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TOWARDS THE RATIONALIZATION OF THE SACRED FOR MORE
VERITABLE SOCIETIES

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Abstract: Religious fundamentalism has become such a bane in our modern day societies that any serious thinker should consider it necessary to try to find a solution to this malaise of our civilization. This paper argues that the source of these crises is in the misapplication of religion to human society. Accordingly, it argues that unless there is a rationalization of the sacred, there may never be peace for humanity. This stems from the view that religious actors tendentiously manipulate religion to serve their whims and caprices allegedly doing the work of the divine. Furthermore, the basis of their actions is a mixture of human nature and values. In order to stem the tide of fundamentalism, this paper avers that the world ought to borrow what the author calls the pragmatic religious value of the African Traditional Religion.

Key Words: Rationalization, Sacred, Religious Fundamentalism, Pragmatic Religious Values of African Traditional Religion

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Introduction

There is no doubt that human evolution is necessarily enshrouded in some sorts of reactions to the divine. This results from reactions in terms of what grounds all existence and how man should relate to this being that is ultimately regarded as the originator of all that exists. The reaction to the inexplicable hollow of our existence has led to the emergence of several religions regarded as sacred. It is this hollowness in man that St. Augustine once realized in his immortal saying: “You have made us for your-self O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”.¹

The realm of the sacred thus is supposed to create satisfaction and fulfilment among the persons who subscribe to them. In order to find satisfaction, man has held tenaciously to the resultant cultural cum religious reactions to the ultimate answers to the issues of his existence. This results in the fact that religion has certain indubitable influence and hold on its adherents. Surprisingly, this religion that was supposed to be a binding force for peace and unity in society has turned into a sword of Damocles hanging obviously over the world, creating the threat of the third World war by corrupting the minds of its adherents in fanatical frenzy. Voltaire captures this fact as follows:

Once fanaticism has corrupted a mind, the malady is almost incurable... the only remedy for this epidemic malady is the philosophical spirit, which spreads gradually at last, tames men's habit and prevents the disease from starting... even the law is important against these attacks of rage; it is like reading a court decree to a reviving maniac.²

It is obvious from the above that any person should be worried about religious fanaticism and fundamentalism as fundamental threats to world peace. The history of the world is replete with heinous crimes committed under the guise of religion. Moreover, with the dawn of the 21st century civilization, the dimensions have changed. Just in September 11, 2001, an attempt was made to destroy American civilization by the Osama Bin Laden's fundamentalists. This, more than any other event, clearly highlighted the obvious threat to world peace caused by religious fundamentalism.³ In April 2011, in Northern Nigeria, a group of fundamentalists known as Boko Haram erupted condemning western civilization and suborning its adherents against the state, its structures and all other individuals of the state. Their drive was to destroy Western civilization and those that acquiesce to it.

It is therefore obvious that religion has turned into a serious danger to mankind's civilization especially as those who are involved in all these problems pretend to do whatever they do “for God”. Since religion is an aspect of human civilization, we shall agree with Arnold Toynbee that the emergence and growth of any civilization is a product of challenge and

effective response. Thus, it is incumbent on us to seek ultimate explanation and solution to the causes of this frenzy in man's society in order to stem the tide. Since religion is supposed to be complementary and not conflictual, our desire is to look for a deeper complementary and enriching co-operation between the secular and religious citizens of the world using the traditional Igbo (African) experience as our paradigm.

In order to do this successfully, we shall state the problematic issues in our discussion:

(a) Most religions of the world revolve around the concept of a God figure; we shall review the problematic of the God question. By this we shall reconsider the issue of the existence of God in order to aver that the wrong perception of the God-head is responsible for these religious conflicts in the world.

(b) The other issue arises from the nature of the personality of those who propagate religious doctrines. This will give us insight into why they do what they do.

(c) There is also the issue of the epistemological status of the revelation of the sacred writings and the purported inerrancy therein.

(d) We shall equally evaluate the Igbo (African) world-view in relation to what Ali Mazrui had called the triple heritage⁴ – African traditional religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam.

(e) There is the issue of religious crises in the world and the role of the human personality trait.

(f) We shall as well review the need for the rationalization of the sacred.

This work stems from the deep concern arising from the grey issues raised above. In addition, certain questions yearn for answers, namely: Who is this God of religions? What constitutes the human person and his roles in fanning the embers of religious fundamentalism? Why is it that these crises are more prevalent in areas dominated by Christianity and Islam? What should be done ultimately to stem the tides of fundamentalism? Our major aim in this paper is to establish that religion is meant for man and not man for religion. Hence, any religious idea that is antihuman should be rejected as the Igbos do.

Theistic Avowals

Every discussion of the sacred is centred on some certain conceptions of the existence and immanence of a supreme deity and His relationship with beings on earth. These conceptions would define the relationship between the sacred and the secular. Two major conceptions are prominent: the domination of the secular by the sacred and vice versa. What the former position stipulates is that since the sacred is ontologically prior to the secular, it should dictate what is done in the secular. This presupposes that since we are products of the sacred, all our

being and actions should serve the sacred. This is what has been taken to the extreme by most fundamentalists in their aggressive proselytizations.

It is obvious that the above position is akin to the mind before matter debate while the second position entails matter before mind. This naturally tilts towards the Cartesian mind-body problem, i.e. which is prior: mind or body? Our intention here is not to solve this perennial philosophical problem; rather it is to postulate that the issue of a frosty relationship between the sacred and the secular arises from the posture taken over by the debate above. We postulate that most religious crises in the world today arise due to the wrongful positioning on the various theistic avowals of the various religions in the world.

