Religion! Guilty as charged!? A phenomenological appraisal

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Abstract

The pervasiveness of the understanding of religion and its amenability to persons and circumstances see it in every area of life. Politics is one of such areas. Their relationship with each other, given their seemingly divergent contents and orientations, has been contentious through times. They are sometimes pitched against each other, or one is seen to be exploited by the other. Religion is accused as being instrumentalised by politicians to access power through religion-induced violence. This theoretical paper seeks to examine whether religion is as guilty as she is charged in the issues of conflicts associated with it in politics and political settings. The study establishes through phenomenological prism, that the true understanding of religion, despite the inherent potentials for peace and violence, exonerates and acquits it from those charges. It invites to a rethink about the abuses of religion, to the upholding of the true understanding of religion, and urges its non-instrumentalisation in politics.

Key Words: Religion, religious, politics, phenomenology, instrumentalisation

Introduction

Differing presentations and manifestations of religion and religious phenomenon have given it various appreciations and valuations among peoples. For some (Durkheim, 1995; Brettschneider, 2010; Nussbaum, 2012; Berger, 2014 etc.), it is highly desired due to what is believed to be its true nature and value for humanity. This is with regard to its abilities at engendering meaning to the mystery of life. Religion is portrayed by this group, with veritable demonstrations, as the source of meaning, harbinger of solidarity, peace and harmony. For some others, however, especially critics of religion and pointers to its dysfunctionality (Marx, 1844; Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2006), it is the very reason for human retrogression, enslavement, neurosis, disintegration and conflicts. For such, it should be abrogated in the affairs of humankind. While for some it is a chance, for others it is a risk (Klosinki, 1994). There is fanaticism and radicalisation on the one hand, and there is the return to irreligion, atheism, as the case may be, on the other. Blood has flowed and destruction has been wrought on its account, as experienced by many. Such views are summed up in the words of Beck (2007, 12), "Religion kills. Religion should never be handed-on to young people under the age of eighteen." The assumption of such statement is that people below the age of eighteen will not be in the situation to manage the capriciousness around religious issues, and that people above eighteen, adults as it were, can decipher which way to go. The age-old criticism of religion by Karl Marx "Religion is opium of the masses", referring to the negative social and developmental control that it generates, also keeps resonating in various forms. Sociologists, psychologists (psychoanalysts and psychotherapists) have variedly pointed out how destructive religion can be when wrongly perceived and lived (Hole, 1994).

This paper asks the question whether religion is as guilty as charged! It considers whether religion is really understood for what it is or are misunderstandings overtaking its real nature? Is the abuse and the instrumentalisation of a thing, in this case religion, justification enough for its complete jettisioning or is something still redeemable about the matter at stake? The proverbial throwing away the child with its dirty bath water cannot be the way. The very many positive contributions of religion, this human reality that is deeply an ambivalent phenomenon, cannot just be thrown overboard without having to pay dearly for such. Some form of dialectic approach constitutes the rules of engagement. It would endeavour to think through both sides of the coin – the good and less good sides of the issues at stake. Such enables the appreciation of its strength and weakness, coupled with the readiness to positive change of perspectives and re-focusing. The paper proceeds along the lines of presenting some understandings of religion. It examines its individual and society dimensions, bringing to light its role in identity construction. Some contextual examples will be made with the Nigeria circumstances. The paper ends with recommendations that give hope to recovering and re-establishing the values of religion and its place in the society.

Method

Phenomenology is the study of things (phenomena) as they appear in our experience, that is, the way we experience them. Phenomenological method in research, therefore, examines the manifest structures of various types of experiences ranging from perception, thought, psychological (consciousness, memory, imagination, volition, desire, emotion), social and even linguistic activities. Its approaches include participant observation also in the form of data collection, analysis of personal text etc. Religion is a fact of experience. It is both psychological and social, and definitely involves language. As such, it is a veritable object of study through this method. And for the purposes of this paper, observation, experience, introspection and text analysis play key roles.

