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## RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper commences with the definition of religion and secularization. It further examines the four ways by which secularization may manifest itself and finally it dwells on the causes of religion and secularization.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Secularization is a social concept. It means that the influence of religion in all areas of social life is steadily diminishing. While in western societies secularization is measured by the decline of participation in religious worship and religious beliefs, in Nigeria, secularization operates in “having a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Nigeria believe much in church attendance, prayer meetings, fasting, praise and worship, tarry nights and all church sacraments. They also believe in the Holy Trinity and in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. However, except in few cases, people’s lives remain largely unchanged.

There is hatred, bitterness, robbery, dishonesty, murder, corruption and all forms of evil in church, government, civil service, market places, village development unions etc. secularization may manifest in four of the following ways:

The decline in the influence of the church on political affairs-the church has no voice on the character and integrity of those who take up the machinery of government. They are selected on the basis of secular constitutions and secular laws without recourse to what the Bible teaches (Deuteronomy 17).

There is growing lack of interest in religious customs and practices-most men do not know why they should seek to one wife or reserved sex only for marriage. Family planning is a norm such that couples today adopt drastic family planning measures such as female sterilization and male sterilizations either to space or stop having children contrary to divine injunction to be fruitful and multiply.

Less readiness to order everyday life in religious terms, e.g. there is a more favourable attitude toward divorce, abortion, single parenthood, pre-marital sex, secret cult membership, drunkenness, smoking, violence and murder contrary to religious teachings.

Adoption of non-religious explanation for events e.g. infertility is no longer seen as resulting from a curse from the gods but as a result of genital malformation and other disease conditions. In addition, transfer of schools from missions to government implies decline of moral and religious instructions.

In many parts of the world, Marxist beliefs tend to offer a materialist and anti-religious philosophy. Among the elites, materialist science has emerged as a secular world view which appears to provide a lot of answers to things that made man religious according to Max Weber, the fundamental question of religion is has life any meaning? But science seems to offer man good health through medical science, information about the world through discoveries internet, radio and television, man flies to the moon through rockets: All Kinds of food are bottled and canned.

There is much prosperity making people especially in the developed world to depend less and less on God. Sports, sex, films, business, money, automobile and travels are seen as the greatest sources of pleasure and appeal to modern man and Nigerian rural communities are being bombarded by these strong waves of cultural change.

### **Causes of Secularization**

The crucial question is this, why such degree of decline in religion? The decline in religious beliefs and practices-secularization has been attributed to intellectual, social and political factors by sociologists and may be summarized as follows:

The growth and expansion of non-sectarian and non-religious education. Science is seen as ultimate in finding solutions to human problems. Except in the remotest rural communities, many Nigerians have to meet the intellectual competition of modernity as the youth who have acquired Western style education adopt strange life-styles-co-habitation, strange hair styles, strange dressing patterns, strange films and music.

The consequence of that though both traditional and universal religions (Christianity, Islam etc.) are still very powerful, non-religious beliefs, attitudes and practices are also very common among educated men and women.

As Bloom and Ottong (1987: 153) have observed, the modern world appears too complex and with too many problems for religion or magic to offer effective solution. There is a declining confidence in the efficacy of religious doctrine or ancestral spirits to solve the multifaceted social problems.

Poverty, inequality, hunger, endemic illness and disease, natural disasters, social upheavals/conflicts demand socially planned solutions. Such solutions require administrators trained in social science and policy science in techniques of analyzing problems, formulating solutions and monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions. Belief and goodwill are not enough given the success of modern science in preventing infant mortality than appeals to ancestral spirits.

In many countries today including Nigeria, the emphasis is on the separation between church and state. In Nigeria despite the missionary success of Christianity and apparent success of political Sharia, the government has reaffirmed the secular nature of the state. Consequently, individuals and groups rather tend to depend on ethnic affiliations than religion for political power.

The religious life which Durkheim stressed should be carried into secular duties by individuals is separated from matters and interpersonal relations. A high court judge who goes piously to church sees nothing wrong in collecting bribes and perverting justice.

There is the prevailing theory that God helps those who help themselves “implied in this merit is that the responsibility for human problems must rest with humans. The belief is that it should not be left to God or to ancestral spirits to cure illness and enhance welfare. The civil wars in Africa and communal crises in Nigeria in particular result from belief that those who are marginalized, oppressed and cheated should tackle their problems and not waiting to be directed by God or ancestor. There is therefore man’s assertion of autonomy and ability to handle his problems without God.

The writing of atheistic philosophers such as Charles Darwin, (1809-1882), Karl Max (1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) have greatly undermined the influence of religion, particularly in the developed world, Karl Marx saw religion as the opium of the people and instrument of oppression.

Darwin tended to debunk the creation story with his emphasis on evolution.

The materialistic nature of the Nigerian society is also a very strong factor bringing about secularization. The average Nigerian, believes that the only successful man is the one who has money and has acquired much property-house, cars etc. so, the Machiavellian ideology of using dubious means to make money pervades the psychological structure of an average Nigeria. So despite what people hear from the pulpit, read in books, tracts, watch on television screens in the name of religion, it does not stop them from being dishonest, demanding and receiving bribes, cutting corners and adopting all the illegal methods of acquiring wealth.

Having consciences paralyzed by deliberate evil doing, spiritual purity and moral uprightness which are thrown to the dust bin. Unapproved worldly methods are used to get along and as such the church man or woman except in few cases is just the same as his or her next door neighbour in character and conduct who does not go to church or have a shrine.

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