Let us, at this stage, start by saying that we subscribe to the thesis of both the existence of God and mind before matter. It should be observed that although a vast majority of mankind accepted that God exists, His existence is not rationally demonstrable beyond every reasonable doubt. Of course, the other side of the divide is a nihilistic attitude toward the existence of God. However, atheism is a self-defeatist venture that ends only as academic rational exercise. This is because atheism contains some underlying theistic attitude imbedded in it. Allan Richardson's view that "atheism has no independent existence"⁵ was instructively applied by P.O. Iroegbu to nail atheism. According to him, "indeed it (atheism) is part, though as we have remarked, a negative or denying part of theism."⁶ Iroegbu's view is that even if atheists have not arrived at the rational or existential indubitability of the existence of God, they are part of this search for ultimate meaning and explanation of the God-talk. By this, they are evidently participating in resolving theism, albeit negatively.

How far has this search gone? And why are the search results problematic? What is the essence of a better outlook on this search for a rational demonstration of the existence of God as "the challenge of developing a new paradigm for philosophizing that enables the sacred and the secular to be lived fully, creatively and co-operatively so as to build a viable global whole"? Over the years, attempts have been made by philosophers to prove the existence of God. However, it has since been agreed that these proofs are mere arguments geared towards the rational establishment of the grounds for the existence of God. Two major orientations are prominent: the cosmological and the ontological arguments for the existence of God.

It should be noted that we shall not dwell exhaustively on the evaluation of the propriety or otherwise of these arguments in establishing whether their non-holistic approach helped in creating this logjam in the secular-sacred relationship. The thought of the cosmological arguments is to use observable phenomena in the world to establish the existence of God. St. Thomas epitomizes this approach. In his five ways (Quinque Viae) he starts from the existing concrete evidence to a regressio

ad infinitum (regression to infinity) in order to arrive at the beginning of these regressions. He used arguments of motion, cause, the contingency of beings, the degrees of perfection and orderliness to “arrive at a supreme or final cause, what we all call God.” Descartes’ ontological argument draws from the cogito. The cogito of his being grounds the indubitandum (indubitable) existence of *res cogitans* (thinking beings). Nevertheless, it is obvious to Descartes that he is not the author of his existence, which he sees as finite and contingent. Therefore, there must be an infinite being that is causatively responsible for his being and this being is God.

Another variant of the cosmological argument is the popular proofs argument. The *consensus gentium* (universal consent) is an illicit assumption that it is common sense that God exists, arising from humankind’s acceptance of this claim over the years. However, we are aware that history is replete with universal claims that eventually turned false with improved knowledge. This is true all the more so as one of the roles of philosophy is to liberate man from what Rousseau calls the “herd spirit”: the view that when a generality of people accept a position, that it is true is illicit. This is because the status of what is called a generality is doubtfully the obtainance of statistical data. Most consensus opinions are the decisions of some dominant people that impose them upon the masses.

Be that as it may, a fundamental problem of the cosmological argument is that it makes an illicit jump from the phenomena, if we may use Kant’s term for the noumenal order. For Kant, the thing-in-itself is unknowable; hence, we cannot permeate the profundity of the inner realities of things from their observable concepts. We are not here to evaluate the propriety or otherwise of Kant’s claims, but what is clear is that understanding the concept of God in the cosmological sense leaves us with a pure materialistic conception of God. This is because accounts of the reality of existence revolve only around the material, as the immaterial can only be known through the material. However, this is not true as most mystic experiences which give insight into the manifestation of God’s activities on earth do not necessarily stem from the cosmological. The dangerous implication of this materialistic conception of God has telling effects on how we conceive the sacred and how we respond to this conception. We shall fully discuss about this later in this work, but let us look at the other argument of the existence of God: the ontological argument. St. Anselm anchored the ontological argument in the following way:

God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived (thought). But that than which nothing greater can be conceived must exist not only mentally in idea, but also externally in reality.

Therefore, God exists not only in the mind, but also externally in reality.⁸

Descartes again re-enforces this position when he claims that the idea of God as an absolutely perfect being is axiomatic like the truth of mathematics in his mind. From his conception of perfection, he concludes that an absolutely perfect being exists. He concludes that God defined as a supremely perfect being exists because denying such a being's existence is tantamount to self-contradiction. Iroegbu captures the attitude of the ontologists in these words: "For our two ontologist-demonstrators, Anselm and Descartes; just agree on our definition of God, and you necessarily agree that He, God exists".⁹

The ontological argument has certain shortfalls, namely, as Gaunillo puts it, making an illicit jump from the conceptual to the real order. The mind is capable of creating perfection that can never exist. The idea of a beautiful island or a unicorn does not make them exist. Logically also, this argument has taken it for granted that it has established what it set out to establish by building the property of existence in its definition. As we have remarked earlier, our intention is not to evaluate the credibility of the ontological argument as to bringing out its implication for the God talk. A type of plausibility of this argument that is taken too far is its idealistic non-materialistic demonstration. It is obvious that an idealistic interpretation of God's existence would be nearer to understanding the conception of God than the materialistic cosmological arguments. But scholars like Hegel inadvertently replaced God (the supposed absolute spirit) with conceptions as man, and his culture in his hermeneutical interpretation of the evolution of reason. This gave ideological underpinning to what Hans Kung terms anthropological atheism. Hegel posited that in the dialectic of spirit (Geist), the summit of this movement is no longer God but human reason understood in the philosophical-hermeneutical sense. The obvious implication of this is the enthronement of the secular above the sacred. Thus, God, the object of religion, became a mere representation (Vorstellung) of the image of the human spirit.

