

Religion: The Fundamental Motivations, Predispositions and Relevance to Man in the Modern World

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Abstract: In spite of the unprecedented technological advancements of the modern world, the observable erosion of positive human values and the apparent indifference towards the divine or God-related matters in the modern world, religious concerns remain perennial. Relying on the outcomes of a considerable number of professional studies on human nature and the relationship they bear on religious motivations and predispositions, this theologico-philosophical investigation, answers the question, “is religion still relevant to the modern man?” in the affirmative. The wave of humanism and religious liberalism that accompanies sciento-technological developments and advancements in the contemporary human society seems to subtly underplay religious concerns, and relegate religious values to the background. On the basis of man’s ontological status as a composite of physical and metaphysical natures, the paper contends that religious concerns remain critical and essential considerations. The values they embody are considered of perpetual relevance to man’s integral well-being. Any investigation limited to the physical, the sensible, and the corporeal falls short of a comprehensive assessment of the human nature. A critical analysis of some basic religious values, trends of modernity, the imports of civilization and industrialization, as seen in this study, reveals that religion has perennial relevance to man.

Keywords: Religio-mythical world-outlook, sciento-technological rationality, civilization, modernity, secularism, industrialization

1.0 Introduction

Man’s ratiocinative power finds expression in his self-discovery and acknowledgement of his finitude as a contingent being. As a possible being, man’s essence does not necessarily involve existence; he comes into being and goes out of being. Man receives his existence from a subsistent being, whose essence necessarily involves existence, that is, a being whose nature is to be. Man’s awareness of the existence of this supra-sensible reality or supernatural being, whose power is made manifest in the sensible world, makes him

develop some sense of reverence for him. Indeed, the acknowledgement of the existence of realities other than the sensible and the imperative of establishing a relationship with them constitute the basis of religious motivations.

The challenge that confronts man in his relationship with the supernatural realities borders mainly on his understanding of their nature. The diverse conceptions, understanding, interpretations of the nature of the supra-sensible, and their actual roles in the visible world account for the proliferation of religion and the different modes of faith expression.

The present discourse examines the apparent dialogical relationship between the religio-mythical or magico-religious world outlook and sciento-technological rationality, wherein the superiority status is accorded the latter. The basic pretension of this discourse is that in spite of the denigrating views of religious values, the human person is ultimately in dire need of some measure of spiritual satisfaction. It presupposes that man has an ontological spiritual essence. Given also that there is a correlation between human needs and the objects that can satisfy them, man's spiritual needs can only be satisfied by spiritual realities.

Of critical relevance to this discourse is the debate about whether religion is innate in man or acquired through learning. Some Psychologists of religion, Sociologists, Anthropologists and experts in similar disciplines that border on human behaviour have extensively debated this. From the relevant issues raised, one can easily deduce that both nature and nurture have roles to play in religion. Using five measures of religious beliefs, interests, and activities in their famous investigation of thousands of twins at the University of Minnesota (USA), a group of scholars (Waller et al. 1990:140) offered insight into the extent of hereditary and emotional influences on religious beliefs, interests and activities. After their empirical study, using samples of identical twins and fraternal twins who were reared either together or separately, the researchers maintained that religion is a function of heredity and environment as they concluded:

Our findings indicate that individual differences in religious attitudes, interests, and values arise from both genetic and environmental influences. More specifically, genetic factors account for approximately 50% of the observed variance in our measures.

Leveraging on the insights of experts on some studies that border on man's ontological constitution or essential nature and the imperative of his relationship with the supernatural, this discourse basically aims at critically assessing the contemporary man's conception of religion with a view to underscoring the essence of religion for man.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

It is imperative, given the peculiar understanding and application of some of the critical concepts in this discourse, to make some conceptual clarifications. A basic pretention of this discourse is that man is not only a corporeal being but a spiritual and moral being; he is a composite of body and soul. A comprehensive assessment of the nature of the human person must therefore take these complementary aspects of the human person into consideration. Accordingly, the present discourse is a systematic exposition and analysis of the concept of religion with a view to advancing the thesis that religious concerns are coeval with man and have a perennial value irrespective of technological advancements in the contemporary world. It is a methodical investigation into man's religious inclinations, human relationship and interaction vis a vis religion and its consequences.

To be sure, this discourse is not meant to be a religious apologetics; it is rather a critical examination of the predominant sentiments about religion and its implications for man in the contemporary world. It is basically, an investigation into the nature and purpose of religion with a view to identifying its relevance for man in the modern or contemporary world. It is also an assessment of the imports of religion in the face of daunting pressures of secularism, anti-religious sentiments and ideologies, as well as the prevalent skeptical views of religion occasioned by civilization, globalization, agnosticism and atheism that characterize the modern world. As a philosophical review of the imports of natural religious sentiments, it defends the thesis that religion provides a considerable measure of psychological relief for man in the face of existential predicaments. Hence, it provides an alternative to despair, fosters the audacity of hope and leads men to find more meaning in life.

For the purposes of establishing a definite framework and delineating a concise scope for this discourse, it is necessary to review some relevant scholarly insights on religion. In terms of scope, this discourse operates within the conceptual framework provided by relevant social sciences, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, religion, and philosophy. It anchors specifically on some insights from psychology of religion, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, and philosophical anthropology.

Methodological Approach

As a theoretical philosophical investigation this discourse employs the expository, historical, critical, analytical, and logical research methods. The expository and historical approaches provide insights into the concept of religion as a natural and ontological concern of the human person, objectively assesses man's potentials and limitations in the face of existential concerns. Relying on the findings of formal research and study outcomes in some relevant disciplines in social sciences, the paper utilizes the critical and

logical methods to justify the promotion of religious values and underscore the relevance of religion for man in the modern and contemporary world.

The paper basically approaches religion from the backdrop of a fundamental pretention, namely, its consideration as a value of perennial relevance. Very much like life, it transcends the bounds and limits of race, culture, and orientation. Religion arguably resonates with humanity's essence. Irrespective of its diverse and possible persuasions and approaches, religion remains a critical concern in man's understanding and interpretation of reality. This is especially given that it is largely concerned with puzzling existential questions and the natural search for meaning. Little wonder, in spite of the unprecedented sciento-technological advancements and inventions associated with the modern world, religious concerns still remain relevant to the modern man as they were to the primitive, barbaric, prehistoric, savage or tribal man.

2.0 Re-visiting the Concept of Religion

The diverse understanding of religion, varied religious values and orientations, and interpretation of religious experiences, account for the multiple modes of faith expression in human societies. The theologian, the philosopher, the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist would each approach religion from a unique perspective, not bereft of possible sentiments and biases. However, for the purposes of clarity and precision, this discourse would adopt views that express more objectivity especially as they border on the essential linguistic designations of the concept of religion and their immediate and fundamental implications for man. Accordingly, it adopts the definitions of religion as presented in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of the English Language* thus:

1. The belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader.
2. One of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular god or gods, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader (Lea & Bradbery, 2020: 1307).