Religion – towards a definition

A generally accepted definition of what has come to be termed "religion"is difficult since every such attempt exhibits one bias or the other. Interestingly, when mention is made of the word, almost everyone seems to be aware of what is meant. The traditional recourse to etymological foundations to it in the Latin word *religio* seems no longer satisfactory because of attendant inadequacies. Goetz (2003), notes such inadequacy when he pointed out that philological investigations into the word and other related words like *relegare, religare, reeligare, relinquere* show the bias of Roman religiosity in their foundations. It is the bias of "scrupulous attention to all signs or manifestations of invisible powers or forces," (pg.56)

Furthermore, cultures and languages that appreciate the religious phenomenon without having to use the traditional term "religion" display non-representation in whatever that term purposes to capture. Scholars that sort for, and consequently denied such peoples having religion (Rhodes 1991; Fitzgerald 2007; Josephson 2012; Zuckerman 2016), had done so not because such peoples did not have religion, but simply because the researchers "failed to see religion" as they had conceived it should be, that is, their basic structure of theism (King, 2005) and in their imperialistic worldviews.
Be that as it may, the understanding of religion moves from human's very understanding of itself and reality around it.

This is the large field of cosmogony and cosmology, human's attempts at understanding the world as given, itself and its place in it etc. It embraces anthropology and epistemology. Madubuko (2022, 87) avers in this light that "religion is generally understood as both the awareness of, and relationship to the supernatural in the bid to give meaning to the world as given, that is, to man's experience of his environment." Every culture and peoples have their perceptions of, and views about the world – worldviews *Weltanschauungen* -, and how they try to get along with it. This has come to be expressed with the technical term cosmology. One of its integral forms is the religious. It is the perception of the universe in relationship to the divine or divinities as the case may be. Madubuko (2015, 35) establishes that religious cosmology:

> …sees the universe as coming into being through a direct act of creation by a God (or Gods) who is (are)

also responsible for the creation of humanity. The human perceives himself as a being in the world and sees it as an integral part of his being to forge a relationship to the God (or Gods) in his bid to understand and get along with his being in the world. This is understood to be the essence of religion.

From this point of view then, one may well talk about religions, given that there is a variety of these understandings, their contents and the ways they are pursued, the intensity or not with which they influence human's understanding of itself, its activities etc. It is in this light that Löser (2005, 3) gives a general understanding of religions as "…social constructs that open out an understanding and behaviour to the peoples who belong to them, whose middle point is God or the Absolute that supersedes the finiteness and expiration of the world."

The idea of the religious being an integral part of cosmology is closely knit to the understanding of humans as *homo religious*. It is the idea that human existence is inherently religious. The human understands that he is not the source of itself, rather that there is an absolute reality from which it came, and to whom it owes allegiance. This absolute reality is percieved as transcending the world, even though it manifests itself in the world - hierophany. Despite this transcendence,the human has an existential drive towards it, relates to it in order to give meaning to its being and world. Note is to be taken that this relationship is more or less initiated through the breaking into the world of the transcendent.

The Sacred is perceived to desire to connect with human beings, and so breaks into the human realm of reality. The human on its part seeks this connect with its origin due to what Eliade (1996) refers to as the irreducible presence of the sacred-transcendent reality within us. Similarly, Goetz (2003, 56) asserts that "in the totality of human experiences and activities the religious phenomenon presents itself as irreducible to any other category save its own and as definitely and always belonging to its own category and *no other*." From the foregoing, therefore, and given the fact of the need for a working understanding of religion irrespective of the fact that every of such houses some form of bias, this paper aligns with the understanding of religion as :

> "…a virtue that leads man to render to God the homage that is due to Him. As an objective manner of behavior and concrete manifestation of virtue, it comprises belief in one God, personal and infinite in His attributes; an attitude of absolute respect and submission; exterior acts that express this belief and this attitude in worship; and as required by all exterior human activity, institutions to regulate that activity." (Goetz, 2003, 57)

This alignment is based on the Christian monotheistic orientations of the researcher, even when non-monotheistic understandings may not be so allein to the understanding given here.

From the point of view of the already stated essence of religion, one has ventured into the areas of the phenomenology of religion. This approach views religion from its experiential

aspect, its components as far as are witnessed in different religious traditions, seeking to understand them the more. It is the task of the phenomenology of religion to interpret the various ways in which the sacred appears – hierophany – to human beings in the world, the ways in which humans understand and care for that which is revealed to them, for that which is ultimately wholly other (Otto, 1958). The central point then in the phenomenological approach to religion is the Sacred, the Transcendent, God as the case may be. Rudolf Otto (1958, 12-19) described it with a double character – *mysterium tremendum* (terrifying mystery) and *mysterium fascinans* (awe inspiring, fascination mystery). To these is added the third character *tremenda majesta* (awful majesty). This is the element of power, might, overpoweringness. These characters of the Sacred, one may say, constitute the major keys to the discovery and interpretation of religious phenomenon. Goetz (2003, 57) avers in this light, that,

> The sacred,… represents an order of reality, the presence of which commands man's attention and at the same time escapes him; it is simultaneously desired and regarded with awe… it possesses an essentially ambivalent character, which makes him feel at once irresistibly attracted by its grandeur and frightened by its superiority.