Worthy of note is the fact that Hegel is reputed as the most popular and influential ideologue of western philosophy. Philosophers after him like Feuerbach, Friedrich Engels, Jean Paul Sartre took off from Hegel and postulated the humanistic-atheistic doctrine of homohomini Deus est (Man is God for man). For instance, Ludwig Feuerbach captures the divine in the following words: "the divine being is nothing else than the human being, for the theory of God cannot be defined and consequently cannot be known by man".¹⁰ This dangerous trend also conceived Marx's and Engels's idea of God as a mere deviated projection of man. They aver the following:

Man, who looked for a superhuman being in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing there

but the reflection of himself, will no longer be disposed to find out the semblance of himself, only in an inhuman being where he seeks and must seek his true-reality.¹¹

The implication of the above for them is that there is no God but man. There is no doubt that these attitudes have helped in the materialization of God with the dangerous result that man, as Protagoras states, is the measure of all things. This relegation of the sacred to whatever man says or manipulates gave vent to the eugenism of Nazism that has had considerable effects on mankind since the holocausts of World War I and II.

All we have said so far is that the conception of God both in the cosmological and the ontological perspectives have materialized the concept of God. This has the decisive effect of presenting the sacred as a manipulable arena by the secular. This is the attitude that pervades the aggressive proselytization and ipso facto the cause of religious fundamentalism in the world. All we have to do before we conclude this section is to postulate the rightful attitude to the conception of God that will help us attain a rational co-existence of the secular with the sacred. At the basis of hermeneutics is the view that man's highest intuition is the understanding of the deepest meaning of realities. Realities are observed in our context cosmologically and ontologically. To capture the nature of God that will be all-encompassing is not to limit this search to either of them. The only authentic way is the combination of both of them. This entails a rational integrating interpretation of reality taken simply and holistically in order to give solution to our quest for meaningfulness. Meaning here designates the penetration of the inner profundity of the essence (quiddity) of all things. This must be done in applying dialogics in order to elicit meaning-centredness and holistic-being-orientedness.

An advantage of this conception of God over the ones above is that it brings out clearly the inner nature of man as a being-in-perpetual-search for the grandest rational discovery of ultimate reality. It does not enthrone the sense of finality but the integration of all the attributes of the above view, synthesizing them. It surpasses them as it gives a rational discovery of ultimate reality as an ever evolving process. This attitude will predispose various religionists to the reality of the fact that they are not the best. We shall end this section with J. Caird's belief that "a consistent architectonic of hermeneutic based on rational cum existential inquiry is the strongest proof of the existence of God".¹² The implication of this is that man's idea of the existence of God is ever evolving without finality.

Human Nature and the Sacred

It is axiomatic that societies are governed in line with the perception of those who formulate ideologies and policies for such societies. In other words, theories of society (whether plausible or not) are implicit in the theories of human nature. Religion as an integral part of social relations is affected by whatever humans think is the real nature of man. Therefore, in order to appreciate the roles of these actors in religions, there is the need to evaluate their conceptions of human nature. Philosophers of different times and ideologies acquiesce to this view. For instance, Leslie Stevenson asserts that: “the meaning and purpose of human life, what we ought to do and what we can hope to achieve – all these are fundamentally affected by whatever we think is the real or true nature of man”.¹³

Amerigo Lapati is of the same view when he posits that, “basic to the study and understanding of any theory that deals with human behaviour is the concept of the nature of man underlying that philosophy or theory”.¹⁴ However, it is worthy of note that underlying the nature of man is a complex of biological, social, physico-chemical, psychological and religious considerations that define the uniqueness of human beings. Consequently, religious theories hinging on human nature are predicated on certain metaphysical and epistemological commitments.

There are two basic metaphysical commitments: the passive and the autonomous. The former revolves around a mechanical deterministic orientation that makes man the subject of the ironclad laws of nature, namely the environment and genetics. This is true when we recall that psychology views as axiomatic that man’s behaviour is a product of nature and nurture. According to the construal of this theory, the cosmos is governed by a web of natural laws, humans are part of this cosmos and eo ipso are subject to these laws. Therefore, there is no absolute wholly other that is incomprehensible and remote (a sort of *Deus Otiosis*) from man and which nevertheless controls his affairs. Man taken in isolation is not reducible to any essence that cannot be investigated scientifically as the self. Thus, it results that every essence of man is manipulable, investigable and predictable. Martin Hollis calls this conception “the plastic man” as against “the autonomous man”.¹⁵

The second metaphysical commitment is the autonomous conception that gives man elements of freedom, responsibility and choice. This entails that any attempt to study man devoid of freedom and as entirely law-governed is a ruse. Accordingly, what is relevant is eliciting justification from acting agents as to why they act the way they do. In consequence, man is free and rational to a certain extent if not entirely. Thus, there is an “essence” that crystallizes in a unique self that makes a choice from alternatives in any situation. This means that the autonomous conception places man, the “rational subject self”, on responsibility for his actions in

contrast to the plastic man who is absolvable from responsibility for his actions.

Of what relevance are these conceptions of human nature to human behaviour? It is evident that various theories – social or religious – exist under the above metaphysical conceptions of human nature. The basic assumptions of social theories are to postulate the organization of society, its functions, structures, institutions and patterns of development. Society is primarily a complex of people in social intercourse. Human nature impinges on human behaviour. J.C. Chukwuokolo seems to capture the essence of this relationship between human nature and human societies as follows:

Just as the nature of molecular behaviour enhances the understanding of the behaviour of gases, the understanding of human nature enhances the understanding of human societies. Our understanding of the coherence of any social theory therefore is predicated on the perspective gained on human nature. It is on this paradigm that we can appreciate Hegel's postulation of absolute Monarchy or Locke's representative democracy.¹⁶

At this stage we shall note how human nature enhances our understanding of social theories. J.C.A. Agbakoba offers us three explanatory models. He starts by positing a teleological conception where the purpose of society and the way it is organized and structured are seen as means of reaching some goals that are inherent in man and which he naturally strives to attain. Rousseau's social contract theory for instance could be predicated on the perceived principle of equality at birth which societies have lost in their evolution. The need for the re-organization of societies to reflect this equality stares them in the face as successes are judged in terms of their degrees of equality.