Articulating the essence of religion from the perspective of the object of worship, a supernatural being or deity, A.C. Bouquet (1941:16) describes it as a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute, or simply, God. Considering religion as a virtue, *The Catholic Encyclopedia for Schools and Home* describes it as "that which inclines man to render to God the worship due to Him as creator and Lord of all things. But it may also signify the worship itself" (Harrington, et al., 1965: 219).

From the etymological point of view, religion derives from three Latin words, namely, *ligare*, which means 'to bind,' *religere*, which means 'to unite' or 'to link,' and *religio*, which means 'relationship' (Haring, 1964:119). These Latin roots of the word accentuate the point that religion emphasizes strong affinity between man and a supernatural being.

They underscore the fact that man, by means of religion aspires and strives to reach an ultimate goal which is eternal union with God, his creator. Hence, organized human societies are not only characterized by well-ordered customs, culture and traditions, but also necessarily feature religious belief systems and modes of worship as integral parts of their general perspectives on life and collective worldview.

Generally, the dominant idea of religion is its conception as an inner longing to relate with a supernatural being that is believed to exist and plays a decisive role in human life and the world in general. It is an inner experience or perception that is anchored on something that is not only external to us but also transcendent and divine.

2.1 On the Concept of God and the Existence of God

Religious value systems generally propagate the idea of an intrinsic binding force that ultimately fosters order and stability in the universe. According to Hood et al. (1996:6), the idea of religion connotes the existence of a being, a deity, God, in whom resides universal, absolute truth, which is the object of adoration by people who earnestly believe and feel that their moral character and relationship to the world is constructively transformed in the religious process. This cosmic principle of unity finds expression in monistic, monotheistic, polytheistic religious value systems or worldviews.

From the monistic perspective, which emphasizes a fundamental unity underlying all things and the monotheistic worldview, which attributes all reality to the creative act of one Supreme Being to whom alone worship is due, (as found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam), one deduces the idea of a definite cosmic order. Similarly, Hinduism and Buddhism which emphasize the oneness of the universe would see everything, including man, as emanating from one divine world soul or the Brahman. Authentic living or ideal life, therefore, would be that ordered towards reunification with the divine soul through ascetic discipline, meditation, and similar exercises that help liberate man from the entanglements of the material life.

On the other hand, polytheistic worldviews which emphasize belief in or worship of more than one god, like the African Traditional Religion, acknowledge the existence of a supreme being that more or less superintends over subordinate deities. The subtle variation in the conception of the relationship between the supreme deity and the subordinate deities notwithstanding, they are generally understood as operating within a definite value system or an established cosmic order.

Pantheism, the view that God is the totality of all that exists and that everything in the universe is part of God, a manifestation of God or self-perfection of God, finds expression in Hinduism, Taoism, Stoicism and the philosophical thoughts of Spinoza and John Scotus Eriugena. The Stoics, for instance, maintain that God is Universal Consciousness of which man's individual consciousness is part. He is universal intelligence or Universal

Soul. All the things in the universe are therefore parts of God and participate in the being of God.

Different philosophical traditions formulate theories and propagate different ideas of God and advance arguments to prove his existence. The varying conceptions of God correlate with the arguments about his nature and existence. Capturing a central idea of God in Classical philosophy, for instance, William James (1960: 422-424) observed that the primary and the most basic attribute of God in Classical philosophy, the attribute from which all other attributes are deducible, is his aseity, that is, the fact of his being a self-subsisting being. Such attributes as unicity, simplicity, immateriality, spirituality, and perfection, are derivatives of this fundamental attribute. Thus, from his aseity it follows that God is a necessary being, that is, a being that cannot but exist, a being whose very essence involves existence, as opposed to contingent beings who may or may not exist. The essence of contingent beings does not involve existence. They derive their existence from the necessary being, God.

One finds an idea of the nature of God in the process philosophy of Hegel and Whitehead (Ogden, 1967). Here, God is conceived as an ever-living, developing and suffering deity; it is neither perfect nor self-sufficient, but always developing, evolving and suffering, as it progresses towards its goal of self-completeness, self-consciousness and self-perfection.

A number of philosophical arguments have also been advanced with a view to proving the existence of God, including arguments from motion, from design (teleological argument) and from universal conviction. Arguments from motion, as seen in Plato (427-347) and Aristotle (384-322), culminate in the conception of God as the origin of motion and the unmoved mover of all things in the universe, the self-moving principle or the Universal Soul. God, the “unmoved mover,” as pure act, initiates motion as a transition from the state of potency to that of act. He does this through attraction of his absolute perfection. This, for Aristotle, is how God relates to the world. Otherwise, as an infinitely perfect and a self-thinking being, nothing imperfect can be the object of his thought or knowledge. Plato’s and Aristotle’s teleological argument, in a similar manner, identifies order and purposefulness as essential characters of the universe, the source of which must be the best Soul or God (Plato), or a being which is divine in nature (Aristotle). For Plato, the apparent universal belief in the existence of God also constitutes a basis for supporting the truth of his existence.

Anchoring on the *Metaphysics* of the ancient Greek Philosophers like Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Plato, Christian Philosophers in the Classical period of Western Philosophy created an image of God divested of all human qualities. They conceived God as an absolutely perfect, self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, impassable and emotionless being that does not even need man’s worship. While acknowledging that the human mind and the human systems of knowledge acquisition are imperfect, St. Augustine

(1961:28-31) upheld the possibility of grasping some measure of eternal truths. On the question of how the finite human mind could attain knowledge beyond its capacity he maintained that such knowledge of immutable and eternal truths can neither issue from the human mind itself nor from finite things but from God himself, who infuses it in the human mind. Augustine's proof of the existence of God is based on this line of thought. He identified some similarities between the attributes and operations of the human mind and the attributes of God. For him, by means of personal experiences and observation of created realities humans can deduce the existence of God, the Creator and source of all realities. According to him, God is the 'Eternal Truth'; he is "something than which nothing more excellent or sublime exists."

With his analysis of the very concept of God, St. Anselm (1033-1109) advanced an ontological argument for the existence of God. In the second and third Chapters of his *Proslogium* or Discourse on the Existence of God, Anselm (1962) argued that since God is the greatest possible being, a being than which none greater can be thought, he necessarily exists and is responsible for the existence of other beings. Similarly, arguing that all men have at least an implicit knowledge of the existence of God, St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) maintained that the existence of God could be proved from creatures as causes can be proved from their effects. Creatures are finite beings that owe their existence to an infinite being given that the idea of finitude presupposes the idea of infinity; the knowledge of imperfect beings presupposes an idea of a perfect being. He further argued that man's natural desire for perfect happiness, as an irresistible desire for the highest good which is God, presupposes the existence of God as well as the knowledge of his existence, since no one desires what he does not know at least implicitly (Copleston, 1962: 284-285).

