



# Religion amidst Tares and Weeds: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Hegemony of Nonreligious Movements and Scholarship on Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## ABSTRACT

Religion is an influential and resilient phenomenon that parades no cryptograms of decline. It incites the deepest obligation, emotion, sharp action, strong dialogues and study for practitioners, opponents and fence-sitters. Any anthropoid who is familiar with the world around them understands that religion is a powerful probing phenomenon that demands better understanding through inquiries. Despite the force of religion, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has observed nonreligious groups and scholars' greater influence on religion. This mixed-method study adopts a grounded theory approach to inductively ascertain from collected data, whether religious movements (RM) will survive the heroic tremor from nonreligious movements (NRM) and scholarship. The study discussed how scholars have studied religion and NRM in various academic disciplines and how the activities and engagements of NRM and scholarship have impacted the beliefs, functions and paradigm of RM. The study discoveries bring out that, though NRM and scholarship have vastly altered religious beliefs and meanings, RM will live beyond the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as far as human beings remain. The study findings additionally acmes that RM should not envision the NRM and scholarship as harmful but also as an expedient tool for favorable and inspired reforms. The study contributes to scholarship by defining religion as anthropoids' innermost instinct and craving to satisfy certain responsibilities as revealed by a transcendental being or a higher order. The study further contributes to academia with the theory that, religious movements cannot be suppressed by the copious nonreligious schedules and scholarship, nevertheless it has made weighty vicissitudes to the trajectory of religious movements, which is worth stating and noteworthy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are trapped in a precise thorny era, as rival groups have emerged and anticipate using modernity and rationalization to discredit the realism and dynamism of religion in a pluralistic society' overwhelmed with secularist philosophy. In pre-Christian religions in

Ghana, realities are made up of beings and objects imbued with fluctuating grades and potentials of supernatural power, and barely does one meet people separated from their religious beliefs which inform who they are and what they do.<sup>1</sup> Religion has captivated the minds of many of the world's arduous intellectuals and many live their lives according to religious principles; some forfeit their own lives or murder others, while others desert their professions to fulfill their religious obligations.<sup>2</sup>

The Daily Post Metro in Nigeria reports a story of the murder of Deborah Samuel a level 200 student of Shagari College of Education in Sokoto who was murdered by her colleague schoolmates (religious extremists) for blasphemy against their religious ideology and such is the influence of religion.<sup>3</sup> The force of religion is such that, intellectuals, politicians, clerics and several people in varied spheres of influence are often swayed away easily, even if the belief subscribed to contravenes the order of nature. Ghana, the context of this study has myriads of religious beliefs which often originate from its religio-cultural orientation.<sup>4</sup> The corporeal realm and the realm of the spirit are not separate from each other but are bound up in one whole and people act or carry out their beliefs thereby influencing life and society around them.<sup>5</sup> Why will a person kill or become violent for the sake of a religious belief 'allegedly flouted? Will there be peace and sanctity on the globe if one's religious belief violates another's belief or unbelief?

There are scholarly questions on how religion came about, why it is so prevalent around the globe, how its ideas and practices are spread successfully, and its effects on practitioners and society, of which RM must brace themselves adequately to answer these philosophical inquiries accordingly. Modern scholarly enterprise of studying religion accentuates the sundry dimensions religion can be conceptualized. Edward Taylor, a cultural anthropologist defines religion as making sense of puzzling experiences and observations through a belief in spiritual beings<sup>6</sup> but Sigmund Freud who is a psychologist asserts that religion originated from a feeling of guilt and is a neurosis of humanity and an illusion of wishful thinking.<sup>7</sup> Karl Max, a sociologist and a proponent of communistic ideas asserts that religion emerged as a tool of class oppression and likened it, to the opium of the people because it provides an illusion of happiness.<sup>8</sup> While some academic giants accentuate the sense in the beliefs of RM, others decry their existence and promote its obliteration.

The sentiments of scholarship from ancient times have caused a colossal uprising of NRM, such as atheism, secularism, humanism, free thinkers and others who tend to challenge religious beliefs and propose other options for life without religion or a belief in God or gods.

Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to be at the periphery of society because religious beliefs and values may be expressed privately but are commonly dismissed overtly on the basis of a healthier, modern and conventional liking. Religion seems pejorative to others which was uncommon some few years back because consensus on matters of belief and practice appears intolerable even within a religious group, let alone across religions. Accordingly, an apparently immeasurable variety of variations exists in all of the major religions, each insisting that it comes closest to a revealed truth, and this to the nonreligious outsiders; the whole thing seems like utter nonsense, an illustration of

<sup>1</sup> Kwasi Atta Agyapong, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Belief, Practice and Consequences*, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Belief, Practice and Consequences*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.38159/npub.eb2021502>.

<sup>2</sup> Claire White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Priscilla Dennis, "Blasphemy: Deborah Samuel's Parent Break Silence, More Shocking Revelations," *Daily Post Metro*, May 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Kwasi Atta Agyapong, "Beliefs in the Activities of Witchcraft in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, September 4, 2020, 281–89, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2020092>.

<sup>5</sup> Kwasi Atta Agyapong, "An Evaluation of Akan and Konkomba Witchcraft Trials & Beliefs in Ghana: In Dialogue with the Biblical, Anthropological and Psychiatrists Perspectives," *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal*, December 18, 2020, 92–102, <https://doi.org/10.38159/pecanep.2020121>.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Burnett Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researchers into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Customs*, 4th ed. (London: John Murray, 1871).

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961).

<sup>8</sup> White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*, p.25.

human vulnerability to the “madness of crowds,”<sup>9</sup> “a tool for class oppression,”<sup>10</sup> “feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in solitude”<sup>11</sup>, “opium of the people,”<sup>12</sup> and “a tool to our greatest fears for which there is no known remedy.”<sup>13</sup> The author seeks to get a riposte to his alternate hypothesis: Religious movements will thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century regardless of the upheaval from NRM and scholarship. This study surveys the seemingly contemporary strife that exists amongst RM, NRM and scholarship and examines the extent their engagements have deleteriously obstructed the spread and sustenance of religious groups. The study adeptly interlaces the passage of Matthew 13:24-30 to the religious rivals in this context; thus, making a metaphor of tares and weeds as used by Jesus Christ in his parable to represent the ‘NRM and scholarship’ amid RM in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The study as well unravels the several ways religion has been studied so as to understand religion in the context of this study and ably decrypts the impact of its synchronicity with the NRM and scholarship.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the grounded theory approach as it sought to build a theory inductively through the primary data that was systematically collected generally from 427 Pentecostal Christians through semi-structured questionnaires,<sup>14</sup> semi-structured interviews,<sup>15</sup> and focus group discussions.<sup>16</sup> Participants who responded through the semi-structured questionnaires were 101, while 100 and 226 responded through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The theoretical and philosophical perspective that guided this work was the interpretive paradigm traced from the work of Max Weber (1864-1930)<sup>17</sup> and this informed the methodical choice for this study.<sup>18</sup>

Secondary data was collected from related literature to triangulate the findings from the 427 participants in the study. The data analysis was done by generating themes or categories from the data gathered.<sup>19</sup> Both the preset theme approach<sup>20</sup> and the emergent theme approach<sup>21</sup> were used in generating categories from the collected data.

Ghana and for that matter, Ahafo Region was the chosen setting for this study, because it is an extreme instance and suitable for theory building.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the case selected is due to manageability and accessibility.<sup>23</sup> Ahafo region comprises 564,668 persons of which 279,328 representing 49.5% are female while 285,340 representing 50.5% are male.<sup>24</sup> The author used Rao’s soft sample size calculator to get the sample size of 427 persons, comprising 211 females and 216 males. The sampling strategy chosen was purposive which recruited participants who can provide thorough and meticulous information about the phenomenon under study.

<sup>9</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Random House, 1936).

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right in Niebuhr, Marx and Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

<sup>12</sup> Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right in Niebuhr, Marx and Engels on Religion*.

<sup>13</sup> T.C., Muck “Religion and the Common Good,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 35, no. 4 (2011).

<sup>14</sup> K. Morrison, Louis Cohen, and L. Manion, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed. (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Z. O’Leary, *Researching Real World Problems: A Guide to Methods of Inquiry*. (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> A.B. Marvasti, *Qualitative Research in Sociology* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Max Weber, *The Methodology of Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949).

<sup>18</sup> Hinneh Kusi, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers* (Accra: Emmpong Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> John W Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Kusi, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers*.

<sup>21</sup> M. Denscombe, *A Good Research Guide for Small Scale Social Research Projects* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Denscombe, *A Good Research Guide for Small Scale Social Research Projects*.

