

Reappraising the Relevance of Religion to the Humanities: Insights from the Old Testament

UMOREN, Gerald Emem

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

Abstract

The standard for the judgment of the relevance of any discipline has become more subjective than objective. However, in many quarters, the criteria for such judgment almost always border on impact and output on the development of the human person for the betterment of the society. Compared to other disciplines, in recent times, the relevance of the Humanities is called to question given that, by nature, it addresses more, the 'internals' of the human person rather than the 'externals' which the world wants to see. Given this misunderstanding of its nature and worth, both in the present and especially for the future, Humanities, as a discipline, has need for renewed search for relevance. Taking a departure from the witness of the Old Testament, this work, as a response to the perceived irrelevance of the Humanities, rather seeks to argue that the place of Religion holds an appreciable viability for the Humanities in the 21st century. Using the historical and descriptive methods consistent with Biblical theology, this paper argues, with insights from the Old Testament, that religion is very relevant to the humanities.

Keywords: Religion, Humanities, Old Testament, 21st Century, Biblical theology

Introduction

The question of the relevance of the Humanities to life has been a perennial one. Critics, in their judgment, have often concluded that the Humanities, apparently not

having much impact on today's sociological scenario, hold little or no relevance for the emerging demands of the 21st century. In response, studies abound which result attest to the relevance of the Humanities. But even these responses seem to be provoking more criticisms. Who is right and who is wrong here? Are these critics asking the right questions? Are Humanities scholars giving the right answers? Why do we still have this perceived irrelevance of the Humanities? From what point of view are these judgments made? Is it possible to discover the point of departure of these critics and from there make some more meaningful response? These are some of the questions forming the background of this paper.

Assuming the 21st century to be a time that needs renewed integral progress and development this paper progresses with the theory of Robert Macfarlane as its framework. Robert Macfarlane's theory of development states thus:

Societies develop by the creative contributions of individual...
The progressive development of the external capabilities of society is a reflection of a progressive development of the internal consciousness and capacities of human beings. Society changes outwardly because people change inwardly

From available data, before now, most of the responses to critics of the Humanities were always either too general (talking about the relevance of the Humanities in general) or too particular (talking about the relevance of individual branches of the Humanities). This paper proposes a different approach in response to the need to reposition the Humanities for relevance. There is need for some better interconnectedness moving from the part to the whole; from the known to the unknown; from the particular to the general. But more importantly, learning from prevalent situation and especially given the demands of the future sociological scenario, this research believes that a response that references and guarantees ACTION could be more meaningful, more impactful and more convincing than one that only begs the question with some rhetorical play on WORDS. Among the different branches of the Humanities, the one, more than all others, which promises this 'action' as basis for relevance is Religion?

The aim of this research therefore, is to examine and if relevant, re-appreciate and re-project Religion as a standard in the growing necessity of not just responding by words to, but *showing*, *acting* and *demonstrating* in deed, the relevance of the Humanities in the 21st century.

The objectives include the following: to discover the major point of departure of the perceived irrelevance of the Humanities; to explore and appreciate the peculiar

demands of the 21st century society; to examine the place of religion in the overall search for relevance for the Humanities in the 21st century; to draw support from the witness of the Old Testament for the centrality and relevance of religion in the Humanities; to recommend appropriate action towards convincingly ensuring the relevance of the Humanities in the 21st century.

The Approach is historical, descriptive and analytical and the scope, for the sake of space, time and distinctiveness, is limited to the perspective of Religion. The findings should be revealing and conclusions and recommendations to be drawn therefrom should propose a new era of relevance not just for Religion in particular but for the Humanities in general

Conceptual Review

For the sake of clarity and contextual understanding, it is necessary to explain some key terms or concepts that play a huge part in our understanding of the major arguments of this paper. These would include: Religion, Humanities, Old Testament and 21st Century.