Many mediaeval philosophers maintained this line of thought. For instance, Duns Scotus (1265-1308), adopted the argument from efficient causality and the various degrees of perfection in the universe to prove the existence of God, who is the uncaused cause and the most perfect being that directs other beings to their proper ends (Copleston, 1962:246). William of Ockham (1290-1349), based on the concept of conservation, argued that since every contingent being is conserved by another higher being, the existence of contingent beings must be traced to a being that is the highest and ultimate conserver, and that is God (Copleston, 1962:92-99).

In the modern period, Descartes' (1954:20), methodic doubt approach radically shifted the foundation of human knowledge to human thoughts and rational potentials from which the idea of existence could be derived. Hence he asserts: *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am). Descartes' aphorism has implications for his perspective on religion, given that it is from the idea of his existence that he proceeded to deduce the ideas of other things including God, that is, "a substance which is infinite, independent all-

knowing, all-powerful, and by which myself and everything else have been created” (Descartes, 1968:113-131). In a similar manner, Gottfried Leibniz (1596-1650) adopted the ontological argument and set out to reformulate or fine-tune the arguments based on the idea of infinitely perfect being, the nature of truth, the idea of sufficient reason and argument from design or the teleological argument (Copleston, 1963:324). Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), based on his concept of substance as “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself,” equally advanced the arguments from causality to prove the existence of God who is most powerful and absolutely infinite being.

In essence, at the foundation of religious motivation is a primary consideration on the existence of a being to whom worship is due and with whom man must relate. From Thales to the contemporary existentialist philosophers, the question of religion has always appeared in one form or another in Western Philosophy, either affirming or denying God’s existence. It is on this stress that Albert Camus (1955:11) remarks that the central problem of philosophy is the problem of man, that is, the problem of the meaning of human life. Irrespective of the theory about the nature of God to which one subscribes or the conception of God to which one is inclined, the idea of God remains central to religion. There are always existential concerns about the ultimate end of man and the purpose of man’s existence. Indeed, human experience correlates with and generally inspires religious experience, language, sentiments, and ideologies.

2.2 Religious Experience

Religious experience refers to the acknowledgement and consciousness of the existence of supernatural realities and belief in their perceived influence on the life of a religious person. According to C.A. Campbell (1957:248), it is “a state of mind comprising belief in the reality of a supernatural being or beings endowed with transcendental power and worth, together with the complex emotive attitude of worship intrinsically appropriate thereto.” For William James (1902/1985:31), it has to do with “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.” For Rudolf Otto (1959:17), it is an awe-inspiring and fascinating experience of man’s encounter with a being that is “wholly other”; a being that is a tremendous and fascinating mystery. A similar view was expressed by Mircea Eliade (1961:10-11), who saw religious experience as man’s experience of the ‘sacred’. For him, religious experience has to do with man’s awareness of the “sacred which manifests itself, shows itself as something wholly difference from the profane.”

While religiousness is a universal character of the human person, the interpretation of religious experience accounts for the divergent approaches to religion, multiple religious systems and values, and the plurality of religious practices. Some people consider religion or religious experiences mythical, psychological, pathological or even hallucinatory,

depending on one's state of mind, socio-cultural background or worldview in general. Following this line of thought, Paul Tillich (1951:108-129) avers that God is a matter of interpretation, which is of course influenced by beliefs, worldviews, and assumptions.

In an attempt to establish a relationship between religious experience and the existence of God, A. E. Taylor (Hick, 1964:153-163) argued that the experiences of religious persons such as saints and prophets are often of something objectively real and must not all be dismissed as illusions. Like the experience of a thinker or an artist, such experience, according to Taylor, must be of some beauty. However, he equally admits that such experiences need the interpretation of experts to determine their authenticity. Hence, whereas illusory religious experiences are aberrations, authentic ones are indicative of the existence of God, a supreme being who is believed to be the source and the object of such experiences.

3.0 Religious Motivation, Beliefs, and Behaviours

Man's existential predicaments are diverse, including social, political, economic, religious, psychological, and technological concerns. In virtually every discourse on religion, the veil of ambiguity that militates against conceptual clarity stems from its wide range of concerns, perspectives, appeals, applications and understanding. The concept embraces man's experiential world and speculations about realities that transcend individual world; it deals with physical and metaphysical realities. A considerable number of academic disciplines weave religious thoughts, themes, and ideas into the fabric of their concerns. In fact, a number of rational enquiries into human affairs and religious disposition affirm the ontological nature of religious motivations and the justifiability of religion as a necessary human need. A critical investigation into the multi-faceted religious views and convictions through the lenses of philosophical, psychological, and sociological studies would certainly highlight the imperative of religion for man.

3.1 Philosophical Foundations of Religion

By means of philosophical arguments and discourses, philosophers from early Greek philosophy through the later Greek philosophy to the contemporary times, have always tried to prove the existence of God and advance arguments for religious motivation. For instance, cosmological arguments that allude to God as the cause of all reality, ontological arguments that through logical analysis establish the existence of a necessary being, God, teleological arguments or arguments from design that prove this on the basis of observable order, beauty, or purpose in the universe, moral arguments that do same on the basis of morality, the ultimate source of which must be transcendent, and arguments from religious experience, mystical experiences or occurrence of miracles.

Aristotle's assertion (*Metaphysics*, Book I), that "all men, by nature, desire to know", underscores the fact that curiosity is an ontological character of the human person. Man's

innate intellectual potentials naturally lead him to the search for certain knowledge and eternal truths. His philosophical investigations involve an inquiry that basically aims at ascertaining the true nature of reality. It is an attempt at understanding man's nature and his ultimate purpose especially in relation to other realities; it is a conscious search for meaning. In fact, philosophical inquiries basically aim at providing rational answers to existential questions bordering on the purpose of man's existence and man's ultimate destiny. This rational enterprise is often complicated by man's complex nature, which affects the approach, method and the ultimate outcomes. Little wonder, Protagoras (*Thaetetus*, 1961:266) declared: "Man is the measure of all things; of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not."

Underscoring the centrality of man's self-knowledge in the human cognitive scheme, Socrates (470-399 BC), following Delphic Oracle, declared: "Man know thyself." A considerable number of philosophical discourses concede the imperative of rational inquiries into man's nature, the intricate relationship with his fellow men and supernatural realities, and how these culminate in religious motivation. Man's natural quest for knowledge, self-discovery, self-mastery and auto-transcendence often culminates in the acknowledgment and realization of the existence of other realities beyond the physical. The investigation into the nature of this possible supernatural realm of existence is an endless and perennial rational inquiry. The findings of such inquiry, though often inconclusive, and not immediately comprehensible, afford man some measure of psychological satisfaction and serenity of the mind. It offers some considerable explanation to existential questions beyond man's immediate cognitive capacity and potentials.

