.

Utopian Eschatology

Fundamentalism is also promoted by this futuristic approach of the Church; it dictates how fundamentalists interact with the immediate world. Almond and others declare that they interact either as world conquerors - using whatever means necessary to bring the world to become subjects of their religion; or as world transformers - using a sort of inner transformation, which is better than outward conversion. An undertone of imposition which characterised some medieval clergymen and churchmen during the medieval period is underscored. The Church, then and even now, is like a school. The first thing given to a student when he/she begins school is a prospectus. The student is expected

to follow the code of conduct contained in it. Similarly, when one agrees to be a Christian or a member of the Church, certain expectations are demanded. The act of reminding one to keep to this expectation is not in any way a latent threat). Thus, an appeal to changing perspectives is made to the world creator. In this alternative world, God rejects sinners and invites others into His Kingdom. This makes sin decline to withdraw from the world of sin and live a religious life. This is also evident in how Muslim Fundamentalists treat those they refer to as “infidels”; looking down on them and not even afraid to kill them because of the promise of eternity with “unnamed number of virgins. Fundamentalists also have faith in various conditions. These are discussed in sub-headings below:

Unconditional Subjection to Authority

This may be found in the scripture as it applies to religion. There is also the unconditional submission to the authoritative interpretation of these scriptures professed by the prevailing tradition and the authority of a spiritual leader. Basically, the authority to interpret the scripture belongs to the Church. This is one of the tools that were used to silence Hypatia, not only as a woman, but as a woman who believed in the power of critical reasoning. Instituted by Christ, the Church preaches and teaches according to the Holy Spirit. While all believers are living testimonies to the truth, there is no justification of murdering Hypatia because she ought to have listened to the Church. A lesser measure of communicating the faith could have been deployed.

Existential Identity

The fundamentalist unquestioningly lives or dies for his or her ideals. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church against Galileo, the latter, in the face of death, recanted his claim about his scientific findings to save his life. However, for a fundamentalist, faith defines existence and, in this light, he is ready to lay down his life for his beliefs. This also comes with the promise of

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eternity in “Paradise”.

Closed Exclusivism

The fundamentalist also has a closed attitude towards life. There is the idea of a closed worldview disallowing any form of liberality whatsoever. Also, where dialoguing becomes fruitless, especially with people who do not share their faith, the fundamentalist might result to violence and murder. With the afore-mentioned features, which mostly point to reward or punishment, one might wonder whether those-called “religious faithful or fundamentals” would hold on to their religious beliefs if there was no anticipation of a reward or fear of punishment. Boko Haram terrorism in West Africa and especially North-Eastern Nigeria has brainwashed many who saw in the brutal acts of kidnapping and enforcing some misunderstood principles as essential to Islam has caused a heavy toll.

Philosophical Thoughts in the Medieval Era: The Debate on Faith and Reason

Although the works of philosophers in this era were largely tainted with the Christian doctrine, there are various philosophers who lived in the medieval era whose works still serve as a point of reference today. One of the prominent and most popular topics these philosophers addressed is the debate on faith and reason. One of such scholars is Augustine (354-430 AD) whose works and thoughts gave rise to a speculative philosophy of history, claiming to uncover the purpose and pattern of history. During the Patristic era of the Fathers of the Church including, for example, Tertullian, Augustine describes the version of history given by the Greeks like Plato as fleeting with eternal, unchanging truth. Truth traps the human soul in an endless, cosmic “merry-go-round”.¹⁶ This, according to Augustine, is in contrast to the Bible that gives history meaning in a linear direction. The Bible is authored by God with human actions and it makes Augustine’s account of history fit in with the Christian vision. The Romans by not quickly

turning to God witnessed the fall of the Roman Empire, which Augustine declared. He presents history in his work, “The City of God” as a moral drama in which the purpose of God and the moral decisions of humans are significant elements. According to him, “faith goes before, understanding follows after.”¹⁷

Another prominent thought pattern in this period was the rise of scholasticism, which was an intellectual movement that arose in Europe at this time. People of this class were called “Scholastics”. Charlemagne first ascribed the term to those who learned and taught in schools. It was later referred to as the intellectual project of integrating faith and reason. The scholastics sought to harmonise church doctrines and fruits of philosophical speculation. To them, theology was the “Queen of the Sciences” and philosophy was her handmaiden.¹⁸ In this school, faith guided reason, set its agendas and gave it the main outlines and landmark truths around where philosophers built their systems.