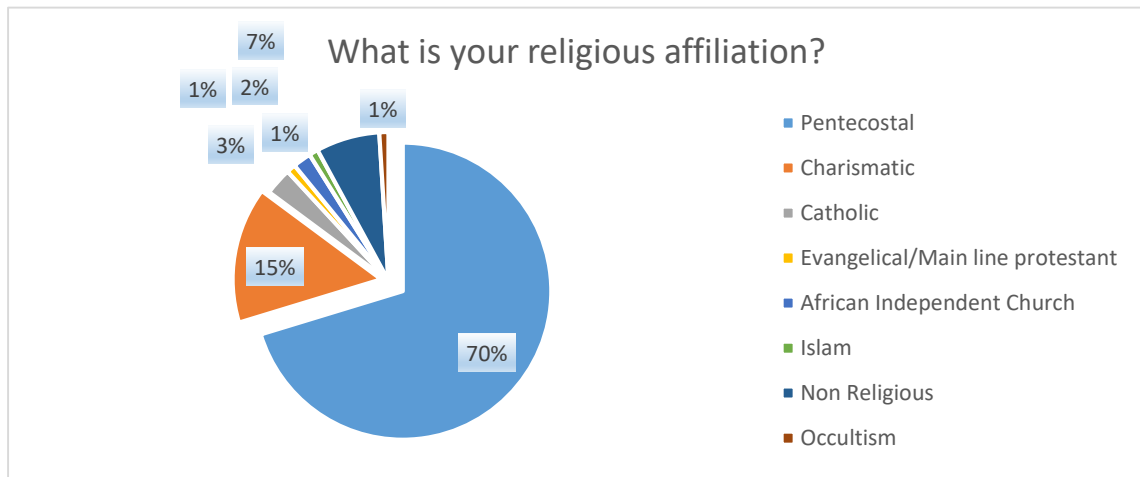
<sup>23</sup> Marvasti, *Qualitative Research in Sociology*.

<sup>24</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, “Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census (General Report Volume 3A),” 2021.

### Summary of Findings

All the respondents to the questionnaires, interviews and FGD were generally religious persons as the study is generally from a Pentecostal outlook. Data collected from the 427 respondents and related literature have been summarized below using the Focus-by-questions analytical strategy.<sup>25</sup>

The respondents were first asked, for proof of religious or nonreligious affiliations and below are their responses in the diagrams below labelled Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Proof of Religious or Nonreligious affiliation

The above diagram brings out that, out of the 427 participants in the study, 299 and 64 persons were Pentecostals and Charismatics respectively representing 85% of the respondents, making the work generally have a Pentecostal outlook as captured in the title of the study. Catholics, Evangelicals/Mainline Protestants, African Independent Churches and Islam respondents were represented by 8% of the sampled participants. Respondents who branded themselves as nonreligious were 30 persons, thus 7% of the respondents. The inclusiveness of the respondents who labels as nonreligious is critical and imperative, as the study gave the NRM a voice and space despite being in the minority.

It was also expedient to unravel both the academic backgrounds and professions of the respondents so as to depict their proficiency in the study at stake and below are the collated responses.

<sup>25</sup> Kusi, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers*.

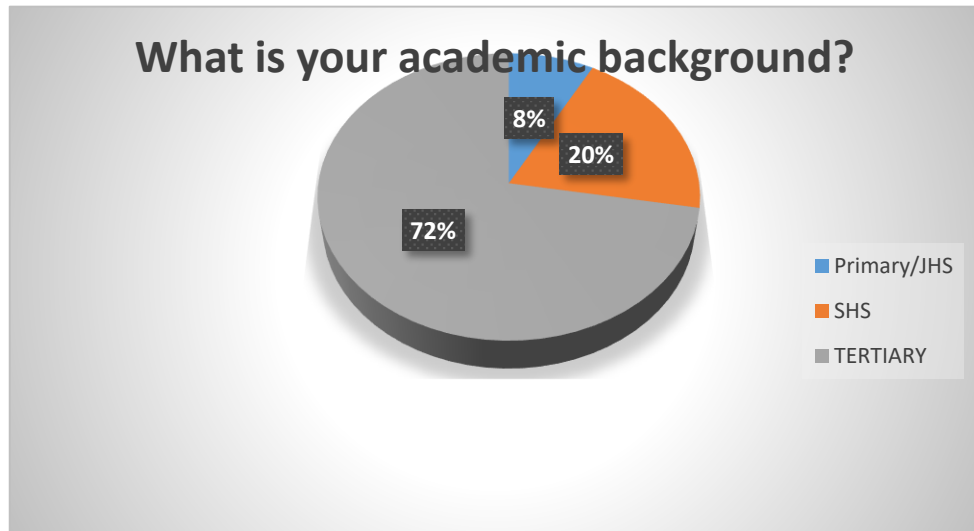


Figure 2: Academic backgrounds of the respondents

Figures 2 & 3 above postulate that the majority of the respondents have gone through tertiary education, signifying the worth and relevance of the data, as most of the respondents have an understanding and know the implications of the phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, 41% representing 175 respondents are teachers at both public and private schools at various levels. 5% of respondents were unemployed while 8% were religious leaders/ clergy.

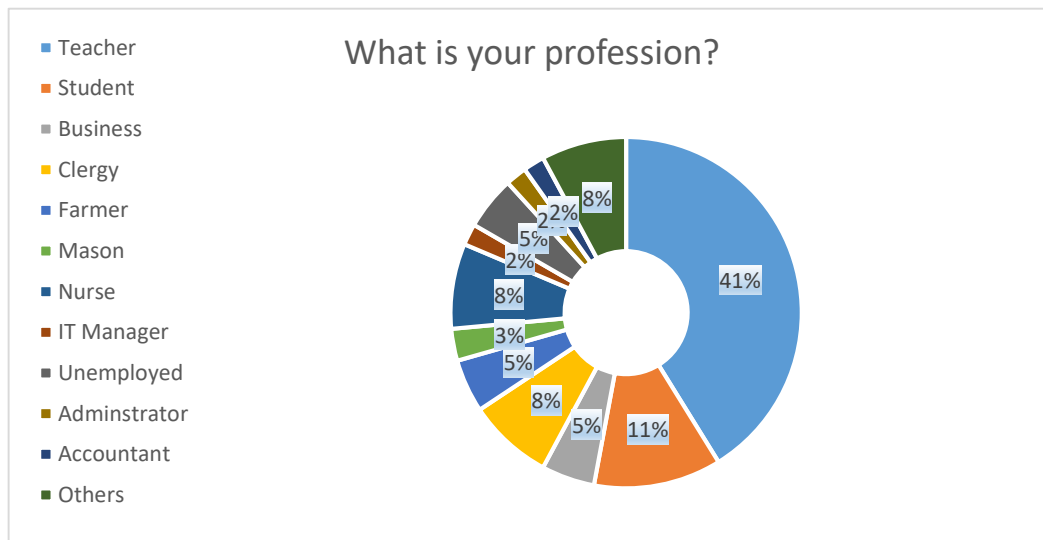


Figure 3: Respondents' Professions and Expertise

The fourth and fifth questions were to ascertain from respondents their awareness of nonreligious movements' presence in Ghana and figures 4 and 5 highlight their responses.

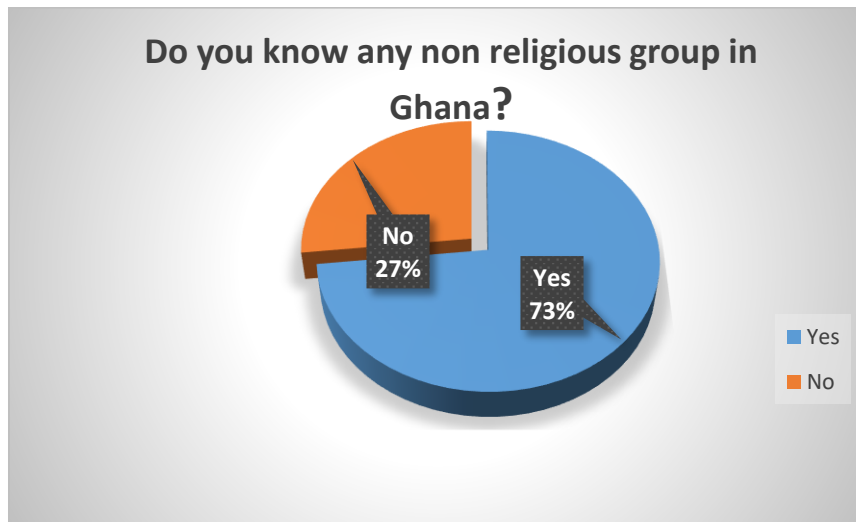


Figure 4: Respondents Knowledge of Nonreligious groups in Ghana.