The second way is causality devoid of teleology. This indicates that social structures and institutions are perceived as determined by human nature through a causal web. Accordingly, societies have no goals except those chosen by their members; hence, nature does not provide inherent ends.

The other way arises from human free will. For instance, man always does what he freely wills; the regularities of action in society are mere coincidences. This results from the capability of individuals having various means of actualizing the same thing. All we can do therefore is mere advisory roles in man. This is the view of any thorough-going existentialist.¹⁷ At this point, it is noteworthy to posit that determinism is inescapable in any study of human nature and development theories. This is because the major conceptions of human nature result from the

disagreement and reconciliation of the application of determinism to human behaviours.

From what we have discussed so far, it is evident that the metaphysical outlooks of societies are fundamental to the perception of human nature which underpins human development theories. The arena of the sacred and how people conduct themselves in this regard are products of these insights gained on human nature. For instance, religious leaders and propagators of various faiths do so depending on the perception of human nature that undergirds their behaviour. A typical existentialist who believes in crass freedom or one who has the plastic conception of man feels that the essence of man is manipulable and investigable. This could be said to be true of the perception of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Sartre, Nietzsche, Feuerbach and a host of others who developed the nihilistic attitude towards a subdued quest for the absolute. This attitude could manifest in various forms, namely in the will to power if we may use Schopenhauer's term, which is the driving force of the behaviour of various religious leaders. It could be stated that most religious fundamentalists especially in Nigeria do the same because of their interests in gaining political power. Every other thing they do is subdued in this quest for power and influence hidden in the alleged avowed love for God. We shall end this section by re-iterating the fact that the perception of human nature gained by humans determines how they react to the issues of the secular and the sacred. Such personality traits developed by such persons determine their behavioural modes of actions in society. The issues discussed here are fundamentally metaphysical as metaphysics is the basis and the central point of all philosophical speculations. Let us turn to how epistemological commitments influence the sacred-secular relationships.

The Epistemological Status of the Sacred Writings and the Purported Inerrancy Therein

It is evident that what a group of people conceive as true and knowable influence their responses to issues, events and entities as spiritual personality. I.E. Eyo captures this view in the following statement: "people's responses or reactions to issues, events, and entities, such as persons or nations, are governed by what they think of or how they conceptualize such issues, events and entities."¹⁸ Epistemology as a search for the indubitability of knowledge has truth at the epicentre of its enquiries. One thing is clear: there are many ways people pursue truth and knowledge. Even though various methods of acquiring knowledge as empiricism, rationalism, intuitionism, authority etc exist, our major interest here is in revelation as a source of knowledge.

Most sacred writings claim the source of their knowledge and truth as revelation from supernatural source(s). This view has two resultant

consequences: the claim that all truths of revelation are inerrant, and, arising from this first claim, the statement that since these truths are inerrant, they have to be accepted by faith without any rational probe whatsoever. In other words, we keep hearing that religion is a thing of the heart and belief but never of reason. This has founded the imbalance of the relationship between the sacred and the secular. Whereas the secular insists that reason should be the guide of man-in-society, the sacred insists that its sphere is that of belief devoid of reason in all its dimensions. As we have noted earlier, this is the root of the tension in the society as whatever religious claims have been revealed, they are never questioned. Thus, fundamentalists hide under such claim of inerrancy and absolutism of the sacred writings (revealed writings) to perpetrate all sorts of irrational and obnoxious anti-social behaviours in society. But what are the epistemological statuses of the sacred writings? Are the claims of the inerrancy of the sacred writings tenable? What is the true position of religious writings vis-à-vis absolutism and infallibility? These questions will be addressed in this section in order to get to the root of the ultimate cause of fundamentalism in societies. This will enable us to proffer a solution to this malaise of society.

We shall state here that as Christianity is our religion, we are more acquainted with the Bible more than any other scripture though we have read the Bhagavad-gita and the Qu'oran. Prior to the 17th century, the belief of divine inspiration had grounded the faith of both Judaism and Christianity. But it was the series of criticism of this notion that followed the post 17th century, which led Herman Gunkel to declare that "the beautiful myth of inspiration has been destroyed."¹⁹ What is of essence is that evidence abounds in the belief of the Jews that some books of the Bible came directly from God; hence, the Bible was organized into three. The tripartite dimensions are the Torah (the law), the Ketubiim (wisdom literature) and the Nabiim (the prophets). The divine origin of these books led the Jewish Rabbis to regard them as Kitve Haqqdesh (books so holy that they soil the hand). In their turn, the early church fathers Tertulian, Origen, St. Augustine etc. avered that God was the immediate and primary source of the Bible. J.L. McKenzie puts it this way: "God is the author of the bible; the human author is God's instrument; the bible is the word of God."²⁰

But what is the nature of the inspired revelation of the bible? Bible scholars have erroneously equated revelation with inspiration. For them, therefore, the whole book descended from heaven and because it was discovered by man, it should be accepted as such without removal or addition. Moslems hold this view of the revelation of the Koran to Mohammed. J.T. Burtchaell summarizes this as the idea that God "inserts into the mind ideas and images ready made from another world, ideas and images, which the mind neither produces nor considers but simply transmits."²¹ This posture is absolutist in the sense that the minutest of

the ideas in the Bible are regarded as God's. We shall further debate on the error of equating revelation with inspiration because it is the source of all these problems. Several theories have emerged as reactions to the questions of revelation (inspiration) of the sacred writings. One of these views insist that due to the inherent imperfections in the scriptures, the Bible is purely human oriented, initiated and accomplished without any admixture of divine orientation. Its various manifestations are encapsulated in the theories of negative assistance and subsequent approbation which entails that the bible is revealed to the extent approved and appropriated by the church.