Religion

Building on, but departing slightly from, the conventional definition of religion as the belief in and the worship of the Supreme Being, the use of religion in this paper captures a wider connotation. It is not only used here as a belief system but more so as a scholastic discipline. Religion as a part/branch of the Humanities is understood here as the study of matters related to faith and culture. Unless otherwise stated, this scholastic understanding takes precedence over every other appreciation of the word in this paper. Religion here could also imply religious studies as an academic discipline under the Humanities. Equally worthy of note is the fact that while religion would signal all brands of belief in the Supreme Being, the scope here is primarily limited to the Christian Religion.

¹ On Methods and Approaches of the Humanities, see Ayantayo, Jacob Kehinde, *Rudiments of Research and Research in Religious Studies*, Ibadan: Samprints, 2015

² This definition of Religion suits all major Religions of the world. See more in G. Theriault M, *Introduction to Islam*, Kogi: AECEWA/IRDC Publications, 1999, pp7ff.

³ The limitation to the Christian Religion is primarily for scholastic convenience. Any other Religion could equally have been good enough.

Humanities

Like religion, the word Humanities is also seen here as a scholastic term. It encompasses, as a whole, all academic disciplines that study human culture and behaviours. Religion is one of them and sometimes, the usage of Humanities in this paper would also reference Religion.

Old Testament

Even though we know that the Old Testament is generally the first part of the Christian Scriptures with 46 books, the use of the Term 'Old Testament' in this paper does not refer to the entire corpus or any particular book or any organised section of the corpus. The use of 'Old Testament' is primarily to locate our research within a specified framework of the Christian religion but it will witness random reference to different but relevant citations in the books and sections of this Christian Scripture.

21st Century

By normal calculation, we are already counting the 21st century (the period between 2001 and 2099), but usage of 21st Century in the context of this work, has much more to do with the future than with the present. The understanding is a reference to the time beginning now but proposing more of the future as following from the present. 21st century also connotes all the 'complications' of the unfolding and emerging society due to the impact of science, technology and other socio-economic changes and challenges of the time. 21st century will, therefore, be used synonymously with words like: contemporary, today, modern and even 'future.'

Literature Review

The Humanities in general have been a very active area of studies and research. However, the nature of our research limits us only to certain aspects of the Humanities. The most prominent perspectives here have to do either with the relevance of the Humanities in general or the relevance of religion as a branch of the Humanities. The over all concern is the appreciation of religion as the standard for the relevance of the Humanities.

Works abound on the relevance of the Humanities. Humanities scholars have struggled, through the ages, to draw attention to the importance of this discipline. Starting from Jonathan Bate's *The Public Value of the Humanities* in 2010, to the work of Martha Nussbaum - *Not for Profit: Why Democracy needs the Humanities (The Public Square)* published still in 2010, the emphasis is a reflection on the

public value of this discipline. Other Books on the Relevance of the Humanities include the works of Eleonora Belfiore, and Anna Upchurch in 2013, that of Rens Bod, - *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* still in the same year 2013, and that of Helen Small - *The Value of the Humanities*, published still in 2013. Again, the target is still the same: an attempt to convince critics on the relevance of the Humanities. Helen Small specifically tries to provide a critical account of the principal arguments used to defend the value of the Humanities. Like many Humanists do, Small argues that the Humanities study the meaning-making practices of culture, and bring to their work a distinctive understanding of what constitutes knowledge and understanding. She also argues that the Humanities contribute to human happiness; that they are a force for democracy; and that they are a good in themselves, to be valued "for their own sake." True and strong as these arguments may be, they all are still apologetic and ignore what seems to be the main concern of the critics – appeal to tangible and impactful evidence of relevance.