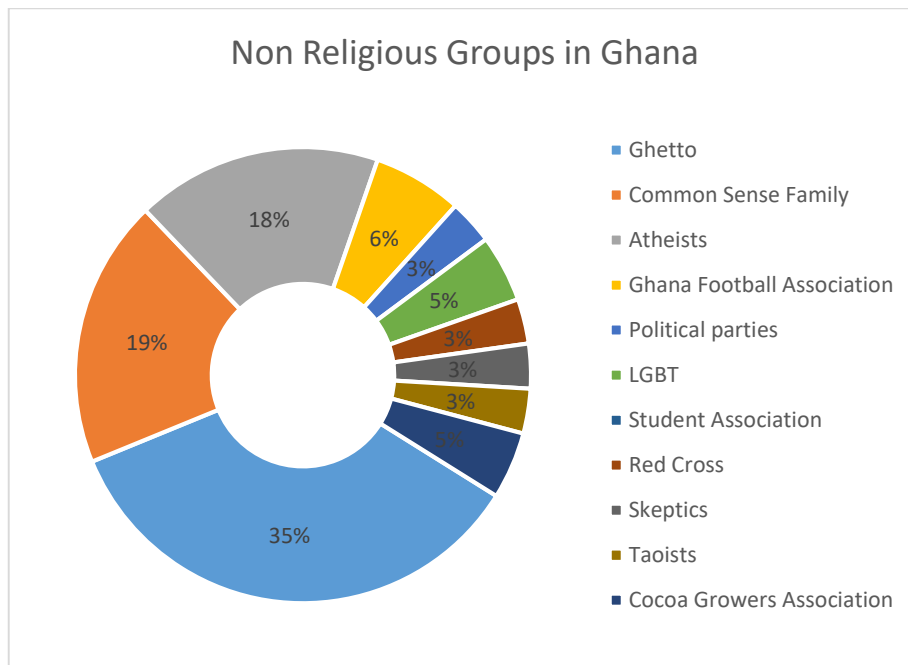


Figure 5: Response to the Known Nonreligious groups in Ghana by respondents

Figures 4 and 5 clearly present that, most of the respondents are generally aware of some of the nonreligious groups in Ghana, yet 27% of respondents said they are not aware of nonreligious movements in Ghana. Though there are countless nonreligious movements in Ghana, those known and mentioned by the respondents are thematically grouped as follows: Ghetto, common sense family, Ghana football association, Political parties, LGBT, Student associations and Red cross.

The sixth and seventh questions requested from the respondents the importance of religious groups to Ghana and their expectations of religious groups in the development of Ghana. Figure 6 and 7 present their responses. The responses have been grouped thematically.

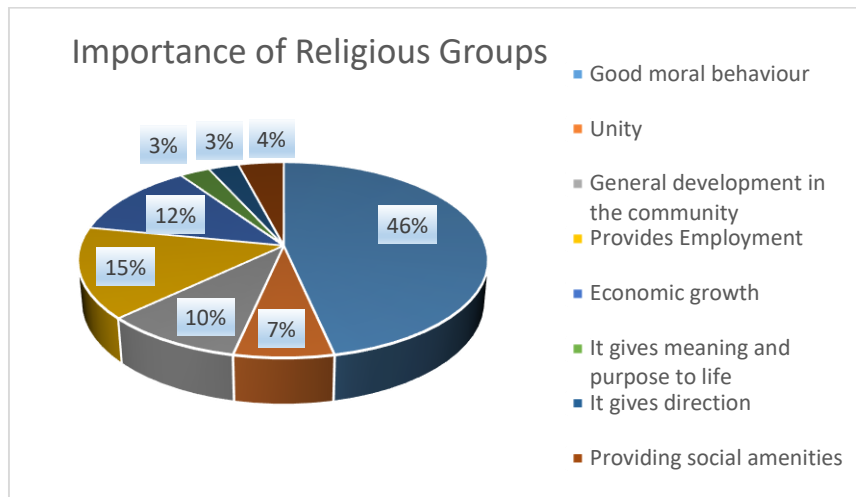


Figure 6: Essence of religious groups according to respondents.

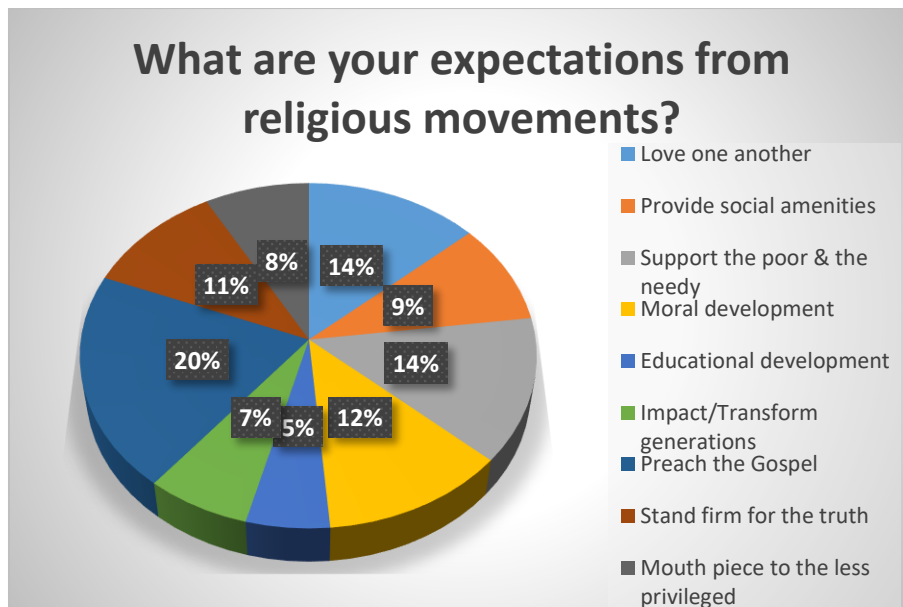


Figure 7: Respondents' expectations from religious groups for the development of nations

Figures 6 and 7 above depict the importance and expectations of respondents from religious groups to the development of nations while also projecting the indispensability of religious movements in the development of nations. Religion movements according to the respondents are indispensable on the grounds that, they are expected to provide social amenities, support the poor and the needy, establish schools, transform generations and others as captured in the chart of which many religious organizations have done either more or less and others are yet to do so.

The eighth and ninth questions elicited the response of respondents on the influence of nonreligious movements and academia on religion and Figures 8 and 9 show their responses.

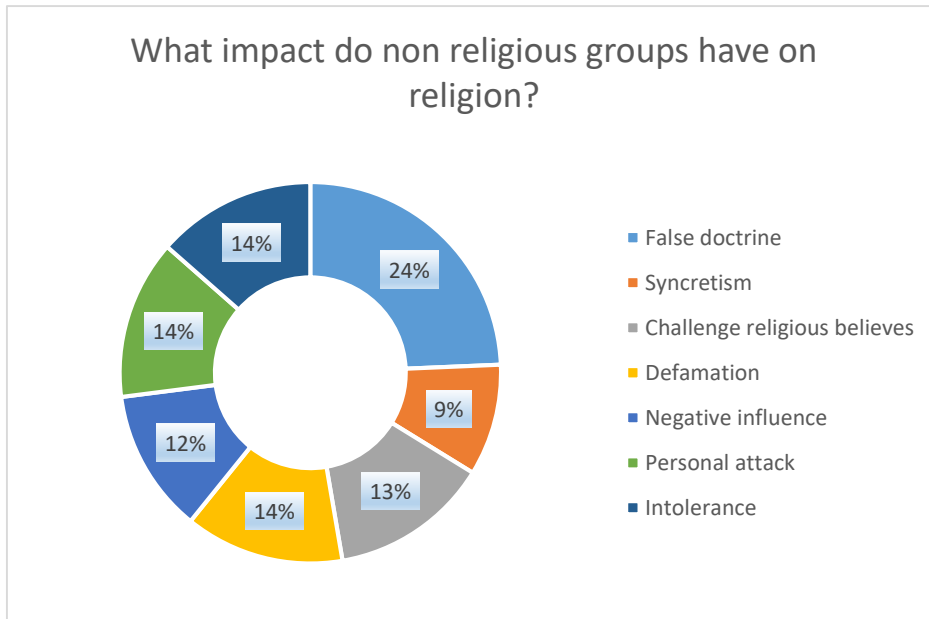


Figure 8: Impact of Non- religious groups on religion

The figure above presents a glaring impact of NRM on religion which includes but is not limited to peddling false doctrine, syncretism, challenging religious beliefs, defamation, attacks and intolerance. NRM's impact on religion according to the respondents is only adverse and as a result non-beneficial to religion.