A typical example of the playing out of this can be seen in the biblical account of the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-6).

To the extent that phenomenological approach to religion goes for establishing what religion is and the experience of it, it could be said to belong to the traditional substantive theories of religion as differing from the so-called functional (reductionist) theories of religion. The later focuses on what religion does. But the phenomenological approach differentiates itself from the officially substantive positions on the note of the experience of religion. This is in the fact of its understanding of the expression of religion as humans' attempt to find meaning, to escape meaninglessness (Pals, 1996) through recourse to the transcendent. As such, it could be argued that the two groups of theories – Substantive and Functional theories – find some coming together, to some extent, in the phenomenological approach. It is in this merger that the issue of religion in relation to the individual and the society, albeit, politics surfaces. Before this issue of relationships, however, one may assert the natural neutrality of religion given its object.

Human's conception of the superiority of the reality it is involved with, a reality that is beyond the control of human's will and all the forces of nature, enables it to evolve an attitude of accepted dependence and correspondent respect. At this subjective level, the human is obedient and correspondent. As such religion, for what it really is, should and does afford serenity. However, as soon as religion gets away from the subjective, from the internal to the social and the external, respectively, a movement it necessarily must have to make, issues begin to emerge.

Religion – Individual and Society dimensions – Politics

There is no gainsaying that religions have social aspect. Indeed there is interdependence between religions and society via the individuals that make up the society. Löser (2005) already regarded it as "social constructs", and this is especially in the realm of expression. The expression referred to here is not in the areas of religious features like rituals, priesthood, prophetism etc. It is rather in the aspects of conduct. Goetz (2003) maintains that the social expression of religion is so important because for the religious experience of individuals to really become a religion, an institution to be reckoned with in history, other individuals must participate in it. This is where the 'spirits' begin to part ways. This participation exposes religion to some dangers of vitiation.

Religions always have strong influence on human beings, beginning with their worldviews, their value systems and ways of doing things. Power and belief, political decisions and religious sensibilities are often closely connected. This is the area of politics, generally understood as the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, forms of power relations among peoples, individuals. Since religions aid the discovery of meanings and the escape from meaninglessness, religious worldviews bear much influence on political discourse, convictions and practices.

Religion begins to depart from just being an inner, peaceful spiritual attitude of individuals. It shows itself as a power that intends to, and really does determine reality. This is where not only the immanent conflict potentials but also the real conflict potentials of religions begin to emerge. The coming to be of cultural circumstances and identities has a lot to do with religions. Religions are integral parts of cultures, and constitute the engine for cultural developments. Having become the agents of horizons of meanings, religions determine cultures, and cultures, in turn, have enormous influence on politics. It thus becomes a veritable instrument in identity construction (Seul, 1999).

Cultures and cultural circles are not always in agreement with one another. They often relate to one another as rivals, rivalries that have actually led and still lead to real wars. The role of cultural circles in today's politics around the world, and in Nigeria in particular, and the conflicts that have ensued and ensues therefrom, is too obvious to be overseen. The West versus the rest of us conflicts, the West - China conflicts, the West – Arab/Islamic world tensions, et cetera, all hang around the different cultural identities generated and perpetuated by value systems founded on religious orientations. This is very well-captured by Huntington (1998). In his words, "Culture and cultural identities, and in the highest levels, the identity of cultural circles are today responsible in the world for the standards of coherence, disintegration and conflict." (Huntington, 1998, 19) The most elementary question, "who are we?" is responded to with recourse to place of origin, religion and religious groups, language history, values, customs and traditions, and no longer from the points of view of ideology, politics or economy (Huntington, 1998)**.** A radical

presentation of such segregative identification is found in Michael Dadins work, *Dead Lagoon*, as cited by Huntington (1998, 18) "Without real enemies, no real friends! If we do not hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are."