First, Christianity dealt with formulating and systematising the articles of faith.¹⁹ Scholasticism therefore had her foundation based on the teachings of the church. It provided the unquestioned framework within which all philosophy had to find its place. The movement however depicted that scholars’ mind was free to roam and compete with philosophical issues. The issues showed that theology did not answer all questions.

Second, scholasticism employed the method of dialectic, which was a term adapted from Aristotle’s works²⁰. First, the discussion is formed like a question and arguments for and against the different answers are raised and resolutions arriving at either a balancing of the competing positions are reached and a position is defended, while others are refuted.

Third, the power of reason could reach truths but is balanced with the reliance on the accepted authority of the sacred scriptures, the Church Fathers (especially Augustine) and Boethius’s logical commentaries.²¹ The philosophers are united in seeking to work out the philosophical implication of their faith and were provoked with controversies, which raged throughout

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Monasteries and Universities. Prominent among these is the relation between faith and reason, which could be taken as the two sources of knowledge in this era.

For the purpose of clarity, five approaches emerged. First, there were thinkers who let their intellect lead their faith like John Scotus Erigena and Peter Abelard. This position led Abelard into trouble and all his works were condemned. Second, there were those who favoured faith by prioritising it over reason. Monastic life reform at this period and resurgence of piety led to reason being seen as a threat. Peter Damian and Bernard of Clairvaux spoke for this position. They condemn the blind foolhardiness of pseudo-intellectuals who presume to diminish the power of God by trusting in reason. They saw philosophy as useless and a danger to the unwary. Bernard prosecuted Abelard at his heresy trial. According to Bernard, "I believe though I do not comprehend, and I hold by faith what I cannot grasp with the mind."²²

The third position held by Anselm was more moderate; he was seeking a sort of compromise. For him, reason cannot be autonomous so it must be led by faith. He, however, placed more confidence in reason but still made all his arguments operate within the bounds of orthodoxy. Thomas Aquinas, holding a fourth position, sought to synthesise faith and reason. For him, minds are limited and cannot perceive the rationality of some theological doctrines. He still held that reason was competent in its own boundaries and considerations of faith do not need to enter into philosophical arguments. He, however, believed both overlapped, as the light of reason can prove some beliefs, which were held on to by reason of faith.

After Aquinas, there seems to be more and more distancing of reason and faith. At the fifth position is philosopher like Siger of Brabant who claimed that faith and reason produced double answer. He did not attempt to resolve both. William of Ockham did a sort of separation of both to protect the truths of faith from scrutiny of human reason. Separation of faith and reason was

fuelled by the resurgence of mysticism in the 14th century, which allocated knowledge of God to religious experience and placed it beyond the pole of rational and propositional knowledge.

Islamic philosophers in this era like Averroés also lent their voice to this debate. He used the double-truth theory. For him, the Qur'an was written for the masses that do not have powers of intellect to appeal to emotions and imagination of the uneducated. However, philosophers must strip away the surface meaning to uncover the true and inner meaning of teachings. Although there might be conflicting conclusions, this is only a conflict with the apparent meaning of the scriptures. Truth cannot conflict with truth.²³ So, the best of philosophy is consistent with the hidden meaning of the Qur'an.

What can be deduced from the above analogy is that, although reason tried to liberate the medieval men, little progress was made as it kept on competing and losing to faith. This was why, as stated earlier; this era had very little achievement. The next two sub-headings discuss the impact of religious fundamentalism in today's world. This is necessary to examine how religion interacts in today's world. Also, how reason can and should interact with religion in today's world will still be discussed.