Another theory (the theory of formal and not material inspiration) was propounded by Cardinal Frazlin. As he puts it:

The content of his book: "Ideas, thoughts, judgments. Even those portions of the contents which he might already possess naturally from his own previous experience has to be as it were suggested to him anew and in some way 'revealed' by special supernatural illumination. Only the words and phrases, in short the literary clothing escaped this divine influence."²²

The highly favoured view of M.F. Lagrange states that the only way to explain revelation in the sacred writings is to understand the co-operation of the divine and the human writer as the co-operation of principal and instrumental causality. This theory known as that of principal and instrumental causality was originally propounded by St. Thomas. All we have established so far, the issue of revelation or inspiration in the sacred writings is problematic. If we look evaluatively at the epistemological status of revelation, we shall find out that it is difficult to accept its indubitability. This is because humankind lacks any objective method of assessing or evaluating the truth or falsity of revelation. It is evident that people have received "contradictory revelations" on the same issue.

This problem has manifested in the bible, in the areas of the authorship of the books of the bible, the contents of the bible and its translations. There are several philosophical issues raised with regard to the authorship of the book of the bible. The Old Testament era was mostly an era of oral tradition with the result that transcription, collection, editing and reviewing culled the issue of anonymous editors with the imprint of their whims and caprices couched therein. Synave and Benoit capture this problem clearly as they aver that "many of the prophetic books today appear to be collections – sometimes rather disorderly collections of oracles and speeches compiled by later disciples."²³ This problem is true of both the content of the bible and the translations. The issue here is whether these translations or these translators were products

of inspired revelations. What is clear here is that the question of revelation is not as simple as it appears. There is no way that these could be isolated from human contrivances and influences. If this is true, it calls for a review of the assumptions of inspiration and revelations of the sacred writings. Before that, let us evaluate Biblical inerrancy and the notion of truth.

The theory of inerrancy postulates that the sacred writings are absolutely error free. This is derived from the view that since the sacred writings are inspired and revealed by God, and God can never err, the sacred writings are error free. Be that as it may, any attempt at the critical evaluation of the bible will see it as manifesting historical, moral and scientific inaccuracies and discrepancies. Few examples will suffice. Mark 2:26 states that King David ate the holy bread when Abiathar was high priest but the correct name for the high priest then was Ahimelech. There are historical, geographical and chronological inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Daniel, Tobit, Judith and Esther such that Renan declared that “the book of Judith is a historical impossibility.”²⁴ Thus, if the bible contains statements that are factually incongruous, why then should the bible be considered inerrant?

Several reactions have been given in order to free the bible from this grave threat. However, thorough theological explanations of these inconsistencies have attempted to be resolved by an analysis of the biblical understanding of truth. Hyacinth Ichoku brings this issue out clearly:

Part of the problem of inerrancy of the scripture is that we apply the Greek philosophical notion of truth to the bible and this does some violence to its Hebrew mental background. The west learned from Greek philosophy to regard truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei*. That is, the correspondence of the intellect with reality. Hebrew mentality does not think of truth as a correspondence of the intellect with reality but as firmness, solidity, permanence and reliability but instability, unreliability.²⁵

Whatever it is, the notion of truth is not to be relativized among cultures. The most enduring attribute of truth is timelessness and it is in order to stem this error that we postulate a notion of truth that cuts across all cultures and times. This sort of truth is hardly noticed in the notion of revelation and inerrancy of the sacred writings as presented by mankind; therein lies the highest point of tension between the sacred and the secular.

Another way to view the problem of inerrancy is to delve into the linguistic analysis of the concept of inerrancy as the source of this problem. Accordingly, the notion of inerrancy is a poor presentation of the Latin word “*non-mendacium*” meaning exclusion of deception from

the sacred books, and yet inerrancy entails exclusion from mistakes. From this perspective, there are a lot of differences between the two concepts. What this amounts to is an escapist position aimed at mediating the numerous errors inherent in the sacred writings. These errors point unequivocally to the human orientation and manipulation of the sacred writings. It should be clearly spelt out that we are neither for an atheistic or agnostic view nor for the human originated bias of the sacred writings. What we are pointing out is that due to the excessive influence and manipulation of the sacred by the secular or by humans, the alleged absolutistic posture of the sacred writings is a ruse and it calls for a review of attitude. This review of attitude is what we term rationalization of the sacred in this work. Before we study this aspect thoroughly, let us present the African in his triple heritage of the African Traditional Religion's, Islam and Christianity. We shall do this to elicit the fact that the typical African Traditional Religions position is the ideal for religious tolerance in the world.

The African: A Triple Heritage

Our intention here is to show how the traditional African values have helped in shaping the values and acceptance of the interloping religions in the continent. It is obvious, as Ali Mazrui has stated that the African has a triple religious heritage, namely Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions. The effects of the interloping influences of Christianity and Islam have been discussed by several scholars. To some, it has been erosion of good traditional values and to some others it has amounted to syncretism. However, the point at issue is whether any of these interloping religions has contributed to a radical change in the people or to a complete change, in its entire ramification. This is hardly so because the African could be described as a religious hybrid. He has not let go of all the traditional values, nor accepted all the values of the new faiths. To us, this has a very contributive influence on the nature of the tension between the secular and the sacred in Africa. But what are those values of the traditional religion that have influenced the alien ones?