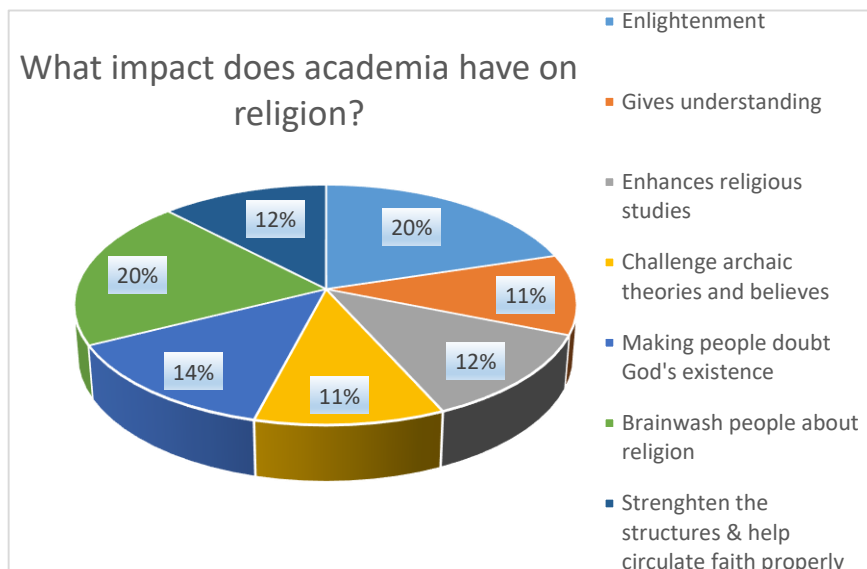


Figure 9: Impact of Academia on religion

The above figures establish the fulcrum for this study's discussions and recommendations. The respondents asserted that academics on the positive side gives people enlightenment, understanding, enhances religious studies and strengthens the structures that help RM to adequately share their faith. Nevertheless, academia according to the respondents adversely impacts religion by challenging RM archaic theories, brainwashing people against religion and making people doubt the existence and

essence of God. This brings to the fore that, academics' impact on religion is double-sided (positive and negative).

The tenth and last question sought to know whether Ghana is ruled by secular beliefs or religious beliefs and figure 10 shows the responses.

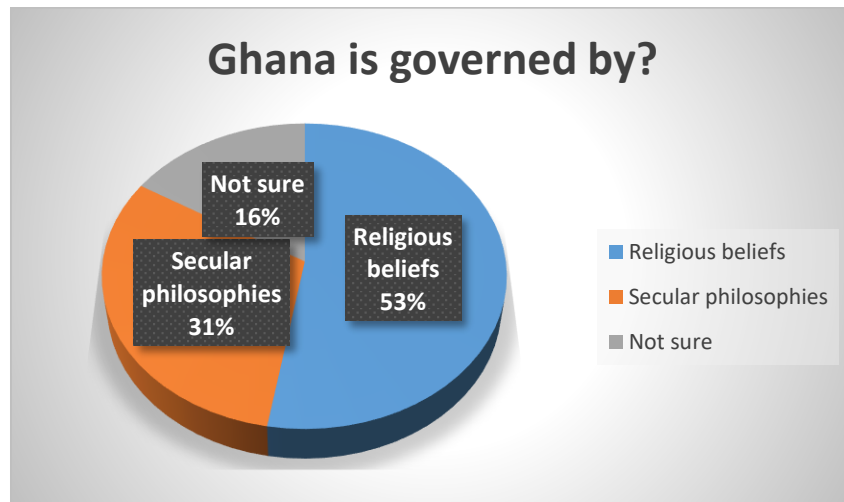


Figure 10: The ideology that governs Ghana

53% Of the respondents said, Ghana is governed by religious beliefs while 31% said otherwise. 16% were not sure about the belief that, governs their nation. Nonetheless, Ghana is a constitutionally secular state as religious liberty is sure-fire and all citizens are unrestricted to accept as true and practice any religious faith or become nonreligious. Ghana as a secular state maintains a careful balance between cooperation with RM and the separation between it and RM. Religious association according to the constitution of Ghana has virtually no relevance in the scheme of things in Ghana as all citizens are at liberty to join or dissociate from any religious organization at will and without any social or political consequence or prejudice.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussions will provide an opportunity to reflect on the analyzed data, address the research questions as provided above and contextualize the findings within theories from related literature to either strengthen existing knowledge, challenge existing knowledge or develop new knowledge in this area of study.

#### The distinctiveness of religion from nonreligious movements and academia

There is a genuine need to be able to decipher the exclusiveness of religious movements from nonreligious movements. The inference from the analyzed data clearly reveals the distinction and figure 8 shows how NRM influences RM. The distinctiveness was also obvious in the semi-structured interviews conducted by the author, as almost all the respondents agreed to RM's exclusiveness to NRM. 6% of the respondents as in figure 5, asserted that football is a nonreligious group yet others have divergent views.

Nevertheless, Andrew Singleton reports an assertion by Diego Maradona, a football legend "Football isn't a game, nor a sport, it's a religion,"<sup>26</sup> It is therefore very important to make a distinction between religious and nonreligious phenomena, otherwise, scholarly inquiries ought to treat football and Islam or Christianity equally. The utmost noticeable variables making religion dissimilar from other

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014).

phenomena are its substantive definitions and functional definitions.<sup>27</sup> The substantive definition of religion alludes that, religion is about humanity's connection with a transcendental being or the other world.<sup>28</sup> Australian psychologist Gary Bouma defines religion as a shared meaning system that grounds its answers to questions of meaning in the postulated existence of a greater enviroing reality and its related sets of practices and social organization.<sup>29</sup>

The respondents responded to this question by enumerating the various NRM's in Ghana they are aware of, as follows: Ghetto boys and girls, Common sense family, Secular humanism, Occult, anti-Christ, LGBT, Political parties, academia, Ghana AIDS Commission, fix the country movement, football clubs, Ghana Red cross society, GPRTU, Police wives association, Rastafarians, let my vote count movement, freethinkers, Skeptics, Torgbe Afede Education Fund, Otumfour Education Fund and atheism. The respondents generally asserted that religion is distinct from NRM in that, it is connected to a transcendental being, whom practitioners worship and obey.

The data collected and related literature convey the notion that religion has yonder this world dimension. This sets religion apart from other worldly systems, values and practices. Mircea Eliade affirms Bouma's definition of religion and asserts that "religion is a response to the sacred."<sup>30</sup> All religions hypothesize the existence of a divine being with whom they connect and also have a beyond-the-earthly mindset.<sup>31</sup> The substantive definition describes the substance of a religious movement. Religious movements are not only connected with transcendence but have other several important elements as well.

To qualify as a religion, there should be deliberate **rituals** to perform, **mythological** dimensions of belief, accepted **doctrines** to adhere to, **ethical** principles to guide, **personal** experiential moods to encounter, a **social** dimension and **sacred places or materials** as mediums of worship. These seven elements alongside the belief in a transcendent being represent the substance of any religion.<sup>32</sup>

The substantive definition of religion builds a theory that all movements, groups, beliefs, values and practices without a connection to transcendence cannot be accepted as a religious movement and that has not changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The above clearly makes RM and NRM dual discrete varieties. The author also adds to the knowledge that, religion should not be seen as otherworldly only but also this-worldly because the impact of the otherworldly mentality must reflect on this worldly dimension for it to be validated. The data collected from the respondents as in figure 6&7 shows that RM provides social services, supports the poor and the needy, starts schools and provides the framework for good moral fundamentals for the citizenry. Religion has a broader impact beyond individual lives as it motivates people to be altruistic and civically minded which in the long run benefits the society at large. The ethics and dogmas associated with religion help promote peace and tranquillity apart from the religious extremists who at times endanger human existence in lieu of fulfilling a religious ethos, though there are dimensions to it.<sup>33</sup> More often than not, religions can also function to consolidate and strengthen the identity of a religious community. Religion serves as a facility to promote the interests of individuals and the community at large, otherwise, its inappropriateness becomes apparent and evident. Religion is therefore distinct in that, it is the backbone of the development of nations in the area of spiritual, social, emotional and infrastructure.

<sup>27</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

<sup>28</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

<sup>29</sup> Gary Bouma, *Religion: Meaning, Transcendence and Community in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

<sup>32</sup> Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of World Beliefs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Winnifred R. Louis, Jolanda Jetten and Susilo Wibisono, "A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism," *Frontiers*, 2019, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02560> A.

## SCHOLASTICISM IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

Religion being a vital and influential phenomenon around the globe is complex and has divergent dimensions that stimulate a more analytic approach to be able to fathom and predict its realism. Almost all the major religions of the world have doctrines, mythologies, ethics, morality, social traditions, rituals, experiences and perspectives for life which warrant an ideal discipline to explain them.

The responses from the respondents as in figure 9, on how scholarship influences religion postulates that, academics brings enlightenment, and understanding of truth, it enhances religious studies, challenges archaic religious theories, makes people to doubt God and brainwash people contrary to religion. 20% of respondents representing 86 persons who are the majority said, academics brings enlightenment to people. Enlightenment in this context is freedom from ignorance or misinformation. 20 % and 14% of the respondents also said that, academics brainwash people about religion and also make people doubt God.

The data collected suggests that academics' impact on religion is double-faced posing itself as a threat as well as a backbone to religion. Academics in this study promotes as well as affect negatively RM. Scholars have analytically approached the study of religion from various scopes and below are a few for this study that were referred to by the respondents in relation to how academic disciplines influence RM:

### Philosophical Study of Religion (PSR)

A philosophy is a belief or system of beliefs accepted as authoritative by a group of people or a school of thought. Some of the respondents in the FGD emphatically asserted that philosophy as an academic discipline challenges religious ideals through reasoning.