Apart from these books, there are also numerous Articles which also address the importance of the Humanities. Some of them include Martha Kanter's "The Relevance of Liberal Arts to a Prosperous Democracy," Herbert J. Muller's, "The 'Relevance' of the 'Humanities'" and Chuks Oluigbo's "Nigeria: The Relevance of Arts to Practical Living." While all these efforts are commendable, one would notice that the focus is still a verbal defense for pragmatism. In most cases, as exemplified in Chuck Oluigbo's Article, the defense takes the form of excuses for non appreciation and consequent perceived irrelevance. But the truth is that the Humanities, surely, are relevant. Most of the Humanists writing these articles fall short of reaching their goal because of their approaches. This is the reason why this research needs an alternative approach different from mere defense.

One other aspect of this study that is worth reviewing is the effort of scholars in also portraying the relevance of religion. Religion has also enjoyed the attention of

¹ The Catholic Bible has 46 books of the Old Testament while the Protestant Bible has 39

² Jonathan Bate, *The Public Value of the Humanities*. UK: [Bloomsbury Academic](#), 2010, pp. 1ff.

³ Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy needs the Humanities (The Public Square)* NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 1ff

⁴ Eleonora Belfiore, and Anna Upchurch, (eds.) *Humanities in the 21st Century: Beyond Utility and Markets*. UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 1ff

⁵ Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*. UK: Oxford, 2013, pp. 1ff

⁶ Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, UK: Oxford Press, 2013, pp. 1ff

scholarship in recent times. From the early masterpiece edited by Finley P. Dunne, - *The World Religions Speak on "The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World"* published in 1970, to Gavin Flood's *The Importance of Religion: Meaning and Action in our Strange World*, published in 2012, the message and approach are similar. Making a case for the acceptance of a fact that should have been evident – the relevance of Religion. There is also this recent work by John Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful people can change Politics*. This has signaled a great change in the approach as Danforth tries to be more practical than defensive in his submissions here. But it still falls short of the desired link that needed to be drawn from Religion to the Humanities.

Evaluating all these, it seems that most of these works, apart from the problem of approach, focus on religion per se and not on any linkable value to the relevance of the Humanities. But, even though Humanities go beyond religion, they are very related and interconnected. Why, then, would people relatively accept the relevance of religion and still find it hard to accept the relevance of the Humanities?

Again, the issue seems to be with the approach. This is the reason why this research needs to use a different approach and instead of just exploring the importance of religion on its own, re-project this very relevant branch of the Humanities as the basis for the overall relevance of the Humanities. Commendable as all these efforts are, their inadequacies also give the justification for this new effort.

This paper will build on their obvious arguments in favour of the Humanities but their gap – non pragmatic approach and their silence on or inadequate efforts to re-project and re-connect the gains of religion to the needs of the Humanities in the context of the 21st century – is what this present research intends to fill. Religion, if better appreciated, has the potentials to guarantee an impactful and convincing era of relevance for the Humanities in the 21st century.

¹ Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, UK: Oxford Press, 2013, pp. 49ff

² Martha J. Kanter, "The Relevance of Liberal Arts to a Prosperous Democracy." US Department of Education Annapolis Group Conference. Annapolis. 22 June 2010. Accessed from <http://www.ed.gov> on 5th July 2016

³ Herbert J. Muller, "The 'Relevance' of the 'Humanities'" in *The American Scholar* published by: [The Phi Beta Kappa Society](http://www.phibeta.org) Vol. 40, No. 1 (Winter, 1970-71), pp. 103-118. Accessed on line from <http://www.jstor.org> on 5th July 2016

⁴ Oluigbo, Chuks. "Nigeria: The Relevance of Arts to Practical Living." In *All Africa* 12 Sept. 2010. Accessed from <http://ezinearticles.com> on 4th July 2016

⁵ Finley P. Dunne, *The World Religions Speak on "The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World"* Netherlands: Springer, 1970, pp. 1ff

⁶ Gavin Flood, *The Importance of Religion: Meaning and Action in our Strange World*, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, Pp. 1ff.