Prior to the contact of the Africans with the Whites, the traditional values (ideologies or philosophies) were largely unwritten. Although there were the cunnifion and insibidi writings, the African preferred to preserve their values orally in folklores, proverbs, rituals/rites ceremonies etc. However, this places an enormous burden on getting an objective truth of our values as these values were interpreted and reconstructed in order to get to what is generally regarded today as African values.

These problems notwithstanding, one of the first attempts was made by Placide Tempels in his Bantu philosophy. This forms the generally acceptable view on African philosophy. Accordingly, the African ontological truth is based on the notion of vital force and vitalism. These

twin attributes are common to all realities, animate and inanimate, as they serve as the principles of change – a sort of prime matter. It is this vital force which serves as the principle of individuation and each being possesses it according to its nature. This means that a being is akin to the force and power it manifests and this leads to the notion of voluntarism in African ontology. J.C.A Agbakoba captures this notion thus:

Vital force is a metaphysical force, the evidence of its existence, however, lies in the specific character and activity of a thing. It follows from this that things are identified by the force and power they display; a thing is, eventually, the force and power it displays. This leads us to the idea of voluntarism in traditional thought. Since things are identified and classified according to the force and power they display, conscious beings should therefore be expected to will the full display of their being.²⁶

The implication of voluntarism for human beings is a materialized entrenchment of self-preservation in this world mingled with the perfection of the self in domination as the Summum Bonum. The traditional values based on the notion of voluntarism are a materialistic core devoid of transcendental values, i.e. values held beyond life in this earth. It is thus seen that everything about values revolves around life with the implication that those cardinal virtues of the Greek people as justice, truth, temperance etc. are not equally important as life. Names like Ndubueze (life is king) and Nduka (life is supreme) among the Igbos attest to this view. Any value that clashes with life is therefore rejected. This attitude results in the creation of what Agbakoba calls voluntaristic personality. As he puts it:

African voluntarism is rooted in and derived from African vitalism; and it gives rise to what we may regard as the "voluntaristic" personality; a personality that is based on the perception of reality and Social reality as the creation of a will that is not governed by objectivity or an objective order. Because there are no transcendental values apart from self-preservation and the projection of the ego, the voluntaristic personality tends to personalize all social relations It, then tends towards the rule of personality and impunity as against the rule of law.²⁷

What is the implication of the voluntaristic personality for the sacred-secular relationship in Africa? It should be recalled that we have established that Christianity and Islam in Africa have taken a toll on

materialism. This results from the in-balance in the materialistic ideological orientation of the hybridization of the interloping religions with the traditional religion. This is with the result that most of those who embraced the new faith have not let go of the voluntaristic traits of the traditional religion. This is true of the zeal in both the adherents of Islam and Christianity to dominate the others in all the various spheres of human endeavour. The struggle for dominion is the highest good and this manifests in the areas of power, economics, social status and religion. It is common place to note that people are placed in positions of trust in view of their religious leanings. This is at the root of all considerations in socio-political relations in Africa.

Another issue is that since the voluntaristic personality entails that there are no transcendental values apart from self preservation and the projection of the ego, all that is required is the entrenchment of material and worldly values in order to stamp the hold of authority and its activities in this world. This eschews the rationalization of social values based on formal structures and rules which are supposed to be universalized and transcendental. This is reflected in the attitude to the transcendental world. The Traditional thought envisions that the here-after is a replication of the mundane world, i.e. the status, influence and means of anybody is carried to the next world. This could be seen as the source of the high cost of the burial rites of deceased people as the display of material wealth announces the status of the dead man to those in the spirit world in order to know where such a new entrant has to be placed. It is obvious that the religious basis for this high cost of burial has been affected by the new religion, but the social reason remains. It is therefore without doubt that the effect of the traditional beliefs of the Africans is still very much felt in the new religion and it contributes to the frosty relationship that exists between the sacred and the secular in Africa. This is because there is no perfect blending between the interloping Religions and their host one. So far, this work has tried to delve into the ultimate cause of the tension of the sacred – secular world, namely the excessive human influence couched in divinity. Let us now turn to religious crises and to how these have been influenced by the aforementioned factors.

Evaluating Religious Crises in Lieu of Human Influences

It is crystal clear that most enduring crises in the world have one form of religious undertone. In Nigeria today, apart from the political, economic and socio-cultural malaise, the greatest problem confronting the country stems from the incessant confrontation of religious riots. Most religious crises in Nigeria, for instance, are either intra-religious (between Muslims and Muslims) or inter-religious (between Christians and Muslims). We shall therefore evaluate the causes of this anti-social attitude. Religions are supposed to be instruments of cementing the

secular relations in society, but it has turned out to be contrary to expectations. We have noted that various reasons account for this, namely the various conception of the beingness of God, the personality traits and the influences that undergird the moulding of people, the epistemological status of revelations and the voluntaristic personality enthroned by the African ontological disposition of vital force/vitalism. One thing is obvious, i.e. tension exists in society mostly between Christians and Muslims or between Muslims and Muslims but never with ATR worshipers. The issue now is why is it that ATR does not install violence and intolerance in spite of its voluntaristic spirit?