It is the philosophical study of the logic of nature and religion. The philosophical study of religion (PSR) is the philosophical examination of the central themes and theories in religious societies. It involves all the major areas of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics and value theory. PSR comprises inquiries into the religious importance of historical events such as the holocaust and the common topographies of the cosmos. Generally, religion has its base of belief in revelation whereas philosophy on the hand is a criticism of the belief system which subjects religious beliefs to austere analysis through rational and coherent explications and validation. The respondents as captured in figure 9 assert that academics challenge religions' archaic theories, brainwash people and cause people to doubt the existence of God.

PSR is an attempt to understand the concepts involved in religious beliefs: the existence of God, creation, sin, justice, redemptions, etc. PSR further helps the comprehension of other people's beliefs and values and why they do the things they do. PSR provides a critical examination of the vital queries posed by RM: what does it mean to believe in God? Is there life after death? Is sin the source of Human Problems?<sup>34</sup>

PSR also brings out the functional definitions of religion, which have to do with the functions that religion performs for individuals, religious communities and the larger society.<sup>35</sup> Marxism a philosophical school of thought, is a well-known political ideology focused on the material realm and thus proposes a political and economic theory void of classes. This theory asserts that religion is a tool of oppression and hence not needed.

The author suggests that, by reason of PSR's rationalistic interpretation of religious opinions, they do not have the ethical exact to share precisely with respect to religious ideas. That notwithstanding, there are other philosophical schools of thought, that do not scowl at religion but academically try to philosophically make sense of religious beliefs and theories. PSR generally uses human reason to provide meanings in contrast with religion which generally gives meaning to its beliefs through revelation.

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Fourth Edition (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Religion as a Cultural System in Michael Banton Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock, 1966).

The author's data gathered and analysis presents three ways wherewith Philosophy influences religion: Antithetical, Apathetic and Aid.

### **Antithetical**

PSR is in tension or opposed to religion because religious opinions are often prescribed doctrines while philosophical enterprises have their foundation in human intellect (reason). Additionally, the focus of religion and PSR is not akin to religion, and therefore conflict may shoot in their mission to explicate religious theories. Furthermore, the goal of PSR is seeking knowledge to understand while the goal of religion is to seek knowledge for worship purposes. Lastly, the methods of carrying out PSR are often scientific compared to religion which is knowledge grounded on faith. 65% of the respondents asserted that PSR opposes and impedes the growth and sustenance of religious movements.

### **Aid**

PSR cooperates or supports religion in the sense that they work on common themes in agreement to accomplish intended tasks. Some of the major religious ideas in late antiquity were better explained with philosophical methods. PSR and religion are to an extent linked to theory and practice because religion provides the religious data to philosophy while philosophy finalizes the philosophical explanation of the religious ideas to real-life situations. 35% of the respondents agree that philosophy supports and pushes further the agenda of religious movements.

### **Apathetic**

Reason and faith are two different varieties in real terms and therefore unsympathetic to each other. PSR's grounds on reason while religion is revelatory and received by faith and therefore vertically inclined to each other, thus it is seemingly impossible to meet at any point and each must follow its own trajectory and accomplish its exclusive goals with its varied methods of carrying out their projects. Generally, the reason is indifferent to faith, and therefore, disregard for each other's methods of enquiry and data gathering is obvious which possibly leads to a lack of interest in the other. Though all the respondents were clear on whether academics are antithetical or aid RM, in their explications, some additionally agree that PSR has nothing in common with religion just as reason and faith are different. In a nutshell, whether PSR will be antithetical, aid or apathetic, to religion will depend on one's perspective and how the philosophical study will be carried out. It should be thus noted that a machete in the hands of a farmer is a great resource but the same tool is a threat and a dangerous weapon in the hands of a senseless person or a combatant. This study, therefore, posits that PSR is not necessarily detrimental nor beneficial to religion because it depends on the persons involved in the study: thus, affirming that, philosophy influences religion.

### **A Social Scientific Study of Religion (SSR)**

The social sciences use experimental approaches to study human activities and look to explicate their activities via social and cultural factors rather than religious or biological factors.<sup>36</sup> The SSR cogitates the interrelationship that exists between religion and the social and cultural world. SSR reflects on the interrelationship between religion, culture and society.<sup>37</sup> The study examines how social and cultural factors influence religion and vice versa.

It's noteworthy to understand that, a common religious activity may be practiced with variations in different contexts and thus how the social and cultural milieu of people can affect their religious practice. The data gathered by the author confirms that some practices of religious movements to an extent are carried out to certain degrees and wavelengths based on people's dispositions, economic affluence and educational background.

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<sup>36</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

<sup>37</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

An SSR represents the systematic effort by scholars and researchers to investigate religious phenomena as well as the sociology of religious participation. Sociologists of religion observe the ways in which society, groups and individuals are influenced by religion.<sup>38</sup> Emily and Michelle in their work examine how religious factors influence people's choice of choosing career, marriage, place of residence and fertility options.<sup>39</sup> Agyapong also argues that "The outcome of one's life is directly proportional to the religious belief subscribed to, which often knits with the culture, socio-religious orientations and worldview."<sup>40</sup>

It was observed in this study that, particular religious communities differed in their emphasis on the role that religion plays in everyday life. Religion to a very large extent shapes ethics, ideals, belief systems, and thoughts, appraises morality, modifies culture and influences decision-making in diverse ways. In as much as the SSR of religions assesses religions' influences on societies and vice versa, it cannot really be said that, this academic discipline has meaningfully impacted or dominated religion.

### **Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR)**

The cognitive science of religion (CSR) has a focus on the role of human cognition in religious thoughts and behavior.<sup>41</sup> CSR sprung up as a discipline in the 1990s as a sub-discipline of cognitive science. CSR incorporates academics from varied fields such as religious studies, anthropology, psychology, archaeology, philosophy, history and many others. CSR brings models to bear on why religious opinions and activities are so common in persons and why religious spectacles take on the structures they convey. CSR uses scientific approaches to the study of religion in explaining how religious ideas, beliefs and behaviors arise and persists among societies or cultures. CSR has a concern with the heroine of the human mind in religion and is a reaction against the theory of behaviorism which suggest that the behavior of human beings is controlled by stimuli in the environment based on past experiences. Behavioral psychology is a theory of learning based on the idea that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning, and conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment. The theory seems to suggest that, innate and cognition factors have either little or no influence on human behavior. Pavlov's behaviorism theory posits that learning occurs through the process of classical conditioning.<sup>42</sup>

The cognitive revolution in the 1950s was a reaction against the behaviorism theory. The mental foundations of religion were not really shaped by CSR but were revived by it.<sup>43</sup> After a long period of drought brought about by the neglect of cognition during the reign of culturology, behaviorism and the *sui generis* view of religion and culture, the cognition revolution of the 1950s provided the rain that germinated the seeds.<sup>44</sup>

CSR discipline in the 1990s foreshadowed the cognition revolution in the 1950s which gave rise to the cognitive sciences. Cognitive science argues that people are not blank slates but rather the mind is complex and influences everything it interacts with. CSR scholars accept that religion is a creation of the mind located in its cultural setting.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, CSR does not adopt a single all-inclusive delineation of what reckons as religion because it underscores that, religion is not a singular or naturally occurring phenomenon. The author's data evaluates whether a phenomenon that is not naturally occurring or divinely orchestrated will not incessantly remain ambiguous and a

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<sup>38</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*.

<sup>39</sup> Meredith Bergey, Emily Sigalow and Michelle Shain, "Religion and Decisions about Marriage, Residence, Occupation and Children," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (2012): 304–23.

<sup>40</sup> Kwasi Atta Agyapong, "Pastoral And Theological Responses To The Effects Of Witchcraft Beliefs In Ghana," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, September 24, 2020, 174–84, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ejass.2020096>.

<sup>41</sup> White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*.

<sup>42</sup> Ivan Pavlov, *Exploring the Mysteries of Behavior* (New Jersey: Enslow Pub Inc., 2006).

<sup>43</sup> White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*.

<sup>44</sup> Dimitris Xyglatas and Ryan Mckay, "Announcing the Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1–4.

<sup>45</sup> White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*.

misperception. CSR seeks to influence religion in that, it relegates faith or revelation to the background while projecting human cognition as the inventor of religion. CSR's impact on religion is the elevation of the cognitive to the detriment of the revelation on which religion is positioned. When religion reaches a phase where cognition supplants revelation, the author's analysis of the data gathered posits that, it ceases to be a religion, because the connection with the transcendental being who sets the pace for the religion is deposed. Some of the Pentecostal respondents in the FGD asserted that scholarship has deprived them of the real Pentecostal flavor and thus affirming Agyapong's study titled, "Will You not revive us again?"<sup>46</sup> The FGD respondents further said that Pentecostal practices such as speaking in tongues, prophecies, miracles, signs and wonders have been relegated to the background because it does not make sense in the face of human cognition. The author asserts that to an extent the assertion is true but should not be presumed holistically as such, because scholarship through its cognitive prowess has helped explain most of religion's complicated queries. Consequently, methodically compiled doctrines of religious movements are no exceptions to the fruits of scholarship.