Religious Fundamentalism in the 21st Century: Towards Humanism

The idea of religious fundamentalism reflects the depth of indoctrination people embrace in their practice of religions, which are imbued in the fundamental beliefs and assumptions that underlay religious practices. Fundamentalism, when placed within the context of religion reflects the dogmatic separation of reason or reflection from religion, and this implies the acceptance of certain religious beliefs without any sense of critical evaluation of such beliefs. Religious fundamentalist tendencies are prevalent amongst adherents to the tenets of Abrahamic religions such as Islam and Christianity in contemporary times, and there are implications this portends to human existence in the 21st Century.

Religious fundamentalists are often motivated by religious teachings, ethics, beliefs, and scriptures to abide only by the tenets of their religion, while disregarding other religious beliefs as counterfeit or false. According to John Mbiti, religion has pervaded all aspects of human life, to such an extent that it is not easy to separate man from it.²⁴ The implication of Mbiti's affirmation is that religion tremendously influences all human activities and belief-systems. The link between religion and religious fundamentalism is succinctly expressed by Ekeopara and Ekpenyong, who aver that religion generally teaches its adherents that evil, bribery, violence, crime, corruption, hate speeches, ethnicity, tribalism, and nepotism are proscribed, while fundamentalism stress practical adherence and loyalty to religious teachings.²⁵ Therefore, religious fundamentalism affirms strict adherence to the tenets, rules and regulations of a particular religious group.

The debate between faith and reason gives a depiction of the dogma of religious fundamentalism, which confronts us today. Religious fundamentalism continues to be on the increase. Not just Christian fundamentalism alone but also Jewish fundamentalism; Hindu fundamentalism; Buddhist fundamentalism and one whose popularity seems to rival Christian fundamentalism is Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism from Africa to Asia, Europe to America, Australia and Oceania has been on the increase. What most of the followers of one religion or the other seems to share is the fact that they perceive religion as what Karl Marx has described as the "opium of the people", which is quite reflective in this statement:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.²⁶

This simply means that religion is an escape from the conditions of poverty and it helps to continue in the “spiritual sense”. Elizabeth Gabhart describes it better as religion creating a believer’s intense emotional experience, specific moral guidance, feeling of belonging to an exclusive group, satisfying ritual, assurance of heaven and enthusiastic commitment.²⁷ However, religious fundamentalism creates a dichotomy between strict adherents to religious beliefs and scriptures and those who do not entertain such beliefs, thereby tagging the later as unbelievers and pagans. Therefore, religious fundamentalism can be said to create a strict divide in humanity, thereby resulting in violence amongst opposing religious groups and the upsurge of insurgent groups in critical areas across the globe.

As in the medieval era, where religion took over due to unrest, in the modern period, poverty, strife and the decline in the economic welfare also make the turn to religion quite easy and attractive. As the opium of the people, it creates hope for the people, an association to fight repression. As Mohammed M. Hafez puts it in his book, “Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World”,²⁸ some Muslims rebel because they are denied access to conventional means of political participation. They also rebel because their organisations and members feel threatened by indiscriminate repressive policies. These people find solace in their religious organisation and they find the answers where the government has failed. It becomes easy to carry out any act of violent acts as long as their religion commands. By way of illustration, Islamic fundamentalism progressed from Saudi Arabia and Egypt in forms of Wahhabism and Salafism as reactions to colonial influences and political orders.

Indeed, there are noticeable features of fundamentalism of the medieval era in modern African society; the increasing number of terrorist activities especially the dreaded Boko Haram has left millions of people worried. It is quite clear that religious fundamentalism brings with it various ills retarding development and inhuman treatment and- all these have made

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Africa, unable to witness the high level of spiritual as well as economic development that African politicians, intellectuals and the masses have been struggling to attain.

Another recent and typical example of religious fundamentalism occurred in Nigeria. As a known fact, Nigeria has always struggled with sensitive issues of religion. In fact, Nigeria's two main religions—Christianity and Islam, have become more delicate especially since May 1999. Indeed, political moves by various states in the North to implement the Sharia Islamic law continues to raise problems till date. The most recent of this can be seen in a state like Kwara, which sits on the boundary of being either predominantly Islamic or Christian. Kwara has a large number of populations practicing both faiths. The heated debate continues among those practicing the different faiths on the implementation of Sharia in Kwara State. Recently, the state has been agog with the news of religious clashes between these two main religions, especially as regards dressing in learning environments in the state.