Philosophers and psychologists from ancient to modern times have, in one way or another, claimed that people possess a primary need to understand what they experience. Indeed, the search for meaning through man's exercise of his cognitive potentials and capacities remains an essential character of religion. A considerable number of discourses bordering on the nature of man, the search for meaning, the question of man's ultimate purpose, essence and existence, do not only expand the frontiers human knowledge, but also advance the stance that there are realities beyond the physical realm of existence. Many theories of religion including cosmocentric, theocentric, and anthropocentric theories ultimately underscore this fact. From an essentially philosophical viewpoint, these perspectives on the study of man provide relevant insights for justifying one of the basic pretensions of the present discourse, namely, that religion has an epistemological system or a knowledge base which provides answers to fundamental questions about human existence, embodies and fosters its peculiar ideologies and world outlook.

Religious Motivation: Cosmocentric Perspectives

From the cosmological dimension, man is always perceived to be influenced by the laws and forces of nature. Human capabilities, from this perspective, are considered inferior to those of the transcendent realities and are limited by material inclinations. This line of thought finds expression in the teachings of ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Pythagoras. Plato, for instance, maintained that man is a composite of body and soul, but insists on the superiority of the soul, which, for him, is immortal. These philosophers reasoned that man is never self-sufficient and that his destiny is determined by an external reality. The motivation of religion, from the cosmocentric perspective, entails an acknowledgement that created realities are pointers to the source of their existence. It is an insinuation following human reason and intelligence that nothing comes from nothing. And so, created things must have a source of existence beyond them. This source is identified in the observable forces of nature and heavenly bodies including the sun, the moon, the stars, as well as the seas, the mountains, the wind, and so on. From this point of view, therefore, man can realize himself only when his actions are in harmony with the principles and laws of nature.

Save being an essential constitution of human nature, religion is driven by the desire to find rational answers to existential questions, to find meaning in life. Religious motivation from the cosmological point of view is linked to the acknowledgement that man's authentic existence requires living in accordance with definite cosmic principles at least to remain in good standing with the forces of nature which are believed to wield decisive influence on man, whether they are benevolent or malevolent. Constantly and habitually living in awe of these forces of nature inspires religious sense, disposition, and attitudes, which are sometimes explicitly demonstrated in acts of reverence and worship.

Religious Motivation: Theocentric Perspectives

As already observed, religion basically attempts to provide explanation for the mysteries of life and tries to account for the ultimate end of man. On a wider horizon, it is preoccupied with the natural forces operating in the universe. At the top of the hierarchy of beings operating in the universe is a Supreme Being. A common view held by almost all the major religions in the world is that man, animals, natural bodies and indeed the entire universe are the effects or consequences of the act of creation performed by a supernatural being, who is at the top of the hierarchy of beings operating in the universe, and who is revered through the various acts of worship in these religions. To ensure his happiness in the 'other world' and to find favour in the sight of the Supreme Being, man has to act according to his dictates or commands. A practical example could be seen in the story about a nomad named Abram told in Christian religion:

Abram's God commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac. As he was about to obey, God relented and permitted him to slay a ram instead. God found him

faithful and made special claims upon him: No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham... I shall establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you...and I will be your God (Gen. 22:1-18).

The Supreme Being conceived as the creator, and sustainer of the universe in most religions, has some ancillary agents, messengers or spirits. In Igbo traditional religion, for instance, *Chi Ukwu* (the Supreme Being) is at once transcendent and immanent. He has cults and symbols. Man is always conscious of his divine presence. Men communicate with him either directly or through the deities. The worshipper anticipates some rewards through the acts of worship here on earth or in “the life to come”, or “next world”.

The wave of thoughts in the Medieval and Patristic periods of philosophy linked man’s religious motivation mainly to the “God-factor”. During this period, the emphasis was on *De Anima* (the soul) and man was understood as being in intricate relationship with God. The Christian scholars studied man in connection with God and they believed that man can only realize himself when he is in full union with God and behaves in accordance with God’s law. This concept changed the Greek notion of man and his relation to nature. The Christian revelation introduced the idea of an almighty God who is the sole creator and governor of all things including man. This period succeeded in introducing religious meaning and import into the cosmology of the world. For Christians, the idea of heaven and hell as the either extremes of human destiny were emphasized. Other religious persuasions also advanced similar views on reward and punishment in an afterlife. This implies that man’s thoughts and actions, as expressed in religious values ought to reflect that of God, the ultimate source of his existence.

The explanations provided by religion, reassure man that his life is never purposeless and that a higher being, a supernatural being is responsible for his existence. To this being he is bound to return after his present life. A number of Christian theologians, including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas link religious motivation to man’s natural longing to the search for his source. St Augustine (1961:31), for instance, maintains that man has a natural and irresistible desire for the infinite spirit or supernatural being in whom alone he can find rest. This irresistible longing for the divine is the spur of religion. Hence, he exclaims: “For you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our souls are restless until they rest in you.” Also, Aquinas’ arguments from motion, arguments based on efficient causality, the contingency of finite beings, various grades of perfection, and teleology are all aimed at proving the existence of God and his decisive influence on man (*Summa Theologica*, art.3).

The Second Vatican Council (Abbot, 1967:31) also corroborates the view that religion is the result of man’s natural search for answers to the fundamental questions that arise in his mind about the origin of human life, his purpose, and ultimate destiny. Irrespective of

the diverse approaches applied by different religious systems in answering these questions or determining their truth value, they remain of critical essence and constitute a decisive spur to religious actions. Thus, human beings, from the primitive ages to the contemporary world, have always expressed religious sentiments and devised different means and methods of worshipping the divine, the transcendent, the supernatural beings or forces in the world. Whether they are benevolent or malevolent, these beings are believed to wield some form of influence in the world.

Religious Motivation: Anthropocentric Perspectives

As early as the 16th century philosophers emphasized the study of man as a reliable gateway to knowledge. The emphasis on the anthropocentric perspectives on the study of man which was more pronounced in the modern period of philosophy was essentially a self-awareness campaign. It was a search for meaning basically driven by introspection. To be sure, the investigation into the nature of man is a perennial concern of many disciplines but a particular concern of philosophical anthropology. David Hume's thoughts on the fundamental objective of philosophical anthropology largely coincide with the relevance of anthropocentric perspective on religious motivation in this study. In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume (1739) contends that "there is no question of importance whose decision is not comprised in the science of man. In pretending to explain the principles of human nature we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences."

The history of philosophical investigations, especially in Western scholarship, features discourses that highlight the anthropomorphic conception of God. In fact, some critical thinkers assessing the anthropomorphic idea of God would consider the God of religion a mere product of human imagination. The Spanish contemporary existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1954:114), for instance, contends that man's preoccupation with the question of God is intrinsically linked with man's concern for himself, the meaning and purpose of his existence and his fate after death. The perception of reality through the lenses of man's ontological essence gained ascendancy in the age of enlightenment when philosophers further identified and emphasized the socio-cultural character of the human person and the modern period of philosophy which was preoccupied with an objective assessment of man's potentialities and limitations. This finds expression in the thoughts of David Hume, Auguste Comte, Martin Heidegger and, especially, Immanuel Kant, who relegated the metaphysical approach to the background and adopted a more sociological approach in the study of man.