⁷ John Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful people can change Politics*. NY: Random House, 2015, pp. 1ff

The Needs, Challenges and Demands of the 21st Century

As explained earlier, since 2001 we had literally stepped into the 21st century. But by 21st century here in this work, we mean to consider both the present and the nearest future as is, and will be, shaped by the experience of today and, may be that of the recent past. It is the successes, needs and challenges of the past and present that would occasion the demands and vision of the future. It is the situation of today that would occasion the expectations of tomorrow.

The projections of science and technology are based on the needs of today's society. The judgment of the successes or otherwise of the sciences, the Humanities, medical, political and commercial advances are dependent on the needs, challenges and demands of the present. It is then from the present that the future is projected. The demands of the 21st century would be those general and specific expectations, based on present experience, but needed to correct mistakes, sustain progress, or propel more advances unto the future integral development of the human person and his society.

Given that we are already into this 21st century by some years, the future begins today. This is why people are full of criticism when things do not still seem to be moving right. In the academic perspective, science and especially the Humanities have come under serious criticism for not delivering on, or for not impacting adequately on the gains of past experience.

At this point, this paper is analysing the 21st century experience to see what the gains, needs and challenges are. This will help us not only to discover the demands of the time but even to appreciate the position of the critics and finally use the information gathered to appraise the relevance of future projections especially in the Humanities.

From experience and from information drawn randomly from primary and secondary sources, the 21st century has been characterised by successes and failures in the areas of sports, education, entertainment, private enterprise, science, technology (mobile phones, internet etc), economy, sociology and politics – to mention but a few. While the failures bring issues and provoke concerns, even the successes have also brought about some challenges from the point of view of sustenance.

Following from the crises of the mid and late 20th century which included the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War and the menace of AIDS, the recent challenges of this early part of the 21st century has left the global scene with serious concerns about dangers of Global Warming; the scarcity of fossil fuels; the

¹ See more in Gail Formanack, "The Importance of Language: The Partnership for 21st Century Skills and AASL Standards." in *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, 25(1), 2008, pp. 28-30.

² Cf. Elena Silva. Measuring Skills for 21st-Century Learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(9), 2009, 630.

economic shift caused by globalisation; the dangers of over population; the effects of poverty; the effects of diseases; the rise of terrorism; the spread of wars; the abuse of power in international relations; the increased use of drugs; the attack of the family system; the controversy on same sex and marriage; the unrest in the Middle East; the problem of corruption; religious fanaticism and the threat of secularism. The overall effect of these situations can only leave one with the desire to embrace a future capable of 'righting these wrongs.' Such desire constitutes the demands of the 21st century – a foreseeable future needing integral development.

The 21st century, therefore needs a re-orientation that would guarantee respect for God, respect for life, respect for nature, improved responsibility towards oneself, improved responsibility towards the other and improved responsibility towards the society. Any sphere of life or academic discipline that does not key into this vision nor show signs of impacting on this need, stands the risk of serious criticism.

The 21st century man is called to rise up to this need for integral development. But development is a human process, in the sense that human beings, not material factors, drive development. The 21st century man seeks development. The energy and aspiration of people who seek development is what forms the motivating force that drives development. The first thing is to create awareness and direct the human person accordingly. People's awareness may decide the direction of development. Their efficiency, productivity, creativity, and organisational capacities determine the level of people's accomplishment and enjoyment. Development is the outer realisation of latent inner potentials. Many things come to play here. The level of people's education, intensity of their aspiration and energies, quality of their attitudes and values, skills and information all affect the extent and pace of development. As far as the 21st century is concerned, these factors are expected to come into play whether it is for the developmental benefit of the individual, family, community, nation, or the whole world. What is needed is integral development.

The Nature of the Humanities

Generally speaking, by Humanities we are referring to those academic disciplines which study the human person as a subject of culture and relationships. The Humanities study how people process and document human experience and the knowledge of such experience makes it possible to feel a sense of connection to those who have come before us, those contemporary with us as well as those coming after us. This sense of belonging generates and motivates dialogue about the meaning and possibilities of human existence using methods such as historical, interpretative and analytical.