While many analysts are debating the risk of a state becoming affected by religious fundamentalism, many scholars have discussed why religious fundamentalism continues to thrive today. One of the reasons why religious fundamentalism thrives and the pews and mats continue to get filled especially in Africa is often linked to existential, sociological, ideological and economic reasons. First, by economic means, religion thrives mostly amongst economically disadvantaged people in the society.²⁹ These people have lost faith in their political and social activists alike. Turning to religion becomes a sort of last resort as there is promise of prosperity for members. However, only the leaders reap from the promise of this prosperity on earth. Members are blindly robbed of their tithe and special donations. The people are hardly getting by, but for the reward of a better life in paradise, there is no hope.

Also, religious fundamentalism thrives in Africa because of political instability and endemic corrupt political culture. We now have spiritual heads that come forward with political agenda

and example of being able to run a government suitable for the people. As clearly argued in his book entitled: *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, Adeshina Afolayan is of the view that there is disparity between different religious phases especially when religion is meddled with politics in addressing the issue of secrecy and divinity. Thus, there have been instances of religious leaders blaming the people's sins on the reason why the Supreme is punishing them with a cruel leader. There is also the lack of religious education. The idea of the Christian religion is an example of a religion foreign to the African society. For this reason, there is dependence on religious leaders for information, truth, and right doctrine without bothering to verify or critically review what they learn from these leaders. There is the belief in the authority and the infallibility of these religious leaders and religious scriptures like the Bible and Qur'an. This makes it easy for followers to be hoodwinked as they continue to follow blindly. It also projects a social imagery with a vision to birth a city of God on earth. All that has been mentioned above makes it easy for religion and religious fundamentalism to keep growing in our society. Despite the fact that many people are raising questions concerning the increasing number of denominations in Christianity, the problem of fundamentalism has not yet been resolved.

There is the issue of religious, political and cultural apathy³⁰ to consider as religion has successfully robbed people of their sense of reasoning. There is a strain religion has created on the smallest unit of the society; the family. There is conflict in religious doctrines and different views held by members leading to conflict. There is also inter-religious conflict caused by the difference in doctrines leading to violent outburst and in many occasions, loss of lives. Indeed, many of these disturb the social order of the society.

However, various challenges posed by religious strife have led to a call for inter-religious dialogue.³¹ This is necessary to promote human flourishing and healthy living in societies. The necessity of inter-religious dialogue would promote the ideals

of civil societies like the United Nations' rights to life, religious liberty and free association. However, there is no way to sensitise religious fundamentalist to accept the idea of religious pluralism unless we advocate for religious humanism.

Conclusion

What to do now is to advocate a practice of religion that is much more humane. It is to switch to humanism. As stated in the introduction, this paper is not an attempt to displace religion but a move to call for a reasonable practice of religion. Like what Renaissance humanism explained as a pervasive cultural mode and not the program of a small elite, a program to revive the cultural legacy, literary legacy and moral philosophy of classical antiquity is necessary. Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasises the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively; it generally prefers critical thinking and evidence over acceptance of dogma and superstition. It takes into cognizance the import of the definition of philosophy adopted in this paper as "the criticism of ideas we live by". That is, calling to question, various religious practices and ideologies that blindfolded people and put them in bondage.

So, how can philosophy interrogate religious fundamentalism? According to Bertrand Russell, philosophy, the queen of the sciences, aims at knowledge which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions and as freeing our minds from dogmas and the tyranny of customs. Philosophy provides critical education that can serve as an avenue for the people that have been brainwashed by the menace of religious fundamentalism. There will always be a person who shares a different religious view. We do not have to result to violence when others do not share our religious sentiments. We should not be quick to brand others who share different orientation from ours as "infidel". We should learn that even above our beliefs, we have multiplicity of religions, cultures, races, political affiliations and we should realise that above all these we are humans first. From here, we draw the conclusion that we need philosophy to survive

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in this religious-tainted existence. Although human freedom and progress might be associated with religious movements, better results can be achieved by humanism. Using humanity as a tool of philosophy as explained above helps to interrogate religious ideologies. It is also worthy of note that we cannot do away with the fact that pluralism is at the very core of our existence.

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