It should be noted that even though the African tradition manifested voluntaristic personality, it was not disorderly, and ipso facto, chaos oriented. This results from the fact that there were ethical balances caused by the regulation of the deities in-charge of peaceful and harmonious relationships in various communities. What this means is that the ethical codes of conduct were established, enforced and maintained by the deities with dire consequences against anybody who transgresses them. This entails that there was a theocratic system where the success or failure of interpersonal relationships in society is dependent on the powers, influences and dispositions of the deities. Agbakoba seems to agree with this notion when he states that:

The abuse of power by those in authority was checked by some metaphysical provisions. However, it should be said here that the order and harmony in the traditional society was founded principally in the power (the fear of) of the metaphysical entities to which communities were committed and not on any transcendental values.²⁸

Even though there were no transcendental values, life and its maintenance were regarded with utmost respect. Thus, any thing that would amount to their destruction was jettisoned. This hinging of values on some metaphysical realities (the goddess of morality) helped in enthroning tolerance, which may be regarded as metaphysical toleration. This implies that although one may be averse to tolerating the views of others, he has no option other than to hide his aversion or face the wrath of the gods. This attitude flourished because the African universe was a monolithic religious universe. However, there was a carryover of this attitude even in this period of polarization of religious beliefs in Africa.

We have noted earlier that Christianity and Islam are bereft of this metaphysical toleration with the unfortunate effect of not tolerating the views of the other. It has to be given to Christianity to be more tolerant than Islam in Nigeria. What could be deciphered from the problem so far is that there is more human influence than the divine in these religions.

These have resulted in the building of such religious personalities who couch their influences on touted divine dispositions. It is thus seen that human influences manifest in various forms ranging from the conception of God, the epistemological status of revelations and the purported inerrancy formulated in religious writings, by authors and in the implementation of creeds, as we have discussed earlier. These human influences crystallize in the perpetual struggle for domination in the areas of politics, economy etc.

In politics, there is hardly any clear-cut separation between the secular and the sacred. Most politicians now advance their power-game with their religious leanings. The implication is that there is confusion as to what the most rightful attitude should be. To what extent should one's belief in a Supreme Being influence his attitude socially, economically and otherwise? S.I. Udoidem pictures the implication of this attitude:

Even those who accept the existence of this supreme Being still have doubts as to whether all their actions should be based on divine command or not. Because these people with different commitments live in human society, there is always a constant conflict occasioned by the competing value preferences.²⁹

It becomes clear that with such an attitude, certain persons believe that all activities should be directed by religion. However, all we are saying here is that the manipulations inherent in politics are not divine but human.

Moreover, when we talk about the doctrinal foundation of most religions and the social relations derivable therefrom, it becomes very clear that there are manifestations of human predilection geared towards some levels of control and influence. A survey of most religious crises in Nigeria results from such ambition, greed, tendency for power, control and domination of others. The recent Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria was alleged to have some economic undertone. It is therefore without prejudice to conclude here that the tension between the sacred and the secular results from the excessive influence of the human in an area alleged to have been reserved for the divine.

Conclusion: The Need for the Rationalization of the Sacred for a More Veritable Society

We have set out essentially and primarily in this work to establish that the tension that exists between the sacred and the secular is the result of excessive human influence and manipulation. There have been series of manipulations by humans in the guise of doing the "will of God". In most cases, what is said to be the will of God are some tendentious

predilections of man oriented towards the attainment of certain goals and ends that could be described in terms of social motives understood as the motives of individuals, where they come to hold to the opinions, expectations, and desires of the members of his/her community.³⁰ If the critical issues of tension in the sphere of the secular and the sacred are reducible to human factors, it follows that there is the need to rationalize man's actions in these areas that were hitherto reserved for the divine.

Man is essentially a rational being; the issues of the sacred have been alleged to be beyond reason but moderated by faith and belief in order to serve the self-seeking motives of man. Nevertheless, we have observed that the sacred has been overtaken by human manipulations as it has been mentioned in the above analyses of the claims of inerrancy of the revelation of the sacred writings. It is therefore needful that we mediate the realm of the sacred with reason. There is no doubt that man is essentially rational. St. Thomas described the essence of reason in man as follows:

For all other animals, nature has prepared food, hair as a covering, teeth, horns, claws as means of defense or at least speed in flight, while man alone was made without any natural provisions for these things. Instead of all these man was endowed with reason, by the use of which he could procure them all for himself.³¹

It is noteworthy that at this point we acknowledge the fact that several people have reacted against reason as the essence of man. This idea is very prevalent in post-modernist philosophy following Schopenhauer, Benjamin Constant, A. de. Tocqueville, Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre and the Romantic Movement. Accordingly, they critiqued western culture and the liberal views of man. However, of very important essence is Cliteur's observation that this criticism was not intended to destroy man's nature as free, rational and autonomous; instead, it intends to keep man on alert against the excessive exertion of reason. As he puts it:

It is important to note, however, that Constant and Tocqueville never intended to destroy the ideal of man as a free, rational and autonomous being. Their aim was to warn us that some Enlightenment thinkers might be too optimistic... Take Freud – who... has done much to criticize the view of man as a free and autonomous being. The aim of his critique was not to foster nihilism or despair. Freud upheld the ideal of man as the controller of his own destiny. Freud merely warned us not to be naïve.

We should be aware of the irrational powers
working in the soul of man (and under his soul).³²

Let us now look at the rationalization of the sacred and at how it can foster veritable secular relationships. It was Frantz Fanon who described man as a “metaphysical being of yes and no; yes to those things that conduce to his well-being and no to those that militate against his well-being”.³³ What this implies is that man should reject those things that are against his existential perfection on earth, while he advances those that fulfil his destiny.

There are so many minute areas of the sacred that need to be rationalized. By this we mean that it should be probed rationally and not accepted by heart, without any rational inquiry. We shall just give a little guideline which could be applied across lines. We are suggesting that man should subject all the articles of the sacred to rational inquiry in order to ensure that he gets out of the conundrum of incessant crises. Any God or sacred writing that presents humans as foes to others for not believing in Him/it should be removed. This is the secret of the success of ATR and its metaphysical toleration of other viewpoints. From this perspective, the attitude of the Igbos offers us a pragmatic attitude to religion which could be described as religious pragmatism. This could be used by other religions in order to assist in eliminating the frenzy and fundamentalism of today’s religions.