### Phenomenological Study of Religion (PSOR)

The phenomenological study of religion (PSOR) concerns the experiential and practical aspects of religion, examining religious phenomena in terms consistent with the orientation of its believers.<sup>47</sup> It underscores religion as being made up of different types of machinery and studies these elements across religious customs in order to comprehend them.<sup>48</sup> The term is used in the field of religious studies to designate the search for patterns of religious experiences or practices across traditions and the practice that shows religion to be an inimitable human experience eligible for its peculiar amphitheater of discourse.<sup>49</sup> PSOR means the comparative study and classification of different types of religious occurrences. PSOR deals with a personal partaking of a researcher in the religion he seeks to study in order to appreciate the crux and expressions of the religious occurrences of the religion.<sup>50</sup> This he does through the gathering of the religious phenomena, the holdup of value judgement which was beforehand alleged about that religion and taking an unbiased position in order to fathom the realism and core of the religion being studied.

The term phenomenology was first coined by the Swiss-German mathematician and philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert in 1764 from two Greek words whose combined meaning was "the setting forth or articulation of what shows itself." He used this term in his locus to the deceptive nature of human experience in an attempt to develop a theory of knowledge that distinguished truth from error.<sup>51</sup> This view of Lambert was written in Part 4 of his *Neues Organon* published in 1764 wherein he tags PSOR as the doctrine of appearances.<sup>52</sup>

PSOR seldom have in common the following in all its studies: collecting religious data whereby certain facts are drawn from observation of the behavior of the religious people, inclusive of their traditions and cultures. Additionally, searching for patterns and analyses of the data of religious experiences is vital in PSOR. Suggestions of generalization are thereafter proposed after a careful study and analysis of religious experiences and patterns. The author's analysis of data received brings out that, the activities of PSOR, though a rigorous academic work do not have any physical impact on

<sup>46</sup> Kwasi Atta Agyapong, "Will You Not Revive Us Again? (Psalm 85:6): An Evaluation of Revival In The Context Of Evangelical-Pentecostal Movements.," *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal*, (2021): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.38159/pecanep.2021221>.

<sup>47</sup> Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, *Experience of the Scared: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion* (New Hampshire: University Pres of New England, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Christina M. Gschwandtner, "What Is Phenomenology of Religion? (Part 1): The Study of Religious Phenomena," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12566>.

<sup>50</sup> Emeka Charles Ekeke and Chike Ekeopara, "Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Religion: A Historical Perspective," *European Journal of Scientific Research* 44, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>51</sup> S.A. Moreau, "Phenomenology of Religion," *Evangelical Dictioanry of Theology* (Baker, Grand rapids, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> K. Lehmann, "Phenomology," *Encyclopaedia of Theology* (Burns and Oates, 1975, p.1226).

religion as it mainly analyses religious experiences and patterns, yet it provides both insiders and outsiders with enough knowledge on the experiences of religious persons.

### **The Academic Study of Religion (ASR)**

The academic study of religion (ASR) is primarily concerned with studying people, their beliefs, behaviors and their social systems.<sup>53</sup> The ASR as is identified today can be traced to the 19th-century happenstance of Western scholars and theologians with non-western cultures. It is often called the comparative study of religion as early scholars of religion were interested in gathering and paralleling religious beliefs, myths and rituals all over the globe. This study establishes a non-evaluative comparative technique in the cross-cultural study of people's religious beliefs. To compare in a non-evaluative manner means, they search for noticeable and documentable resemblances and dissimilarities without making a normative judgement as to which of them is upright or ruthless.

The ASR is a fundamental interdisciplinary discipline, integrating textual studies of the world's sacred texts, philosophy, linguistics, history, art, anthropology, literary studies, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, comparative literature, cultural studies, gender and ethnic studies, legal studies, and other approaches in order to better understand, compare, interpret, and analyze those beliefs, traditions, practices, communities, artifacts, and other phenomena of religions.

The data gathered by the author surmises that while some religious practitioners are open to consultations on their beliefs, others are ferocious when issues of beliefs are touched by non-practitioners. Inter-religious dialogue is the way forward for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the society is pluralistic and full of inestimable beliefs with their trimming rituals. CSR is a nonevaluative discipline, yet the author's data reveals the extent to which CSR has meaningfully impacted religion by inspiring religious tolerance and the need to adjust accordingly, as religious persons in a pluralistic society.

### **THE ACTIVITIES OF NONRELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Apart from seasoned academics who want to make sense of religion through research, there exist groups around the globe who are irreligious and would not associate with any religious substance. Religious peoples' understanding, is informed by their faith or belief in life matters while nonreligious people make sense of their lives through nonreligious symbolic universes (SU).<sup>54</sup> The symbolic universes (SU) are systems of assumptions for living the self and the world; they function as the universe of logic.

Religious people use religious SU to make sense of their lives, the nonreligious people also use nonreligious SU. The nonreligious SU gathered from the respondents and literature as a result of the preset themes includes: humanist ideas, secularism, rationalism, Free Thinkers and Agnosticism, Ghana Football Association, and Ghana Education Service.

Figure 8 above presented that, nonreligious groups influence religion through syncretism, false doctrines, challenging religious beliefs, defaming the cogency of religious theories and about religious ideas and philosophies. 24% of the respondents, representing 103 respondents said the major influence of NRM on religion is false doctrines while 9% representing 39 respondents pinpoint syncretism as another area of the stimulus. 30 respondents representing 7% of the sample identified themselves as nonreligious and that is critical for this study as NRM had a voice in the gathered data, though the study was from a Pentecostal perspective giving the collected data the levelheadedness it deserves to inform and provide direction in this area of study. The study at this point discusses how some of these nonreligious movements co-exist or influence religion using related literature to give credence to the data provided by the respondents.

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<sup>53</sup> Aaron Hughes and Russell McCutcheon, *Debating the Academic Study of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2021).

<sup>54</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*, 199.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Atheism; The rise of the New Atheism

Atheism in general is the rejection of any belief in the existence of deities. In the past decade, atheists around the globe have mobilized themselves against the forces of religion.<sup>55</sup> Atheistic views and activities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century comprise but are not limited to bus advertising campaigns promoting reason over religious beliefs, staging international atheists' conventions that attract thousands of attendees, publication of several works of literature indifferent to religious beliefs and establishments of atheists' churches (provide features of a religious congregation in a context of unbelief in a deity or the supernatural). Each of the above atheists' activities is what is currently designated as the New Atheist social movement. This movement focuses public devotion on deliberations about the role of religion in politics, education, politics and personal life.

Atheistic views and beliefs seem to be working alongside religious beliefs, each has an itinerary to become prominent via disarming the other. The author reasons if will there ever be an end to this competition. Or whether there will there be a day when the two seemingly antithetical fellows will complement each other because the 21<sup>st</sup> Century pluralistic society promotes tolerance?

Revealing the extent to which religious and atheistic belief must be seen to influence, and on a fundamental level, to co-create one another, the pluralistic society in which religious belief is counted as one option amongst many is given primacy. The fact that religious faith has become not only optional but also, in many contexts, strangely alienated from society, deeply modifies the experience of the believer as much as that of the non-believer. A focus on 'experience', over and above 'belief', moves us towards a mode of experiential knowledge which refuses to privilege the atheistic believer and deride the reality of religious belief.<sup>56</sup>

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen an apparent surge of atheism in popularity and numerical growth across the nations. In the 2011 Australian census, 37 percent of Australians do not believe in God.<sup>57</sup> According to Sociologist Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro- Rivera's review of several worldwide studies on atheism, there are 450 to 500 million positive atheists and agnostics worldwide, representing 7% of the world's population with China alone accounting for 200 million of the demography. Atheism is simply growing almost in almost all corners of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Data from the US ARIS survey shows the number of self-identified atheists in the USA increased by 77% from 2001 – 2008, Australia increased by 88 percent between 2006 -2011 while in England and Wales, Atheists increased by 182 percent between 2001 and 2011. The number of churchgoers in Australia is about 9% and still dwindling.<sup>58</sup>

The essayist realized that accepting to be an atheist seems to carry a negative connotation amongst the selected sample size in the context of this study, as most religious persons who are the majority cannot simply fathom why a person can boldly claim he has no belief in God or gods. That notwithstanding, there is the possibility of atheists as 30 respondents were bold to identify themselves as nonreligious signifying that, there is a possibility of having an increase of persons in this context who may subscribe to atheism.

## The Domination of Humanists' Beliefs and Ideologies

Humanists' philosophies have antecedents dating back to antique Greece and have become a key module of the western worldview and adhered to by many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> Humanists subsist in both irreligious and devout forms. Humanism at its fundamental principles upholds the dominance of human beings and the expertise and understanding of humans in all matters affecting them. The

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<sup>55</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*, 193.

<sup>56</sup> Romano Claude and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Atheism: Phenomenology, Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. Romano Claude and Robyn Horner (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

<sup>57</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*, 195.

