

Introduction religion  
has occupied  
academic discourse  
in



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## **Introduction**

The debate surrounding the future of religion has occupied academic discourse in religion, philosophy, sociology and other sciences within the context of post modernism for sometime.

The question that dominates the debate is whether the world is becoming more religious or more secular, or is intertwined in both. The other tenet is to be seen in the mutation of religion in a post-modern society and the influence that religion espouses on other sectors of the society (Ott 8).

Indeed, whereas some debaters are of the view of disbanding religious belief altogether, others imagine that religion is so ingrained in human history that it must thus be understood within the context of modernity as a mutating phenomenon (Ott 8).

This paper seeks to explore these debates within the wider context of what modern religion entails and illuminates further on the influence that it has on other areas in the modern world. In a way, it predicts the future of religion in an increasingly 'secularized' world dominated by 'reasoning', globalization, and democratization. In doing so, it also takes accounts of what these phenomena have on mainstream religion. It also explores other important issues in religion seen in the light of the west and East as a fundamental contrast and agreement in the future of religion for humankind. Also viewed is the gender issue in religion, both in the past, present and future perspectives.

Specifically it discusses the following areas.

## 1. Religion in Relation to the Environment

Debates concerning the relationship between religion and future ecological concerns have been on the rise, with the views that religion is and will continue to play a fundamental role in aiding human beings to sustainably regulate the natural environment (Taylor 12). Whereas a number of scholars have associated religions with environmental conservation, other thinkers and scholars alike have blamed some religions and sometimes religion as a whole for precipitating environmental degradation (Taylor, 2009).

Broadly, however, religion has been largely viewed as a significant factor in environmental protection now and in the future. Taylor (12) notes that, with the advent of debates regarding the correlation between culture, religion and the natural environment, with the analysis, assumption is based on the notion that, 'the diversity of life came to exist through biological evolution', and that 'environmental degradation is becoming increasingly obvious' (Taylor 12). This is the basis upon which he lays the question, 'Will the future of religion be green?' (Taylor 12).

To answer this question, he posits that the response to this question should lie in the meaning of the term religion, as well as what it means to say 'green religion'. Citing David Chidester's definition of religion as 'the dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms', Taylor (18) attempts to assemble what green religion means by making reference to Religion and Ecology as a field that emerged as a discipline (Taylor 18). This field, according to him, emerged with the broad lens of the impediments that world religions posit as an impediment to environmental conservations, and eventually as the acumen that religions may possess for advocating for <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-religion-has-occupied-academic-discourse-in/>

environmental sustainability patterns of behavior among humans. These two standpoints have been anchored with singling out religious practices that promote ecological conservation (Taylor 20).

## **2. Green Religious future in the context of Mother Nature**

This is definitely related to the first point discussed but has an interesting twist especially in exposing sacred association to the expression 'mother nature'. Taylor (2009) notes that increasing environmental degradation has awoken the religion outlook, both in the sense of world religions and the evolutionary theory as a 'religion'.

These are largely tied to fear of divinities, natural disasters, and environmental science, with some taken the issue of supernaturalism. However, the notion should be that all these might be driven with the evolutionary science, and slightly on natural religion. This will happen in two ways (Taylor 23). Evolutionary Science as a religion is becoming increasingly influential and it has gained tolerance among many people across the world. It is today taught in many schools and universities, however the cultural resistance that has come with it.

Further, semi-illiterate, and less educated individuals are also gaining acceptance of evolutionary science. Two is that, Supernaturalism certainly will continue to play its inherent role grounded on the fact that those who destroy Mother Nature will be punished (Taylor 23).

### 3.

#### **Growing Diversity in Religious Beliefs**

The world will continue to grow in respect to religious affiliations. Buddhism, for instance, is slowly getting back into India, after several decades of increasingly diminishing. In America, fifty years ago, most people were practicing Protestants, Catholics, and Judaists. Diane Eck has suggested America will be religiously more diversified in the years to come. This belief is that, this new religious diversity will be instrumental on communities. James, as cited by Taylor, notes that today, for instance, Buddhism, which was categorized as world religion in America, is now placed as an American Religion in school discourses (Taylor 24).

So what are the connotations of these developments? These have and continue to have impact on how business is conducted in America and the world over. Today, Hanukah, Ramadan, Christmas, and other religious celebration connoting different affiliations are celebrated in America. Studies have revealed that there is growing diversity indeed. The typical protestant's today church service is more restructured to meet the demands of modernity and to capture the notion of diversity. This is exemplified in the worship and praise styles in the church, and employing their use of technology in worship and preaching such as use of power-point presentation in preaching. In fact, incorporation of contemporary styles of worship is in the increase in America. Churches are taking on this seemingly future route because of the need to outpace others who are still stuck in the traditional methodologies of worship.

The use of electronic media is so much used in church worship today. Indeed, a greater percentage of churches are employing the use of movie clips, music videos, and computer graphics (Ott 17).

#### **4. The End of Metaphysics and the Death of God**

Bainbridge and Rodney (14) note that, with secularization and the age reasoning coming to the fore, more intellectual activity is increasingly not so based on truth in the supernatural, but ‘ conservation’ where all standpoints have the capacity to find accord. The space is thus increasingly being left by metaphysics and being filled up by new ideologies. The authors argue that for the major part, this will result to self ‘ edification’ rather than generation of knowledge. Today, the post-modern man is increasingly becoming less and less in need of the ‘ miracles’, magical assurance, in relation to God’s provision, and the notion that he gives happiness (Bainbridge and Rodney 14).