The anthropocentric perspective on the study of man and assessment of his nature and potentials could provide a basis for man's religious behaviour. As already observed, the idea of God is a common feature of all religious systems and that the idea of God as projected in most religions is anthropomorphic. Describing religion from an

anthropocentric point of view, Feuerbach (1957:30) maintains that religion is simply man's worship of human nature projected into objectivity. God, the Supreme Being, is often conceived in the image and likeness of man with all human attributes. He possesses and uses such human organs as eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet, and nose. Like human beings, he exhibits emotions like anger, joy, tiredness or weariness, hatred, love, jealousy, sympathy, mercy, forgiveness, and so on. These traits are found in the Yahweh of Israel, the Christian's God, the Allah of Islam and the Supreme Being in Africa traditional religion. However, most of the mainline religions maintain that God possesses better and more objective versions of these human traits and attributes; hence, the difference between God and human beings is in degree not in kind.

Virtually all the disciplines within the domain of social sciences investigate the meaning of religion for the individual and how it is expressed; they assess the place of religion in the social order – its historical, political, social, political and even economic functions. Corroborating the view that religious sentiments, values, beliefs and experiences have always been part of man's perennial critical concerns, Hood et al. (1996:1-2) write:

People surround themselves with spiritual reference, making it a content in which the sacred is invoked to convey the significance of every major life event. Birth is sanctified by christening, baptism, or circumcision. Marriages are solemnized by clergy, who readily interpret the roles of husband and wife in religious terms. Throughout life, religion mitigates death by associating it with gratifying images of an afterlife where only good prevails or justice demands that evil will be punished with pain and suffering. And, finally, some religious traditions assure the faithful of an ultimate resurrection at the end of time.

The various perspectives on religion largely correlate with the varying conceptions of religious motivation and behaviour. The multi-variant opinions about the nature of faith acquisition or religious development gave rise to several traditions or approaches, especially as advanced in the psychology of religion.

3.2 Biological Foundations of Religion

The biological foundations of religious behavior largely correlate with the psychological foundations. Hence, the Instinctive Tradition, the Defensive/Protective Tradition and the Growth/Realization Tradition, as theories of religious motivation, remain relevant to the discourse on biological foundations for religious behaviour. The Instinctive tradition stresses the idea of inherent sources of motivation, cognition and behavior, the Defensive/Protective tradition holds that the motivational basis for religion is human weakness and inadequacy, while the Growth/Realization tradition, which was fostered by Kurt Goldstein (1939) and Abraham Maslow (1959), emphasized the concept of "self-actualization"

Some grounds for the justification of biological foundations of religion are also found in some philosophical investigations and thoughts. The doctrines of innate ideas and man's natural instinct to act based on some stimulus have been part of intellectual speculations right from the ancient Greek period of philosophy. One finds in Greek philosophy both an empirical tradition that considered all mental contents as the product of learning, and a parallel heritage that stressed a doctrine of innate ideas. Views that apparently advance biological basis for religious behaviour and foster biologically based notions, dominated much of Western thinking about the essence of humanity by the late 19th century. It was a case of projecting nature over nurture. In fact, some psychologists, following this trend, simply saw faith as the product of instincts and emotions.

Although there is little evidence to support the notion of heritability of religion or the possibility of having religious genes in humans, it is evident that there are natural predisposing conditions that boost religious inclinations and experiences. The result of an empirical research on the possibility of the innateness of religion by Thomas Bouchard and his colleagues (Bouchard, et al., 1990) lends credence to this view. They followed more than 100 sets of twins who were separated in infancy and reared apart, as well as many more twins who were raised together. They concluded that religiousness, like many other psychological characteristics, has strong heritability components, and that family enrichment tends not to have strong influence on children's religiosity. This research, though not an absolute proof of heritability, suffices as a pointer to the fact that there are some genetically inherited predispositions to believe in a supreme power. In fact, the study implies the possibility of some genetic and biological potential to be religious. Hence, some authors and theorists in developmental psychology like David Elkind (1970:36) suggest that at least some aspects of religion "can be traced to certain cognitive need capacities that emerge in the course of mental growth."

3.3 Psychological Foundations of Religion

There is a thin dividing line between man's religious concerns and his psychological concerns; sometimes, his spiritual problems dovetail into psychological concerns and vice versa. Psychologists mainly investigate the domain of inner experience including religious beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and knowledge. From this standpoint, Max Muller (1889:188) conceives religion as the perception of the infinite under such manifestation as are able to influence the moral character of man. For Walter Houston Clark (1958:22), "religion can be described as the inner experience of the individual when he senses a Beyond, especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his behaviour when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the Beyond." Similarly, William James (1902/1985:29) maintains that "religion consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto." Man's inner experience from this perspective is anchored on a being outside him, a transcendent, infinite and

divine; a being that embodies universal, absolute truth, an object of adoration by people who believe in him and feel that their moral character and relationship to the world is ordered by him. It is an inner response to an outside framework. The concern of religion from this perspective includes man's beliefs, feelings, actions, and experiences as they are expressed in relation to this external system. From a psychological point of view, therefore, religion enhances the worshiper's well-being and constitutes a basis for living a good life.

One of the basic pretensions of this discourse, as already observed, is that religious disposition is an ontological character of the human person which, like potentially inflammable embers, is often fanned into flame by a number of factors. Against the backdrop of the philosophical and psychological heritage that holds that every human action is stimulated by an impulse, psychologists argue that religious behaviour is stimulated by human weakness and inadequacy. Some philosophers and psychologists, arguing along this line of thought, state that the major spur of religion is fear occasioned by man's inability to explain challenging and uncontrollable life situations. Feuerbach (1957:26) traces this back to the fear of nature associated with primitive peoples. According to him, "the explanation of religion by fear is eminently confirmed by the fact that most primitive peoples take the frightening aspects of nature as the principal if not exclusive objects of their religion." Similarly, Leuba (1921:81), adopted Lucretius' stand that "fear begets Gods," as well as David Hume's view that "the first ideas of religion arose from a concern with regard to the events of life and fears which actuate the human mind." For Gross (1982:242), "when misery is the greatest, God is the closest." William McDougall (1909), also shares the view that religion is an outgrowth of the instinct of curiosity, fear, and subjection as well as admiration, awe, and reverence. From a psychological point of view, therefore, an acknowledgement of human limitation constitutes a fundamental basis for religion.