<sup>59</sup> Singleton, *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach*, 195.

humanist theories endorse hugely human values like nobility, aptitude, intelligence, fellow feeling, affection, fortitude and others.<sup>60</sup> Humanists accentuate that, one can have a very good and moral life without religion because humanism provides the ethics and explanations necessary to make life meaningful. Humanists commonly highlight human dignity and man's ability through reason and scientific methods and often reject religion. Humanism is a viewpoint for the here and now and esteems human values as making sense only in the context of human life, rather than in the promise of a supposed life after death. Humanists encourage the idea that humans are at the epicenter of their own universe and should grip human accomplishments in education, classical arts, science and literature.

This viewpoint of the humanists has mounted up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and adherents are continually increasing both in the religious and irreligious terrain across the globe and Ghana where this study was carried out. It was also realized in the study conducted by the author that, most religious persons accept the fundamental principles of the humanists and its intriguing to cognize that, it is being preached by some religious leaders to their congregants as a way of life to enhance their development, though not subscribing to all the humanists' opinions. The respondents actually did not mention humanism in the pursuit of their knowledge of nonreligious movements in Ghana as in figure 5, yet the practices and illustrations they gave concerning NRM in Ghana unveiled the humanistic ideologies domination in the context of the study.

### **Secularistic Philosophies in a Pluralistic Society**

Secularism is a belief system that rejects religion in public matters or the belief that religious views should not be part of the affairs of the state or any public institution. Secularists peddle the belief that religious stuff should not influence public decisions. That notwithstanding, other religious movements also recommend a, "deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding religions' relationship with the society."<sup>61</sup>

Figure 10 sought to understand from the perspective of respondents whether Ghana is governed by religious inclinations or secularism. The responses gathered clearly depict that, 53%, 31% and 16% asserted that, Ghana was governed by religious beliefs, secularism and those who were not sure respectively. The interpretation is that most Ghanaians are unaware of the system of governance of the nation with regards to this because article 56 of the 1992 constitution prohibits the elevation of any religious movement into a state religion and also makes it clear that Ghana is a secular state and that does not also mean that Ghana is an agnostic or an atheistic state. Religious pluralism and diversity are encouraged by the Ghanaian constitution because it is a secular state. Ghana is pluralistically religious and all institutions are run with secular laws other than religious opinions.

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century society is a pluralistic society, as different beliefs, theories and philosophies co-exist. The word web dictionary defines pluralism as a social organization in which diversity of racial, religious, ethnic, or cultural groups is tolerated and that is the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Secularism is commonly defined as the separation of religion from civic affairs and the state and may be broadened to mean eradicating or decreasing the role of religion in any public sphere. Nonreligious groups adopt the secular philosophy as a major tool to prize fight the upwelling of religious engagements in the society. Martin Hagglund argues that "we don't need to cultivate a religious faith but a secular faith devoted to our finite life together because what matters is how we treat one another in this life and what we do with our time."<sup>62</sup>

These are the primary indicators of a secular state: guarantees personal and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individuals regardless of religion or no religiosity, the state is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion, does not interfere with or promote any other religion and religious pluralism and diversities are not frowned on. That notwithstanding, secular laws hinge

<sup>60</sup> Konstantin Kolenda, "Humanism in Robert Audi (Ed), Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy" (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Barbera Blake and Richard H. Cox, *Secularism, the Church and the Way Forward* (Benton - USA: Resource Publications, 2021).

<sup>62</sup> Martin Hagglund, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (United States: Penguin, 2019).

on laws rationally woven rather than on religious beliefs and that makes secularism an SU of NRM. The data gathered suggests that secularism can be woven in such a way that, even some religious persons will not know it is a nonreligious SU.

### **Free Thinkers**

Free thinkers are groups of persons who think freely or independently and form opinions on the basis of reason, completely independent of any assumed authority, and they often reject or are skeptical of religious dogmas.

The research conducted by the author postulates that some Ghanaians assume the posture of free thinkers but are affiliated with religious movements, that notwithstanding, they do not kowtow to holistic religious set beliefs, creeds, or dogmas on the basis of rationalism and free thinking. It was realized that this free-thinking paradigm cuts across both the elite and the uneducated.

The Ghanaian pattern seems dissimilar to Europe and most parts of the world as free thinkers mostly reject religion in Europe and Asia, but in Ghana, some religious persons accept free thinkers' ideologies though they may not subscribe to all their perspectives. Analyzing the situation in the context of this study shows that syncretism is present. Persons in the focus group interviews were seen subscribing to ideas their religious affiliation disagrees with. This led the author to establish a theory that, **religious dogmas are not automatically put into praxis by their devotees**. Religious leaders who assume this posture that, all their adherents subscribe to their holistic theology should reconsider their theories and devise pragmatic strategies for their theology and practice to sink well with their aficionados or members. The presence of non-conformists, who at the same time affiliate with religious movements makes conspicuous the author's thesis, "Tares and weeds amidst religious movement." This suggests that the tares and weeds as used in the thesis will not be limited to nonreligious movements but also refers to participants of religious movements who also refuse to follow a set creed but still desires affiliation.

### **WHY TARES AND WEEDS?**

Nonreligious movements and scholarship in the context of this study have been likened to tares and weeds. Tares and weeds are significant and therefore, efforts will be made to explicate the fittingness of the metaphor as used in the milieu of this study. Jesus mentioned tares in Matthew's Passage while the essayist adds the weeds to well describe the functions of NRM and scholarship in the midst of RM because tares are weeds.

#### **What are Tares?**

Tares as used in this passage was coined from the context of Jesus Christ's parable in the book of Matthew 13:24-30 to depict the essence of nonreligious movements amidst religious movements. Tares are weeds that resemble wheat. In the parable, a wheat field had deliberately been polluted by an enemy who sowed the seeds of the tares and intermixed them with the wheat. Only after the plants were partly grown did the problem (tares) become apparent. TARES (Heb. זונים, *zunim*) or (Greek- *zizania*) or the darnel – *Lolium temulentum* is a weed that grows among grains, particularly wheat. The grains resemble those of wheat so it is very difficult to separate them by sifting, and as a result, they may be sown together with the wheat and grow with it in the field. At one end of the spectrum, tares can simply make bread inedible, turning the flour grey and making it taste acrid and bitter. It's definitely not good for humans but not poisonous when eaten. When people eat its seeds, they get dizzy, off-balance and nauseous, and its official name, *Lolium temulentum*, comes from a Latin word for drunk.

#### **What are Weeds?**

Weeds are simply unwanted plants which grow together with deliberately grown crops and thus compete for nutrients and water with the main crops in a field. Generally, weed is a term for plants growing where it is not wanted. The weeds as a result feed on the nutrients meant for the crops and thus lessen the reserve of nutrients for the crops, thereby impeding their development. Consequently,

it's anticipated that weeds need to be restricted in order to augment the progression of the preferred foliage or crops. Likewise, NRM seems to compete with RM for the minds and hearts of people making it a suitable metaphor in the context being used.

### **Is the Metaphor for Nonreligious Movements and Scholarship Precise?**

Regarding the discourse on the import of tares and weeds in this context, the essayist is of the view that nonreligious movements and scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century rightly fit the metaphor of tares and weeds amidst religious movements. Religion seems central in the innermost instinct of every anthropoid, thus within every being is a craving to live up to satisfy sure responsibilities as will deem fit to a transcendental being or a higher order and that is religion. Religious thoughts to an extent seem natural to humans and deviation seems abnormal and unwanted just like a tare or weed that appears amongst crops.

Furthermore, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century nonreligious movements and scholarship correctly fit the metaphor as their arguments are carefully interlaced and appropriated to defy the very essence of religion according to the data from the respondents.

The nonreligious movements and scholarship often present sets of ideologies that seem to be the best and contemporary replacement for religious beliefs and such is the nature of tares and weeds as used by Jesus in Matthew's passage in the scripture studied above. The data gathered affirmed that nonreligious movements and scholarship are like tares and weeds in the midst of religion.

That notwithstanding, in Jesus' parable, the householder firmly instructed the servants not to mess up the tares or they will end up destroying the expected crops. Quite surprisingly, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed colossal abuses of people victimized or brutally slain for not living up to other people's religious beliefs. The essayist suggests that, NRM and scholarship which could seemingly be viewed as unbelievers to certain religious thoughts be left just as the master instructed in the passage, rather than taking actions that may be regretted in the future as a result of undue negligence and fundamentalism (militant defense).

### **IMPLICATIONS:**

#### **Syncretism and Decay, the result of Nonreligious Movements and Scholarship amid Religious Movements**

The observed response of religion towards its engagement with NRM and scholarship seems to spot religion at an underprivileged location as the nourishments meant for its growth and sustenance are sucked wrongly by undeserved opponents just as tares and weeds do to the intentionally sown crops. The strength of religion in this regard would have been to maintain its set standards and stance in the face of opposition and practically defend what they stand for, rather than compromising and accepting some of the views of the NRM and scholarship into their fold, deprived of a pungent action to annihilate the tares and weeds from the field. The author of this study realized that some religious rituals and beliefs have been refined with time when they were challenged by NRM and scholarship and time will tell whether the modifications were good or otherwise.