For the Igbos, the essence of divinity is the betterment of their well-being through the exhibition of power and influence on its adherents. Any God that fails in this regard is jettisoned and its veneration and worship are discarded. This is manifested in various ways; the Igbos accept that gods are powerful, “but when the gods consistently fail to prove themselves powerful, we reserve the right to discard them and seek other gods”.³⁴ Thus, gods derive their potency from their manifestation through various functions. Achebe’s description of how the people of Aninta decisively dealt with their god when he failed was informing. For him, they took “him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set fire on him”.³⁵ Elsewhere, Achebe’s interpretation of the proverb Ikenga adiro ire awa ya nku (if the god Ikenga [represented as a carved image] does not prove its mettle, it merely becomes a wooden piece) is appropriate and epochal.³⁶ From the foregoing, it is obvious that the traditional Igbos accept that the ontological status of a God rests in its performing its function, namely the maintenance of the well-being of man. Any God that fails to do so is killed. This is the principle of religious pragmatism that arises from the rationalization of the sacred. Thus, we postulate that for the world to live peaceably, it has to enthrone the elements of this religious pragmatism of the Igbos.

Notes:

¹ St Augustine, *The City of God*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 88

² Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, Trans. by Peter Gay, (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 268.

³ For a nuanced understanding of the way in which specialists define religious fundamentalism, one could read Jakobus Martinus Vorster, "Analytical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 6, No 17 (2007): 5-20; Jakobus M. Vorster, "Perspectives on the Core Characteristics of Religious Fundamentalism Today", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 7, No 21 (2008): 44-65; Reuven Firestone, "Divine Authority and Mass Violence: Economies of Aggression in the Emergence of Religions", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 9 No 26 (2010): 220-237.

⁴ See Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans - A Triple Heritage*, (Boston Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1986).

⁵ Allan Richardson, *Religion in Contemporary Debate* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 63.

⁶ P. O. Iroegbu, "The Theism of Atheism: Revisiting the Proofs of God's Existence" in *West African Journal of Philosophy* (WAJOP) Vol. 5, (December, 2002): 39.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Maryland: Christian Classics, 1948) 1, 2,3C.

⁸ St. Anselm, *Proslogium*, See Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. II Part I, (New York: Image Books, 1962), 177-186.

⁹ Iroegbu, 46.

¹⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper Touch Books, 1857), 14.

¹¹ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (New York: International Publication, 1975), 175. See also Sandu Frunză, "Religious Fundamentalism and the Globalization of Intolerance", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 1, No 3 (2002): 5-16.

¹² J. Caird, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 132.

¹³ Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 3.

¹⁴ Amerigo Lapati, "Skinner and the Nature of Man", In: *The New Scholasticism* XXXVII (1973): 501-502.

¹⁵ Martin Hollis, *Models of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5.

¹⁶ J. C. Chukwuokolo, "A Critical Examination of Hegel's Theory of Development and Its Impact on Contemporary Society". Unpublished Ph. D Thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria Nsukka (March 2009), 62.

¹⁷ J. C. A Agbakoba, *Philosophical Issues in Development* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 2003), 5.

¹⁸ I. E. Eyo, "Thinking Nigeria: Psychological Reorientation of Nigerians towards Nationhood" in F.U. Okafor (ed) *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1997), 223.

¹⁹ See S. K. Sherwood, "Biblical Criticism and Modern Man". In *Lucerna - A Journal of Theology*, Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, Vol. 5, No. 1 (July - December 1983): 25.

²⁰ J. L. Mckenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), 390.

- ²¹ J. T. Burtchaell, *The Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspirations since 1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 10.
- ²² Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration* (New York: Desclee Co, 1961), 61.
- ²³ Synave and Benoit, 123.
- ²⁴ See J. H. Newman, "On the Inspiration of the Scriptures" in J. Holmes and R. Murray (eds.) *On the Inspiration of the Scriptures* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 72.
- ²⁵ Hyacinth Ichoku, "Inspiration and Inerrancy – A Study in Modern Biblical Criticism", in *Horizons. A Journal of Theology and Religion* Vol. 2 (1988): 44.
- ²⁶ J. C. A. Agbakoba, "Developing Appropriate Administrative Instruments for the African Cultural Environment" – A paper presented at AEGIS Conference on African Studies 11th – 14th July 2007 at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands (Available on line at the AEGIS website), 6-7.
- ²⁷ Agbakoba, 7.
- ²⁸ Agbakoba, 8.
- ²⁹ S. I. Udoiden, "Religion in the Political life of Nigeria: A Survey of Religious Related Crises in Nigeria since Independence" in F. U. Okafor (ed.) *New Strategies for curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1997), 153-154.
- ³⁰ Agbakoba, 13-14.
- ³¹ Aquinas, 95, 2.2a, 2ae I CH I
- ³² Paul Cliteur, "Liberal Globalism: A Defence" in Eva Nieuwenhys (ed.) *Neo-Liberal Globalism and Social Sustainable Globalization* (Leiden-Boston: Brill Academic Press, 2006), 19.
- ³³ Frantz Fanon, cited in Mohammed Babu, *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* (Dar Es Salam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1981), 30.
- ³⁴ M. Echerue *A Matter of Identity* (Owerri: Claretian Institute of Philosophy Press, 1979), 19.
- ³⁵ Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (New York: Heinemann rept., 1974), 19.
- ³⁶ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Heinemann rept., 1988), 113-114.

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