

## TRUTH AS DETERMINANT OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how varying religious truth has determined different religious faiths in the world. One God created all human kind and placed them in their different environments, but the allegiance, service, worship and honour to him varies due to the different truths at the foundations of the many faiths. This article does not proffer recipe for the unification of religions so analyzed which is engendered by either the myths of the religion or the historical personages. The truth we intend to establish here is the various truths with which mankind adopted in search for the ultimate reality based on myths, cultural background, historical personages or any other source of enlightenment.

**KEYWORDS:** Truth, Worship, Faith, Myths, Personages.

### INTRODUCTION

Truth according to Hornby (128) is a fact, belief etc that is accepted as true. The quality of being true, that which is true. In his position, Sissela Bok (460 quoting J. L. Austine states that, "like freedom, truth is a bare minimum or an illusory ideal". In Carnall words, truth is a quality of judgment or proposition, which when followed out into the total witness of fact in our experience, does not disappoint our expectation".

What is truth? The question was cynically posed to Jesus by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. He was not interested in an answer, and Jesus did not give him one. Perhaps Pilate view truth as too exclusive to grasp. John 18:38. This disdainful attitude toward truth is shared by many today including religious leaders, educators, and politicians. They hold that truth especially moral and spiritual truth is not absolute but relative and ever changing. This of course implies that people determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Truth is that which conforms to essential reality. Pragmatism defines truth as that which works, Jerry (31) and as correspondence or that which coincides with reality. In this article, truth means that which conforms to each faith's essential reality. For instance, Jesus posited that, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. John 8:22.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. **Determinant:** This means that which or cause a thing to happen in a particular way or which grouped something in a particular way. In the words of Hornby, it means a thing that decides whether or how something happens.
2. **Religion:** Scholars have not agreed on the definition of religion. Each scholar defined it through his own lense. We shall consider some of the definitions here as a guide to the articles topic.

Anthropologically, Ludwig A. Feuerbach explains religion to mean that, man in religion strips himself of his best qualities, his goodness, his justice, power, wisdom, mercy etc and projects them outside himself into an imaginary being, called God Omoregbe (44). Psychologically, Sigmund Freud states that, religion is nothing other than childhood mentality extended into adulthood, Omoregbe (7) sociologically, Emile Durheim posits that religion is a creation of society used as an instrument of control, Omoregbe (10). Robert Bellah defines religion as a set of symbolic forces and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.

Religion therefore is that instrument used to indoctrinate, mould and control people and

their thoughts in the society. This is done because the people could not quite understand the sources of societal remote control with pervading influence over them which they attribute to God. Institutionally, Iwe (3) states that, "Finally religion may be viewed and defined institutionally as possessing its own definite system of beliefs, system of activities and system of values like any other institution". Our concern here is how religious truth that ought to be absolute has become relative thus producing many different religions in the world.

### **Relativity of Religious Truths As Determinant Of Religious Faith**

Truth has been defined as that which conforms to essential reality, but is it absolute? Does absolute truth exist in the formation and foundations of all world religions? What about the truth of which each of the religion is established, does it conforms with the general religious truth? Or is one religious truth true to other religions? We may say that man's idea about God and religion started from one common source "After all religion is related to thinking ...." It is not that all religions actually grew out of one religion, but ideas and concepts are traceable to some common origin of religious ideas. This means that man's religions did not originate from one single source which has accounted for the relativity of religious truth. Protagoras of Abdera argued that truth is not absolute but relative. It is just a matter of opinion. What is true for you, is true for you, what is true for me, is true for me. This is exactly what the various or different religious faiths are saying which is the empiricist position. This is why a psychologist professor once said, "there is only one absolute, and it is that there are no absolute". In the words of Jerry Sandidge (25) "The idea is that since each person sees things differently, absolute truth is impossible". Therefore religious truth is relative. God and man are the measure of all things, therefore religious truth is more than one.

In this case, religious truth can be compared to the story of the elephant and the blind men. One touched the leg of the elephant and exclaimed that the elephant is like a tree. Another touched the tail and concluded that the elephant is like a snake (rope), yet another touched its side and claimed that the elephant is like a wall. All of them were doing their best to describe the elephant according to the part each touched. Each of the religions explains the part it

touched which has made for the variation in their truths.