In the Nigerian circumstance, for instance, it is observed that religions determined and still determine the very polity Nigeria itself, and the political givens in it. It is always about the Muslim – Christian differences, Muslim-North and Christian-South conflicts. The foundations were laid by the deep socio-cultural differences of the many peoples that got forced together by the British colonialists to make up a nation of their interest**.** There were no negotiations, no consultations with the pre-colonial ethnic nationalities before this forced marriage was forged. It thrived and thrives on the concessional privileges granted to the north against the south, privileges that have kept being widened and multiplied almost without end.

Earlier than 2015, some form of consideration of the sensibilities of the nationalities in the management of the nation was written large (Adeniyi, 2017). Under the administration of President M. Buhari, such considerations have been thrown overboard with some unprecedented impunity. The availability or not of development opportunities (both individual and regional), education, the leadership of the nation, the taking-up of political, economic and administrative positions etc. are spelt out along these lines. While the Muslim-North enjoys monopoly of every opportunity to betterment, the South, and especially South-east writhes in marginalization upon deprivation. Clear examples are shown in the appointment of service chiefs in the security apparatus of the nation. For many years, until the appointment of General Lucky Irabor as Chief of Defense Staff on 26th January, 2021, President Buhari appointed only muslim officers from the North to those positions. Pluralism and federal character requirements for such positions were jettisoned (Akhigbe, 2017).

In the current run-up to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the choices of candidates in the leading political parties, the chances the candidates are expected to have or not in the elections, the spread of voters etc. are all determined by religio-cultural considerations. The Muslim-Muslim ticket choice of the All Progressive Congres (APC) showcases this. Merit is often sacrificed on the altars of such considerations. Leadership, this utmostly important factor in the life of a complex nation like Nigeria, is made an issue of turns and not of competence. Ineptitude and mediocrity are enthroned (Olaopa, 2022). The country is at the precipice of collapse, no thanks to religio-cultural exclusions.

Ihne (2009) advances some of the reasons for the immanent conflict potential of religion. They include: 1) Basic axioms of religions often do not admit critical reflections over their validity, even while they determine how reality is perceived and actions are regulated etc. They are merely believed. Thus there are more or less no rational religious axioms. Rather we have rational statements about the religious. 2) From the pragmatic-political perspective, religions' immanent potentials for conflict issues from their penchant to enforce the immunity of their axioms from radical reflection through religious ceremonies. Should the ceremonies be threatened with critical enquiries, authority and power are brought to bear to force it down the throats of the critics. Conflict is bound to ensue. 3) Moral statements that recommend what should be done are made immune from criticism. This brings in some form of arbitrariness.

But the actual conflict potential of religions is very obvious. Many ethnic motivated conflicts are hidden culture and religious conflicts. Part of the reasons is the claim of absolute truth that characterises most religions. This leads to irreconcilable conflicts as each seeks to justify its claims. This gets often abused and instrumentalised by opportunistic elites for the moblisation of the masses. They constitute weapons in the hands of violent-ready politicians as targeted strategy of instrumentalisation. Cavanaugh (2009), challenging the conventional wisdom, which he called a „legitimating myth", that religion has a dangerous tendency to promote violence, rather argues that it is the political configurations that bring such about. Similarly, Hasenclever (2009), however, insists that the risk of war in a society is not essentially influenced by her religious structures. In her opinion, economic and political factors are responsible for such.

Economic crisis and scarcity bring about conflicts in distribution, and leads the state to loss of control and armed opposition. Such situations are exploited by political elites who then interpret their religious traditions as strategy for the mobilisation of followership and legitimisation of violence. Juergensmeyer (2017) sharing similar view, identifies patterns within the cultures of violence perpetrated with links to religion. According to him, religious terrorism and violence are undertaken not only for strategic reasons, but also to accomplish a symbolic purpose.

Singling out the often-asserted conflict potential of Islam, for instance, Hasenclever (2009) rather believes that there are other major reasons than religion that leads to such vulnerability in Islamic states, namely, weakness of the state, economic crisis and political discrimination. These provide opportunity structures that then get exploited for the outbreak of armed conflicts. True as her views may be, the cacophony of instructions in the Quran regarding relationship with and to "unbelievers", as Islam is wont to refer to non-Muslims, tend to prove otherwise. The very name "unbelievers", strongly inscribed in Islamic consciousness over and against non-Muslims, says volumes about the "no love is lost" regard and treatment for non-Muslims. Critical voices to the foundations of such attitude are often unwelcome (Abdel-Samad, 2015).