Closely allied to the view that fear stimulates religion is that advanced by Freud (1927/1961:22), who likens the attitudes of a religious person to those of the weak child who confers on the father a mantle of omnipotence. Realizing the parental limitation over time with advancement in age and experience he initiates the idea of God as an exulted father who supplies for the limitations of the temporal father. The longing for the imaginary omnipotent father's care and protection, according to him, is the root of religion. Although the Catholic theologian, Hans Kung (1979:97) would contend that this approach to religion would reduce it to a mere need satisfaction enterprise and render it self-deceptive and escapist, it still offers considerable explanations to some puzzling questions that have religious essence.

The idea of the supreme deity in religion also serves as a dependable anchorage for inexplicable events of importance for religious people. With such expressions as "it is an

act of God,” “God works in mysterious ways,” “the will of God prevailed,” etc., events are attributed to God as considerable reasons why they happened. This idea is an aspect of the broader “deprivation theory” advanced by some psychologists, who contend that human limitation, shortcoming, weakness, and deficiency in various forms foster religious behavior. According to Charles Glock (1964:27), economic, social, organismic, ethical, and psychic forms of deprivation can stimulate religious activity. From the economic deprivation perspective, for instance, which is the case when people feel they lack enough resources to meet survival needs and needs for other basic life satisfactions and enjoyments, religion may tell the believer that money doesn’t really count; he should rather emphasize a way life that is lived spiritually and morally. Glock’s argument is applicable to similar forms of deprivation as stimulants of religious attitudes. While life challenges, including poverty, ill health, low social esteem, lack of opportunities, tend to weigh people down in the present life, religion offers assurances of better life and reward in eternity.

Although the mainstream insights into religious motivation align with somewhat negative perspective which emphasizes the defensive or protective impulses, a number of scholars also advance a more positive perspective that emphasizes the growth/ realization tradition. Kurt Goldstein (1939) and Abraham Maslow (1959) advanced this line of thought as they emphasized the concept of self-realization, arguing that in all circumstances people seek to utilize their capacities optimally. For Maslow (1964: xii), self-actualization is most fully expressed in peak experiences, which according to him refers to very special moments of emotional and intellectual enlightenment. Religionists are prone to utilize such opportunities thereby making religions an avenue for self-enhancement, growth, realization and actualization, and broadening of experiential horizon.

Through its rituals, liturgy, theology, prayer, and different modes of faith expression, religion fills inner needs issuing from human inadequacy. For instance, prayer, in its various forms, including petition, thanksgiving, adoration, and so on, serves as a means of communication between the religious person and the object of worship. By means of prayer, the religious persons express their concern before God and request his guidance and protection. The prayer dialogue with the divine being or beings brings relief, inner tranquility, and considerable measure of psychological satisfaction as the believers expect positive response to their prayers. Other religious practices and obligations like helping the needy and burying the dead also serve similar purpose as they offer the religious person some sense of fulfillment and psycho-spiritual satisfaction.

3.4 Socio-Cultural Foundations of Religion

Sociologists and anthropologists approach religion from what is technically termed an “outside perspective”. From this standpoint, religion is conceived as an institution, defined in terms of a group, category, or organization – a church, sect, or cult, “the faithful,” “the believers” or “the chosen”. Within the religious institution man demonstrates his faith, taking cognizance of the implications of his faith expression and religious practices for the object of worship and for his fellow men. Social aspects of human behavior are critical triggers and determinants of religious dispositions and practices. Socio-cultural concerns including social stabilities, social changes, the functional problems of the society, as well as the internal structure, development, problems and dilemmas of social organization in relation to other social institutions are intricately linked to religious concerns.

To the extent that the urge to relate with the divine is embedded in human nature, it has a unifying element or character; hence, the imperative of assessing religious behavior from a sociological standpoint. Social scientists trace the origin of the idea of religion in man to culture. They observe that apart from the power of reason, man is fundamentally distinguished from other animals by the fact that he is a creator and bearer of culture. As a matter of fact, man’s rational capacity and potentials are often expressed in culture. Culture, therefore, should not just be seen as a discrete collection of disconnected artifacts and symbols, but to a greater or lesser degree, a system. Cultural value systems and worldviews of human societies arguably constitute a critical spur of religion. A people’s conception of the divine or the supernatural reality or object of worship is often determined by their culture and belief. These offer a framework within which they have their religious experiences. On this note, Omoregbe (1993:28) writes:

For every religion without exception is the product of a culture and part of that culture. African traditional religion, for example, is the product of African culture. Islam is a product of the Arabic culture and an integral part of culture of the Arabs. Christianity is the product of the complex Jewish-Hellenistic-Roman culture and an integral part of that complex culture. Hinduism is a product of the Indian culture and integral part of that culture. Confucianism and Taoism are products of the Chinese culture and integral parts of that culture, and so on. No religion can be separated from the cultural worldview that gave birth to it. Culture is an epistemological determinant, for it is the framework within which a people live their lives and interpret their life experiences. It colours, shapes and limits a people’s view of reality, for it serves as the lenses through which people look at reality and interpret it.

A people's culture generally features an integration of the different aspects of their peculiar experiences and needs. Social scientists maintain that culture attempts to answer man's questions about himself and the world, provides the forms or symbols for expressing and communicating his feelings, and provides standards for the evaluation of his moral conducts, particularly in his relation with his fellow men. Authentic religious life involves two basic dimensions of human relationship, namely, the vertical and the horizontal. Whereas the vertical dimension deals with man's relationship with the divine or supernatural being (God), the horizontal dimension is concerned with man's relationship with his fellow men. Since man is by nature ordered to social living, religion cannot be just the private affair of the individual. Religious life achieves full development and concrete expression in the community. Thus, for Emile Durkheim (1915), religion is a creation of human society which serves as a means of self-preservation. It is a system of control that has acquired a divine character through its religious demands. God, according to him, is a personification of the pervading force of the human society.

Retaining a sociological standpoint, but with emphasis on economics, Karl Marx (Del Noce, 1972:207-208) strongly linked religion to the economic exploitation of the masses in the capitalist system. For him, God is an imaginary ideal being invented by the masses as one to whom they have recourse in the face of economic exploitation and oppression. According to him, religion is the opium of the people. It is an effective sedative used by the exploiting class to ensure that the masses do not rebel against them as they hope for eternal reward in heaven.

Against the backdrop that people often bear the identity of their immediate environment, the imprint of religious socialization wields remarkable influence on them. The religious tenets to which one is exposed at home, among peers, adults, schools, church and communities persist throughout life. The intensity of such experiences largely determines one's religious attitudes in later life. Similarly, the repertoire of religious concepts available to one or to which one is exposed determines one's religious language. Religious persons accordingly possess religious language with which they describe their experience. Theorizing on the religious development of the human person, Gordon Allport (1950) maintained that the child moves from essentially no religion to the point where faith becomes an integral part of the personality. He therefore rejects the idea of innate religion but maintains that religion is acquired not inherited biologically. He however allowed that it does to some extent grow out of some human needs. Hence, cultural environment shapes religious orientation just as they contribute to other aspects of human development.