The branches of knowledge that belong to this group include: Philosophy, Literature, Religion, Music, History, Culture, Languages and the Liberal Arts etc. By nature, the Humanities, generally concerned with human thought and culture, examine the past in order to understand the future. The problem of man and that of the human society can be solved only by man himself. The events of social life do not come about by themselves; they are made. The Humanities by nature provide the balanced judgment for designing a meaningful social life.

Commenting on the relevance of the Humanities, many scholars have brought out the true characteristics and value of this academic discipline. Some of the commonly highlighted ones include:

- Helping us understand others through their languages, histories and cultures.
- Fostering social justice and equality.
- Revealing how people have tried to make moral, spiritual and intellectual sense of the world.
- Teaching us empathy.
- Teaching us to deal critically and logically with subjective, complex, imperfect information.
- Teaching us to weigh evidence skeptically and consider more than one side of every question.
- Helping to build skills in writing and critical reading.
- Encouraging us to think creatively. They teach us to reason about being human and to ask questions about our world.
- Preparing one to fulfill civic and cultural responsibilities
- Making one familiar with and able to use the creative ideas from great minds outside of science.
- Strengthening one's ability to communicate and work with others.
- Helping one to gain knowledge of foreign languages and foreign cultures.
- It even helps one understand the impact that science, technology, and medicine have had on society and understand the future scientific needs of society.

¹ We really need to re-project both academic perspectives and skills to address the demands of the 21st century. Read more in Bob Regan. "Why We Need to Teach 21st Century Skills—And How to Do It" in *Internet @ Schools*. Accessed from <http://www.internetatschools.com> on 8th July 2016

² Cf. Elena Silva. Measuring Skills for 21st-Century Learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(9), 2009, 630.

³ Integral development here is also to be understood as 'all-round development.'

⁴ See Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*. P. 17.

- Developing informed and critical citizens. Without the humanities, democracy would not flourish.

The humanities reflect the diversity of humanity. No one branch of it is self-sufficient but the only branch that reflects a significant part of every other branch is religion – not only as doctrine but more so as scholarship. According to Sarah Piper, the Humanities, by nature, keep us human. But more than keeping us human, the assumption of this research in progress is that the Humanities are supposed to also keep us humane – good natured. This is where religion promises to provide the needed direction.

The Place of Religion in the Humanities

As was already stated above, religion, in this work will not be treated in isolation. Religion will always be treated as a branch of the Humanities. But since this research is to examine how much Religion can give relevance to the Humanities, it is important to determine the place of this part in the whole.

First of all, by religion or religious studies, we mean that branch of academic endeavour that engages in the comparative, cross-cultural study of religions and cultures. Religion is characterised by studies which utilise various disciplinary approaches, including the historical, sociological, anthropological, philosophical and theological to arrive at conclusions for human existence and moral action. The academic study of religion seeks to interpret, analyse, and evaluate the nature and role of religion in the lives of individuals and societies.

Even from this definition, one can see the correlation between religion and the Humanities. While the Humanities in general aims at influencing humans to appreciate their nature and being, religion specifically seeks to interpret, analyse and evaluate those cultural actions towards making the human person morally sound - not just making them human, but making him humane.

See more gains and benefits of the Humanities in “The Humanities Matter!” accessed on line from <http://4humanities.org> on 7th July 2016

Sarah Piper, “The Humanities: What Keeps Us Human” in E – Vision accessed on line from <https://www.jmu.edu> on 6th July 2016.

Read Geoffrey G. Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America*, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011

See more in Gavin Flood, *The Importance of Religion: Meaning and Action in our Strange World*, pp. 10ff

The understanding of 'humane' here is that of being 'good-natured.' It attracts a moral value. Religion proposes to make people good-natured.