Religious truth comes from diverse sources which determines the relativity of the various religious foundation, we find such truths in,

- i. Cultural background
- ii. The myth about the religion
- iii. The Historical personages in the religion

**1. Culture**, simply means the way of life of the people.

All religions grew from culture. In the assertions of Iwe (2002;58), Religion and culture are twin, essential, inseparable and interdependent of human life. Religion and culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is impossible for a society to have a culture without religion and religion without a culture. It is on this note that Lawrence G. Thompson alludes that; Ancestor worship is not restricted to Chinese but whereas it has usually been considered a feature of primitive culture, in China it has been the very warp of a high culture throughout the millennia of time. There is evidence of the centrality of the family cult as far back as archeological findings take us, in the shan or yin dynasty before, 1,000 BCE. Ancestor worship is a practice of most religions and societies.

It is truly the origin of and foundation of many religions. It is cultural and religion for African traditional religion and the Roman Catholic Church to venerate their ancestors. Most times, it is cultural also for the Jews to make references to their ancestors as the custodians of their religion and culture. (78).

More facts on culture as a base for religious truth takes us to mankind search for God (187) which states that, "The formation of Shintoism is almost identical with the Japanese ethnic culture, and it is a religious culture that was never practiced apart from the ethnic society". It is note worthy to state here that every religion on earth is culture based and cultural objects are used either for sacrifices, illustrations as means of explaining the reality of the divine of that particular religion.

**2. Myth** is said to be a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people .

Myth about the religion as truth of religion foundation. Myth gave us the evidence that the

ancient man was searching for gods as well as the meaning of life. Some are based on fact, while others on fiction. It is the foundation for religion as mankind (41) explains,

A reason for considering myths is that they are the foundation for beliefs and rites still found in religions today. For example, belief in immortal soul can be traced from ancient Assyro-Babylonian myth through Egypt, Greek, and Roman mythology to Christendom, where it has become an underlying tenet in her theology.

We have established here that most religions are founded on myths such as African religion, Buddhism, Hinduism and Shintoism. In fact there are various theogonies from so many cultures that formed the basis of most religions. **3.** This has to do with historical important or famous persons and their contributions to the establishment of religions.

Historical personages formed truth of religious foundation. Jesus Christ we are made to understand was a Historical personage and the pioneer of Christianity. He was promised Abraham, prophesied by the prophets and manifested and born by virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea in AD 2 and walked on the streets of Palestine according to the Bible. Historical personage and source of Islamic religion was an orphan boy Muhammad, born in Mecca in 570 AD of the Quarish clan who was dissatisfied with the Arabian traditional religion and went into the mountain to attract spiritual enlightenment to start Islamic religion known then as Mohammedanism.

Also spiritual enlightenment could inform different religious truth or faith. Jesus of Christianity was revealed to the Jews. Judaism was revealed to Moses. Buddhism has a different spiritual ray while Mohammed has a revelation from Angel Gabriel from the mount. These different sacred personalities of different cultures and epoch cannot have the same light or enlightenment. They could cause the diversity on religious faith. Islam has said that God reveals himself to different people at different times, this is absolute truth which has led to the relativity of Religious truth.

Another thing to consider is economic situation of the people, Karl Marx has said that the economy of the people caused them to use religion as opium of the people. Religion has made many to become rich and some live in poverty depending on how it is viewed. John Wesley and John Calvin both of Christianity have different deposition of religion.

We see also extremism as a major factor for differential religious truth. Over zeal and impatience make one founder to manufacture his own religion truth. In fact, the meaning of death and the nature of life after death also determines religious truth.

**What Makes Religious Truth Similar In Outlook Include The Following:** Though religions have different or relative truth, they have so many things in common. Though religions come from different sources as in sacred personalities, culture, economic considerations and place, they are common in certain phenomena. This we call the features according to Elemei, (64-68).

**Conviction:** Every religion gives conviction. This is a condition of mind free from doubt as to the existence of a being very superior and a place of perfection and bliss. This raises the hope of the theists of any religion.

**Faith:** This is the force in religion in making its adherents accept its tenet without the pre-condition of verification. The tenets are taken, accepted as true on the authority of the superior power who they believe cannot lie.