This is where religion comes to the fore, given the abuse and instrumentalisation of its escalation potentials. People are often fired-up through faith slogans, and made ready to fight for their faith-convictions. The mobilisation power of religion, according to Hasenclever (2003, 177), is connected to the fact

that dogmas are non-negotiable, and people get segregated from or integrated to others on such grounds. Faith-convictions then generate readiness to sacrifice for the faith in the in-group as well as suspicion against the out-group. This is exactly what the political elites cash into, and load up secular conflicts with religious sensitivities in order to reach their goals.

Continuing in the context of Nigeria again, in recent times, in the face of the up-coming 2023 general elections in which Muslims wish to retain power despite the abysmal failure of the incumbent APC-Buhari led government, a number of Muslim political elites and religious leaders are not shying away from calling out followers to regard the presidential election as jihad (Sahara reporters, January 6, 2023 https://saharareporters.com). They insist that it is an opportunity to perpetuate the hegemony of Islam over the rest of the land through voting the APC party despite floating a muslim-muslim ticket. Nigeria is notorious in the political instrumentalisation of religious differences.

As Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from the South-west Nigeria, became president in 1999, the elites of the muslim-north became so jittery, and threatened the radicalisation of the followers. Sharia was introduced in some states in the north, making for different governments and rules in the one supposedly souvereign country. Threats and pockets of persecutions were witnessed. They were made means of blackmail for the administration in order to get some compromises. What else would have fired the enormous resistance to Goodluck Jonathan's immediate takeover of the reins of power at the death of his principal Umar Musa Yar' Adua if not the politicisation of Islam? The emergence of the All Progressive Congress as a political party and the conglomerate opposition to the PDP-Jonathan led administration is not far from the muslim-north's bid to wrest power from the south, and retain it for as long as it takes (Adeniyi, 2017).

The plague of banditry currently ravaging the nation is alleged to be Islamic mercenaries imported at the heels of the 2015 presidential elections to make the land ungovernable for President Jonathan, should he win the elections. Fortunately or unfortunately, things played out differently from what was conceived. The bandits have made governance a hell for this administration, exposing immense weakness and security breaches, loss of lives and property. At some point, they became so audacious as to reportedly issue open threats to President Buhari and Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna state (Adelakun, 2022).

Hasenclever (2003, 179-180), however, observes that even though the enrichment of conflicts with religious dimensions heightens the risk of esclalation of the conflict, increases the intensity of violence, it, however, does not follow that all violent conflicts have religious sources. True that religion can easily be instrumentalised, and political elites know too well how to take advantage of this. They give violent strategies

religious legitimisation, and mobilise societal support through religious messages. He maintains that for such to be the case there are prerequisites. The hub is the availability of the fundamental readiness for such instrumentalisation in the masses. If the masses addressed possess the readiness to accept the religious interpretation of political process and believe the rhetoric of mobilization offered them as something meaningful to them, then the circumstance becomes very fruitful for the abuse and instrumentalisation of religion. The replete availability of these prerequisites in Nigerian settings is shocking. In some climes, politicians are looked upon as the bastion of hope of their settings, as it were, father of and provider for all in the constituencies. Having amassed so much money from misappropriating public funds and opportunities, whatever money would do is at their disposal in the face of the immense poverty of the masses. In the Nigerian political setting where hunger has been instrumentalised, what would people not do to have something to eat, even if for that once. Coupled with the reigning gullibility in the masses, they are easily hoodwinked and manipulated by the "flying horse" promises of the politicians in the name of belongingness to one religious group or the other. These put religion in bad light, so much so that many consider it a scam.

Any hope for religion? Recommendations

This question leading towards conclusion dares to point out that the kern of the demonisation and disrepute of religion has little or nothing to do with the fact of religion itself. Its object – the Transcendent and relationship with or to it - is clearly not abhorrent. The problem is rather with the intrepretations given it, its abuse and instrumentalisation by people who apparently have other interests than the true relationship with the Transcendent. From its origin, found in human's quest for meaning in the world as given, it is needed. Its vulnerability to abuse and instrumentalisation should not blank out its enormous value. An important area that has often been neglected and underestimated is the peace potentials of religions. Examples abound of faith-based organisations that have played immense roles in political movements, and who fought and fight, albeit without violence, against injustice and oppression. They did and do still on the grounds of their faith convictions.