The diverse and divergent views on the relationship between religion and culture notwithstanding, the fact cannot be unmade that religion is an integral part of human culture and that religious attitude is a natural and universal tendency in the human

person. As long as man, who is a bearer of culture and its attendant corollaries, is concerned, there are hardly people who could be said not to have some kind of religion.

4.0 Religion: Implications for man in the Contemporary World

Man, by nature, is a religious being. Given that he is inextricably entangled in the web of religion, a negligence of his religious concerns would inevitably amount to underrating his natural drive for authentic existence and self-realization. Thus, granted that the contemporary scientific and technological advancements of the modern world significantly influence his worldview, ideologies and psycho-social dispositions, religious values still subtly anchor man's ontological essence. The concerns of religion transcend the physical and the temporal; they are metaphysical, supernatural and spiritual. A harmonious blend of the two components of the human person, that is body and soul, is an imperative. Arguing that religion is not only essential for authentic human existence but makes for the sustenance of the culture of any given human society, Christopher Dawson (1929:13) writes:

This spiritual alienation of its own minds is the price that every civilization has to pay when its religious foundation is contented with a purely material success. We are just beginning to understand how intimately and profoundly the vitality of a society is bound up with its religion. It is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force which unites a society and culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense the great religions are the foundations on which civilizations rest. A society, which has lost its religion, becomes sooner or later a society which has lost its culture.

Religious impulse is an ontological constitution of the human person. The quest for the cognitive grasp of the supernatural and supersensible is coeval with man. However, the diverse and multiple perspectives on religion and religious values militate against its proper utilization for the progress of the human society. A conscious and deliberate effort at identifying and applying the common positive elements and principles of the diverse religious orientations would make for a more progressive human society. This has been the major concern of the advocates of interreligious dialogue as an attempt to eradicate the barriers of religious intolerance and foster peaceful coexistence in the contemporary human society.

Just as there are varying understanding of existential predicaments and challenges so there are varying solutions proffered to them. Man's reason continues to explore possibilities via sciento-technological exploits with a view to improving the present physical and temporal life. For its part, religion offers considerable explanation to some existential questions burgling the human mind and fosters the longing for the eternal life.

Virtually all religions provide templates for interpersonal relationship. Most religions promote values that considerably foster stability in human society. To that extent, religion finds relevance in human society. Like the values of science and technology, positive religious values, as found in virtually all major religions, ought to be explored and harnessed for man's ultimate benefit in the contemporary world. When positive human values are highlighted more, peaceful coexistence becomes possible. Acknowledging that there are more that unite humanity than divide them is a step in the right direction. The diverse approaches to securing a better life after the present one could be left to the consciences of each religious group, especially when they do not harm others or disrupt common good. However, when certain religious values conflict with objective human values, the latter should be preferred. For example, sacredness of human life must take precedence over committing murder in the name of religious war or forceful conversion (jihad or crusade) aimed at gaining eternal reward.

4.1 Religion, Modernity and Sciento-Technological Rationality

Man has considerably conquered nature to his own advantage. The tremendous evolvement of human cognitive capacity and ratiocinative powers accounts for the unprecedented advancement in science and technology, the attainment of incredible heights in human development, and enhanced conditions of existence that characterize the modern or contemporary human society. These features of modernity have far-reaching implications for religion. In the modern or contemporary period, science and technology seem to have answers to virtually all possible questions that can arise in human mind, leaving little or nothing to fate or nature. In the present age, people rely more on human potentials, especially through science and technology, for the provision of human needs; science and technology provide considerable solutions to problems and cater for needs that hitherto were considered to have supernatural solutions. Hence, it seems pointless having recourse to religion for solutions to existential predicaments.

The wave of humanism, as a necessary consequence of sciento-technological progress in the modern age also deals a heavy blow to man's inclination to religion. In an age when people rely more on medical assistance than divine assistance for healing in times of sickness, when artificial intelligence in many ways make life less stressful and more comfortable, and when people even attempt to explore possibilities of living in other planets, there is a tendency to deify man and relegate religious concerns to the background.

Religion is arguably favoured by the fear of the unknown and advanced by human limitations, such that wherever man's natural powers and cognitive potentials end, the metaphysical and supernatural take over. An attempt at enlarging or broadening the scope or horizon of the temporal realm and human powers, as expressed in science and technology, would invariably result in shrinking the realm or domain of the supernatural.

The magico-religious or religio-mythical approach to man's existential concerns that characterized the primitive age is speedily giving way to more superior, science-conditioned, or technology-driven modes and patterns of reasoning or sciento-technological rationality. While the former apparently fosters religious values, the latter obviously promotes humanism and dependence on human potentials and capacities with their identified implications.

Remarkably, too, religious intolerance, bigotry, extremism and fundamentalism have been identified as possible cogs in the wheel of progress in the contemporary human society. Holy wars like jihads and crusades are equally potential causes of hostility, violence, and conflict among nations and human societies inspired by religion. Whereas some religious tenets would promote the sacredness and sanctity of human life (thou shall not kill), others would take life at the slightest provocation or even sacrifice it on the altar of doing god a favour, hoping to have eternal rewards. Cases also abound of discrimination on the basis religion in some human societies. These negative features of religion considerably militate against the call to promote religious systems and values.

Against the backdrop of the negative features and trends of modernity vis-à-vis religious values and systems, one may ask: "Is religion with its apparently theoretical, imaginary, and idealistic perspectives, still necessary for man in the contemporary age?" This paper, as already observed, answers this question in the affirmative, stating clearly that in spite of its possible limitations, religion remains of perennial relevance to man given its critical roles and imports in the lives of individual human persons and the human society at large. In the light of the Latin adage, "*Abusus non tollit usum*" (abuses do not invalidate or destroy use) the paper contends that the positive imports or merits of religion far outweigh its demerits, which are often by-products of extremism and abuses.

The human person is naturally and unavoidably entangled in the web of religion. Man cannot but be religious. The claim of the atheists not to be religious is only a matter of principle and not practice. Even though they do not identify with any religious group, as long as the so called atheists inadvertently manifest some implicit inclinations to some religious principles, they are religious. Man's rational faculty is associated with the natural quest for the causes and implications of human experiences. In cases like extraordinary human suffering and death, where science and culture fail to give satisfactory explanation, religion, through its recourse to the supernatural, comes to the rescue. Hence, the anthropologist F.L.K. Hsu (1952:133) asserts:

Man will always love and be in need of love. Man will always aspire to heights which he cannot reach; Man will always be fallible; Man will always die and be in distress; and Man will always have a seemingly ever-expanding universe before him even if he has conquered all earth. As long

as man is subject to these and other circumstances, religion will have a place in human culture.