**Justification:** religions give a sense of worthiness to its followers: This condition makes him to feel real good, great and noble. This offers ultimate salvation to man. Christianity for instance promise salvation through Jesus Christ. Islam believes in justification through work, Buddhism in a seven baskets.

**Transcendence:** This means beyond the physical universe. Most religions acknowledge the existence of a superior being who is not created far above our world or beyond our abilities. Buddhism believes in Nirvana. In Buddhist terms, the basic idea of salvation is liberation from the laws of karma and Samsara, as well as the attaining of Nirvana. Buddhist texts say that it is impossible to describe or explain but can only be experienced. It is not a heaven where one goes after death but an attainment that is within the reach of all here and now. The word itself is said to mean "blowing out, extinguishing". Thus, some define Nirvana as cessation of all passion and desire; an existence free from all sensory feelings, such as pain, fear, want, love or hate; a state of eternal peace, rest, and changelessness. Essentially, it is said to be the cessation of individual existence (154). The above features seem to be rallying point where religions seem to agree. This could be said to

contain element of general truth of religions.

### **The Fundamental Truth about Some Religions of the World**

**Christianity:** This faith is founded on a historical personage who pointed to the Almighty God as the source of salvation, mankind (244). He also stated that he is the way, the truth and the light and that no man comes to God except through him. This inclusive position sticks Christians to Jesus' religion (249).

**Judaism:** It is also founded on a historical personage, Abraham, the Hebrew and Moses who was given the law, the ten commandment of God. Although there are no creeds or dogmas accepted by all Jews, the confession of the oneness of God as expressed in the shema, a prayer based on Deuteronomy 6:4 formed a central part or truth of the synagogue worship "HEAR, O ISREAL THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE" Mankind (219).

In Judaism truth (belief) is summarized into four:

1. The existence of a personal monotheistic God-Yahweh
2. Yahweh is the creator of the universe who is fundamentally good and who communicated his will through his prophets.
3. Man is created on the image of God (Imagodei) and
4. The Jewish nation is bounded as a community of faith.

**Islam:** This religion borrowed from Christianity and Judaism on the oneness of God (Allah) but added that the way of God is by submission as their truth. Mankind (284).

**Shintoism:** This faith is based on mythology. The whole truth here is "Ask nothing but submit to the divine providence". Mankind (262) and that Harmony is with gods, nature and community is considered to be of superlative value Mankind (194).

**Hinduism:** It is another religion of mythology striving to achieve maksha – this means liberation from the grinding wheel or rebirth and different existence as their truth. This is achieved through four different Margas. Mankind (114/10).

**Buddhism:** is a mythical religion and based it teachings of salvation on liberation from the laws of Karma and Samsara and well as to attain Nirvana. Mankind (154) truth-salvation can be summed up as the need to purify the mind of evil. Damian Keown (57).

**African Traditional Religion:** For the adherents to have a resting place in the spiritual world, Omoregbe (153). states that, "But in order to have a resting place in the world of the spirits and join the company of the ancestors after death, two things are necessary. First, one must live a good live and be a good person. Second, one must be given a decent burial after death by ones children. "This becomes the truth with which traditional monotheist African Religion was established.

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

Throughout the centuries, humanities search for God has splited the world into uncountable pathways called "truth" which has resulted into numerous religious expressions of faith found throughout the earth. The unending varieties like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism to Buddhism are proofs of this fact.

The variation is of little significance as to whether and how this search for God has been successful. If we try to remove the distinctions which is as the result of climate, language, race, peculiar conditions of their native land and other factors, we shall be able to see how amazingly similar in features most of these faiths turn out to be one.

As we can see, cultural background, historical personages, and myth about the religions accounted so much for the relativity of truth of the various religions in the universe. This has made absolute truth of religions to be farce. Hence, various religious truths, determined various faiths in the world.

We can see here that the seven different religions mentioned above have each its truth upon which its foundation is laid. This truth is true to each of them and none is ready to compromise its truth. Most of all of the religions claim that what they confess comes from God/the divine. This means that, "God is conceived and portrayed differently by different religions and different philosophical systems Omorogbe (25). Every religion has its history; its view of life, and its own apprehensions of truth and reality which has accounted for the variation in religious truth.

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