Such personalities like Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King jnr., Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama etc., have left, in this regard, enviable footprints in the sands of time. The role of religious leaders and faith communities in bringing about the end of bloody conflicts, initiating and consolidating peace initiatives cannot be over-emphasized. A typical example is the role of Great Ayatholla Al-Sistani in summer 2004 in breaking the backbone of the rebellion led by the Iraqi militant preacher, Muqthada al-Sadr. He had gathered his followers in a mosque, and for three weeks long fought the Americans and the allied forces. He almost proved indomitable until Al-Sistani openly and clearly reminded him and his followers that their armed resistance and possession of the mosque was actually against the norms of Shiites. The resistance got broken through those

clear words of a religious leader worth the name, and Iraq knew some peace. One can imagine the great peace the world would have if religious leaders in those crisis points of our world and settings rise up to their vocations and office, and tell their followers in clear words what a disservice they are doing their religions through their instrumentalisation for the legitimisation of violence and conflicts. How heartbreaking then it becomes, when experiences show that sometimes the so-called leaders even feed the fires of such bloody exchanges directly or indirectly!

One of the greatest weapons religions have in their hands for the urgent restoration of their dignity, for purging themselves of the demonisation they are suffering in the social space is what may be termed "votarisation". This is in the sense of the adherents living up to the demands of the Transcendent that religions propagate. This concerns both the leaders and the led, politicians and the masses alike. One may dare to say that the religions will not have problems with one another if their business is only about the object of religion. It is the politicisation of the religious that brings about the abuse and instrumentalisations of religion, making it lose its face in the social space.

While some religions consider political manouvering an integral part of their *raison d'etre*, some others seem to propagate political aloofness as defence of their other worldliness. Such extremes do nobody any good. Virtue stands in the middle. Man is *homo politicus*. As such his search for meaning in the world as given does include the organisation of his *polis* even in the light of the Ultimate. In the involvement in the organization of the polis, religion, the church must not lose itself. Religion, Church and State can and should be friends, encouraging and checking each other. They must never be bedmates. For when they become bedmates, religion, Church gets used and kicked away at the end. On another note, one who regards him/herself as creature of the Ultimate being God, Allah, Father of all that there is, should not see any reward or gain in killing, harming or oppressing fellow human creatures. One who calls the Transcendent the Merciful should votarise the mercy attribute of the ultimate being and object of one's religion.

An agent of votarisation is proper religious upbringing in particular, and proper education in general. This is a veritable weapon against radicalisation and instrumentlisation, on the one hand, lability and imbalance on the other. It affords the knowledge that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive, enables enlightened and critical approach to doctrines, tenets etc., and leads to responsible religiosity and religion. For Hans Küng (1993,11-12), the task of proper religious education is about the generation of fundamental trust *Urvertrauen und Geborgenheit*, the communication of a healthy God-image. It brings about the acceptance of oneself without regression, responsible getting on with religious symbols and rituals, offering spiritual orientations for daily living and unconditional ethical standards. It should be a learn-process, a way of living that is dignifying.

As societies are becoming more and more pluralistic in culture, religions and orientations, proper religious education becomes a panacea for the inherent tensions in such multifaceted relationships. It enables the openness of religions to one another, assists religions in addressing the above-mentioned immanent conflict potentials they are imbued with. Such would rather enable their peace potentials to become actualised. The Fathers of the Vatican II in recognition of this truth declared that "All men (and women) of whatever race, conditions or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of the individuals, adapted to their ability, sex and national traditions, and should be conducive to fraternal relations with other nations in order to promote true unity and peace in the world. True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of the society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share." (Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1) They were also inspired to release the document *Nostra aetate* – The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, opening out to the truths found in order religions and overcoming the narrowmindedness of former times.

Any religion that is foreclosed to enlightenment, to the demands for explanations, that abhors critical disputations and dialogue, may well find another name for itself. Through proper religious education the credibility of religions and religious leaders, of politicians in religious circles etc., is established and enabled. They will be followed as and when due. Those interpretations that generate abuse and instrumentalisation will no longer have sway. Our earth will be made safer and more habitable. Union with the Transcendent at its time gets assured. What else would "Thy kingdom come" mean!

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