4.2 Religion and Authentic Human Existence

Deducible from the basic definitions of religion and the foregoing exposition is the fact that religion is a process of interacting or communicating with supernatural realities. This however does not preclude the necessity of its expression in social relationship. Man's religious nature correlates with the need for harmonizing the relationship between him and the supernatural being as well as the relationship between him and his fellow human beings. In fact, religion addresses man's social, cultural, moral and psychological concerns; religious values permeate virtually all aspects of human life.

In the search for meaning, religion occupies a central place. Without understanding, without knowledge or meaning, a person is severely handicapped in coping with many of life's problems. Ambiguity, doubt, and uncertainty are the enemies of action. Man's understanding or interpretation of reality largely determines his disposition, attitudes and approach to it, as well as his responses to its summons. Man's self-understanding, his understanding about God and nature are critical to his authentic existence. Being able to comprehend one's world, to make it meaningful, probably constitutes the core of successful coping and adjustment. For many people religion performs this role very well, especially in times of personal crisis. It provides individuals with personally useful meaning for upsetting circumstances, offers the individual a sense of power and control over such circumstances, serves as a reliable resource for coping and adjustment, and enhancing self-esteem. Hence, religious events and rituals including prayers, worship, consecratory, propitiatory, purificatory, or exorcist sacrifices, are all means of fostering not only a positive relationship with the object of worship but also the good of the worshipper.

The role of religion in offering people meaning is at no time greater than when the mystery of death is confronted. From the hindsight of developmental psychology, one identifies man's natural quest for permanence in a world that is also characterized by change. While the phenomenon of death deals a heavy blow to this quest, religion attempts to foster permanence by conjecturing and propagating ideas of an afterlife, thereby giving meaning to life. Death in most religions is considered a prerequisite to the continuation of life in another realm. In fact, some philosophers claim that death invented religion. The theologian Paul Tillich (1952:40) champions this view as he insists that the anxiety of fate and death is the most basic, most universal, and inescapable. Taking this one step further, prominent anthropologist Malinowski (1965:71) claimed that death, which of all human events is the most upsetting and disorganizing to man's calculations, is perhaps the main source of religious belief.

Gregariousness, as an ontological character of the human person, also resonates with essential values of religion given that it fosters associational drive. Religion provides a sense of fraternity among believers. It satisfies the instinct to search for relations or the natural quest to know how individuals are linked to each other. A child gains personal meaning from knowing connections to family members, friends, schoolmates, neighbours and other objects and ideas of personal significance. In this regard, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle (1962:28) had already expressed a perennial truth that the human person necessarily finds fulfillment in the human society. According to him, “he who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself must be either a beast or god.”

As already noted, save the emphasis religion lays on the need to be in good terms with God, religion equally stresses the importance of peaceful coexistence in human society. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus may not agree on the nature of God, or on religious rituals and teachings, but they tend to agree on a considerable number of moral issues. Sociologists of religion emphasize the social dimension of religion as essential feature of virtually all the major religions of the world, especially as it is captured in the “Golden Rule.” Irrespective of the varying ways in which it is stated, the “Golden Rule” is basically considered in these religions as a noble aspiration of the human spirit:

Christianity: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you” (*Matthew 7:12*).

Judaism: “What is harmful to you, do not to your fellow man” (*Talmud, Shabbat, 3id*).

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself” (*Shunnah*).

Confucianism: “If there is one maxim, which ought to be acted upon throughout one’s life, surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness. So do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you” (*The Analects, 15, 23*).

The import of the foregoing is that the truly religious person is expected to express concern for the needs of others. Granted that religion can be a bad tool in the hands of religious extremists, fundamentalists, fanatics and bigots, who foster violence and intolerance, the truly religious person is ordinarily inclined to promote such virtues as tolerance, helpfulness, honesty, as well as personal and interpersonal integrity. The development of the religious personality and attitude involves emancipation from self-centeredness which ultimately results in positive social change and sustenance of social structures. Of course, good or virtuous individuals expectedly make a good human society. On this, Wilkins (1976:12-13) asserts: “the structure of any society rests on patterns of behaviour developing from commonly held beliefs and values becoming

institutionalized in the social system and being reflected in the personalities of the individual members of the society.”

The principles of religion basically animate the moral aspects of the human person. The invitation to virtuousness is not only an important but a central and intrinsic aspect of religion. The divine precepts as expressed in religious practices always bear on practical human conducts. Moral probity is a practical manifestation of the inner disposition towards the divine precepts. This is often considered a necessary factor in man’s admittance into the eternal life, the life after the present life, the next world or union with God. One’s life in the present world plays a decisive role in determining the nature of the life to come. For one to be virtuous, therefore, one has to live a life that manifests one’s knowledge of God’s laws and one’s faith in God.

It is pertinent to note, following Aristotle (1934:2.6.15), that good acts posited only occasionally do not make one virtuous. Truly virtuous acts necessarily flow from an inner disposition or frame of mind that is permanently set towards doing good. A truly religious person is one who is not only well versed in religious principles and theoretical knowledge but one who habitually puts such knowledge into practical use.

The moral dimension of religion undoubtedly has implications for the human society given the intricate interconnection between human actions and the society in which they are posited. Human actions can foster or militate against social structures and interpersonal relationships. Such moral laws or principles as respect for authorities, respect for one’s parents and elders, and respect for the sanctity of human life, arguably have decisive implications for the human society. To this extent, moral values correlate with civic responsibilities.

In essence, the inherent desire in man for auto-transcendence correlates with and inspires a constant introspection and a persistent effort at discovering and re-discovering himself. Religion arguably constitutes an effective means of satisfying this desire, achieving this purpose and actualizing this potential in man.

5.0 Conclusion

The temporality of human existence naturally raises existential questions bordering on man’s ultimate destiny and the purpose of reality in general. Religion provides considerable rational answers to this puzzle. From the metaphysical, spiritual, supernatural and other-worldly perspectives it teaches that man has supernatural end, and so need not brood over his losses and unrealized dreams in the ephemeral world. Religion provides considerable motivation to cope with the debilitating and dehumanizing vicissitudes of life and human predicaments, provides ethical principles that guide interpersonal relationship, and promotes common good. Given that it inspires

one to pursue spiritual perfection and moral excellence, it invariably guarantees high quality of life and meaningful existence.

In spite of the notable discrepancies in the understanding and practice of religion, it remains of perennial relevance to man given that it borders on his ontological constitution and provides rational perspectives on his existential concerns. Positive religious principles as propagated and advanced by most of the major religions of the world accord with objective human values, enhance individual well-being, foster peaceful coexistence and socio-political progress. In the face of such existential challenges as near-death experience, old age, retirement from active service, life-threatening sicknesses or terminal illnesses, the loss of a very dear one, and similar predicaments, introspection becomes imperative; a critical review becomes necessary as many people are compelled to think more critically about the ultimate purpose of human life and existence in general. The unique perspective that religion provides on existential concerns, therefore, cannot be supplanted by the unprecedented merits of industrialization, civilization, and the innumerable sciento-technological achievements in the modern world.

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