#### **5. The Rise of Hermeneutics**

Coleman (2005) sees hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, as the friendly future of religion. This is grounded on the critique that this anchors on the idea of truth. In his view, hermeneutics sees truth with confines of objects and propositions. Further, hermeneutics arguably does show that the path to salvation is not through acquaintance or narrative, but through interpretation.

#### **6. Secularization of the modern world**

Coleman (16) argues that phenomenon such as “ urbanization, industrialization, methodological-rationality, radical cultural pluralism” in the

modern and the post modern world lead to loss of religiosity, leading to what German Sociologist, Max Weber, called loss of charisma. Secularization, according to Bryan Wilson, is the ideology that “ in essence relates to a process of transfer of property, power, activities and both manifests and latent functions from institutions with super naturalist frame of reference to new institutions operating according to empirical, rationality” (Coleman 16).

According to Coleman (16), secularism in the postmodern society and arguably the future can be examined under three subset directions.

### **A. An increasing Pluralism in World views and Canopies**

According to Robert Bella, the modern pluralism entails the belief that life cannot be constructed one way and end at that, but that life has endless possibilities (Coleman 21). In fact, for churches, strict adherence to fundamental doctrines is becoming a challenge.

### **B. The loss of monopoly control by the churches over official models of religion in Society and even the individual religious impulse**

Again, Bellah notes that this would mean that no single religious organization is claiming monopoly that it is the answer to supernatural ultimate conditions. Instead, it can only be seen as one entity of spirituality just like other autonomous units (Coleman 47).

### **C. The rise of individual autonomy in religious matters**

This means that people are becoming selective on what they believe in and what they do not as far as different religious doctrines go. They choose some dogmas and reject others. This means, for example, that in the postmodern society, it becomes difficult for the churches to maintain discipline especially

in the era of globalization and democratization. A case in point is how some priests are choosing to marry increasingly and wanting to be accepted in the Catholic Church still (Coleman 19).

#### **D. The privatization of Religion**

Many sociologists and philosophers alike contend that religion is increasingly becoming more private and therefore not functionally available to order societal life structures like the state, and education among others. However, some scholars argue that privatization of religion is to be seen in the context of globalization as a strong force. This is because religion is increasingly being seen as a fundamental explanation for globalization (Coleman 47).

#### **E. Greater Institutional Autonomy of Non-Religious domains**

Bellah notes that ‘ what is generally called secularization and the decline of religion would appear as the decline of the external control system of religion would appear as the decline of the external control system of religion and the decline of the traditional belief’ (Coleman, 47).

The argument here is that religion is increasingly becoming more important for some societal sector than others are. For instance, Coleman notes that this is more so in conceptualization of tribal identities.

### **7. Battle of the Sexes in Religion**

In the past, the earliest set of myths and religion were associated to both male and female.

Both sexes were seen to contribute to religion and these were ‘ intimately tied together’ in human psyche during the prehistoric time, medieval times



and in the modern society. However, one thing that has remained clear is that leadership in religious matters was seen as reserve for men over the years in the world's major religions – Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, traditional belief systems, among others. Today, many women are taking seats in church leadership, both as preachers and pastors in many facets. This is likely to continue flourishing with emergence and continued fight for gender parity in all spheres of life (Coleman 19).

## **8. The contrast between the West and the East**

This is a fundamental contrast in conceptualizing the future of religion. The future in view of the East, for example, in Buddhism and Hinduism is seen as the 'ascension to the higher real of reality' (Bainbridge and Rodney, 1986, p. 44).

However, in the west, the future is seen as within the understanding on the conflict between the struggles of good against the evil, with the good eventually winning. Thus, for the west, the fight of the good and the evil and the ultimate winner defines their future; that is, if the good wins against the evil, their ascension to the higher level of reality is assured; for instance, inheriting the kingdom of God by Christians (Bainbridge and Rodney 44).

Broadly, the east does not seem to have an ultimate sense of conflict between the forces of darkness and those of light. For instance, the Hindu Religion posits the world may come to an end when the Great Shiva destroys it, yet the notion of the evil being trounced by the good is not clear (Oxtoby and Segal 2009). Another fundamental difference is that the West is seen as more 'war-like' religiously than the East, in terms of its militancy

antagonism. However, the point of convergence between the two is that they

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see the future as being in the realization and the peak of a 'higher level of reality'.

The difference in this however is that, the west religious psyche is ingrained in the phobia of death and the notion of a continuation of individual soul in Heaven promised in Christianity (Bainbridge and Rodney 37). Generally speaking, all the aforementioned seem to contend to a consciousness of a belief system of a belief configured about the Supernatural as addressing the origin of things, both religious and secular, concerning the destiny of human beings.

## **Conclusion**

It goes without saying that religion and the future remain tied. It is clear from the paper that religion will not die in the near future. Instead, forms and ways of belief is what is changing and will continue to change. Religion will be influenced by a number of factors and it still has the power to influence a number of issues. Indeed, the future of religion and mythological thinking must be conceptualized in a wider sense encompassing all the elements.

Religion will continue as it has done in explaining reality in a structural way. This it must do in the scope of visions, stories, theories and the character of the future, the past, and the present.

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