As a result of the nature of tares and weeds amongst wheat: the nonreligious movements carefully weave their theories to seem attractive and convincing of which fragments of their opinions are applied by most religious practitioners thereby promulgating syncretism in the religious terrain. The expression and views of religion have been altered so sharply, due to challenges from nonreligious groups and scholars who often analyze religious theories from the perspective of rationalism.

The author's analysis of the numerous ways religion has been studied is to expose religious movements of its deficiency in accepting all studies and accepting the analysis from various disciplines as authentic and vital to its survival. Religious beliefs have their basic foundation on faith and not cognition, why then will religious movements consent to discourses of rationalism to interpret faith? Mrs. Agyapong, a respondent in the interview conducted for this study asserted that faith in the Akan Language of Ghana means, "*gyidi*": transliterated in English as "*take and eat*". Her assertions postulate that religious beliefs are received and accepted, other than subjecting it to cognition for analysis and

interpretation. The symbolic universes of rationalism compared to revelatory tendencies are antithetical in essence and nature.

The various studies wherewith religion have been studied, though academically beneficial, should not thus, be presumed as religiously beneficial because it gives room to syncretism, where traces of other opinions and beliefs are smuggled into religious beliefs, practices and rituals.

Syncretism is the incorporation or attempted amalgamation of different beliefs, cultures or schools of thought or the merging of different inflectional varieties with another. Ross Kane argues that the history of syncretism's use emphasizes wider explanatory complications, drawing attention to attempts by Christian theologians to protect the category of divine revelation from perceived human interference. Kane shows that the field of religious studies and theology has approached syncretism with a racialized mind which should not be so. Ross Kane's book, *Syncretism and Christian tradition* examine how the concept of race plays out in dominant religious traditions associated with imperialism or empire-building and reveals how syncretism can act as a vital means of the Holy Spirit's continuing revelation of the truth.<sup>63</sup> Revelation is progressive and should be seen as such. Jesus said in Matthew 13:52 "Then said he unto them, therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (KJV).

Respondents' view on the impact of NRM on religion in figure 8 is adverse throughout as all the impacts they cited were from the undesirable length, whereas figure 9 presents that 65% and 35% of respondents mention the adverse and benefits of academics' impact on religion respectively.

The author from the data analysis asserts that, though nonreligious movements and scholarship are disturbances to religious ideologies, it nonetheless firmly informs the religious movements on how to position themselves, to be able to receive the right nutrients expected to grow and develop them to maturation. Consequently, syncretism should not be seen only from the negative connotation, as syncretism, an aftermath of nonreligious movements and scholarship's engagement with religion is hazardous as well as suitable.

## Recommendations

- The author recommends that religious movements would widen their "social rescue mission's strategies" to be able to attract the 21<sup>st</sup>-century up-and-coming young ones. More so, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has an occultist craze syndrome, and priority should be given to spiritual truth and supernatural dimensions rather than operating on the level of cognition thoroughly.
- Religious Interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance should be encouraged among variant religious movements thus promoting the academic study of religions. The tendency where religious movements assume the posture of a "redline or blasphemy" wherewith none crosses freely must be given careful thought.<sup>64</sup>
- Religious movements must not be *akratic*, especially in relation to fear of syncretism because of their engagement with nonreligious movements and scholarship. Syncretism should not always be cognized as negative as some beef up the lapses in some religious thoughts and rituals.
- Deliberate and in-depth studies must be conducted by religious movements on the apprehensions of nonreligious groups and scholarship to be able to adeptly apply religious principles correctly and where necessary modify them accordingly.
- Religious organizations must not be limited to providing only spiritual solace (e.g., salvation, rituals) but educate participants and the communities to have a wider understanding of contemporary issues as the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a pluralistic and secular context.

<sup>63</sup> Ross Kane, *Syncretism and Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: Oxford university Press, 2020).

<sup>64</sup> Nurudeen Lawal, "Deborah's Killing: What Islamic Clerics Told Governor Tambuwal about Blasphemy and how it can be averted," *Legit*, May 2022.

- A starter of a religious discipline that highlights religious beliefs vis a vis NRM and scholarship in the future will be an added value to academia in the twenty-first century and must be pursued with all earnestness. The introduction of this discipline will help practitioners and academicians to appreciate the contest better. This will be a completely new area wherewith academicians are encouraged to venture. The introduction of this discipline should be included in the basic schools' educational curriculum as that may instill tolerance and respect in the upcoming generation regardless the religious or nonreligious affiliations.
- Those devout movements who subscribe to animism in pursuance of a religious conviction must reconsider their belief systems as that paves way for the nonreligious movements and scholarship to unsympathetically critique RM's worth and applicability.
- Religious convictions that contravene the optimistic machinery of nature's (fauna and flora) sustenance must be amply worked on. The religious extremist who pursues religion from an angle of unsympathetically doing away with all who do not subscribe to their belief system should learn to accept other people and dialogue accordingly when need be.
- Religious movements must acknowledge that the numerous beliefs systems around the globe, though claimed to be revealed by a transcendent being, sharply disagree with other religious beliefs and therefore difficult to apply all of them in any given context, thus paving way for the NRM's symbolic universes' (secularism, free thinkers, human right, etc.) to lead the forte in the politics and governance of the nations. It's imperative for RM to firm up on common principles though beliefs in totality may be countless and varying. It should be thus realized that principles are few despite numerous methods.

## CONCLUSION

The study fairly discussed how NRM and scholarship have influenced and altered the beliefs and functions of RM in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The study findings were that, NRM and scholarship well fit the metaphor of tares and weeds amidst RM, and that NRM and scholarship have sufficiently influenced the beliefs, functions and perspective of RM. It was also realized that, though tares and weeds seem to carry a negative connotation as used in the passage of Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:14-30, NRM and scholarship at certain points notwithstanding transforms favorably and put to shape some weird and uncorroborated beliefs of RM which are not needful and beneficial. The data gathered and analyzed inductively proposed that, though NRM and academia through their activities and schedules have backlash the essence of RM, it is impossible to asphyxiate religion because the force of religion cannot simply be washed away and religion will abide as long as humans exist.

The author through the data gathered defined religion as the innermost instinct and craving of anthropoids to satisfy sure responsibilities as revealed by a transcendental being or a higher order. The fact that religion generally flows naturally from within the inmost and is a personal instinctual craving of human beings, is a backbone to the authors' alternate hypothesis that religion will survive the quiver and criticism from its rivals. A theory contributed to scholarship in this discourse is that religion will survive the 21st-century challenges and will be existent as far as humans live on. This study's findings further contribute to academia by refuting the theory that religion is either otherworldly or this-worldly as proposed by most scholars.<sup>65</sup> The discourse has established that religion is neither otherworldly nor this-worldly but both. Eliade asserts that religion is a response to the sacred but this study will augment it by saying, it is a response to the sacred for the betterment of human existence. The benefit of Religion should be mutual, thus responding to the sacred and responding to the needs of persons as well. This is to avow that, RM that responds to the sacred whiles not responding to the quandary of mankind or who through extremism afflicts mankind is an incomplete religion skewed toward a single-direction other than the bi-direction which is a precondition for any religious movement.

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<sup>65</sup> Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*.

The data gathered and analyzed scientifically also brought out that, the nonreligious movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have a belief about the supernatural, because every person believes in something, even if it is a denial of the supernatural world. Additionally, it was realized that the NRM has a schema to secularize the societies through rigorous and intense campaigns and they are skillful in using national institutions and platforms to circulate their convictions and consequently use all their forte to mollify religious beliefs.

It was also realized from the findings that, there are participants of religious movements who think **freestanding** and thus do not copiously assent to religious views but are part of the religious movements because of either communal credit or repute. The NRM and scholarship generally argue from the rationalistic point of view whiles RM often argues from a revelatory or mythological perspective and the author asserts that this debate is unending as rationalism can in no way answer the questions of revelation and vice versa. It was also realized that one of the most positive influences of NRM and scholarship on religion is preparing the grounds for tolerance and dialogue amongst persons with divergent belief systems whereas religion also influences scholarship and NRM in that, religious education help people to develop an understanding of themselves and others as well as promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments of the individuals, groups and their communities. The study brings out that, NRM and scholarship through their engagements with RM promulgated compromises and syncretism in RM which is not to be seen as entirely negative as that can be a vital act of God's continuing revelation of the truth to RM.

NRM and scholarship amid RM are beneficial, a defragmenter and a modifier and as such cannot cause the cessation of religion nor its essence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and yonder.

The author as a result of the findings makes suggestions for further research to advance the context of this study as stated below:

- Science and religion, do they compete or complement each other?
- What is the future of religion beyond the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- The social scientific study of religious extremism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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