There is the evolving appreciation of the fact that Religion is at the centre of the Humanities. Religion is also the engine room of the Humanities. The Christian Religion, especially in its Scriptures bears witness not only to the different branches of the Humanities but to the integral development of the human person – a goal that the Humanities propose to meet for the 21st century.

Religion at the Centre of the Humanities

Religion is not only central to all the branches of the Humanities; it is actually the centre of the Humanities. Almost every branch of study under the Humanities has a place in religion. Between philosophy, history, arts, music, literature, language, communications and cultural studies, one can find a unifying point in religion. For example, there is philosophy of religion and there is philosophy in religion. There is History of Religion and there is History in Religion. There is Religious Arts and there is Arts in Religion. There is religious music and there is music in religion. There is religious literature and there is literature in religion. There is religious Language and there is language in religion. There is religious communication and there is communication in religion. There is religious culture and there is culture in religion. Everything has a 'corner' in religion.

Using the Christian Religion as an example, its Scripture has a section that connects to all aspects of the Humanities. While the worldview of Genesis reflects the outline of Philosophy; the Historical corpus of the Old Testament (especially the Books of Kings, Samuel, Judges and Chronicles) by documenting the historical appreciation of the theocratic Israel, attest to the interest of History (as a Humanities course) in Religion.

Instances of the Liberal Arts also abound in the Old Testament. Apart from performance Arts which is manifested in the Temple Liturgy (cf. Is 6), the Old Testament is full of instances of God's determination of artistic works and designs (cf. The Design of the Ark of the Covenant in Exod. 25: 10-22). All these show that the Humanities Courses of Liberal Arts are attested to in Religion. The Psalms are a great testimony of Biblical music in composition and performance (cf. Psalms 1-150). Religious music has always been the background of musicology.

Regarding Literature, the Scripture is literature itself. The most ancient Literatures are those of the ancient Romans and the Greeks. Literature as a Course in the Humanities has this considerable place in Religious studies. The same thing is in Language. The Old Testament is traced to the original languages of the initial human authors. Religious studies therefore accommodate the study of Hebrew and Aramaic,

Latin and Greek in order to facilitate proper understanding. It becomes possible therefore to confirm that, not only Literature, but the Languages also, as Courses in the Humanities, are attested to in Religion.

If the Old Testament is Literature and the Literature is written in a language setting, it would automatically follow that the Old Testament would promote communication. The content, focus and skills of Communication as a Course in the Humanities are evident in the style, formula and rhetoric of the Prophetic oracles of the Old Testament. In the same line, Religion is almost synonymous with Cultural Studies. In studying and analyzing the culture of Israel, the Old Testament is confirming that Religion contains and promotes cultural studies.

All these things must not be taken for granted. The centrality of Religion in the Humanities as found in these instances is an indication that what this all-inclusive part holds can be projected for the benefit of the whole. Since Religion proposes to be this representative of the Humanities, then its gains could benefit the relevance of the Humanities.

The Old Testament Witness to the Integral Development of the Human Person

Catholic social teaching holds that the development of the human person has to be integral. It must encompass the different aspects of human life. If the Humanities must be relevant towards the development of the human person, therefore, it should address the integral development of that human person. If Religion typifies the relevance of the Humanities, then religion, much more than other courses in the Humanities, must witness to the integral development of this human person.

Exemplifying the place of Religion in this, it is interesting to see that the Old Testament witnesses to this integral development. All other branches of the Humanities may, by nature, point to integral development of the human person but it is only religion which tangibly witnesses to it and proposes actions which promise to

¹ For more on Philosophy of Religion see Ekpo, Israel, *Introductory Studies in Philosophy and Nature*, Uyo: Inela Ventures, 2014, pp. 87ff

² As stated above, Religion studies the various disciplinary approaches, including the historical, sociological, anthropological, philosophical and theological to arrive at conclusions for human existence and moral action. This is why various aspects of the branches of the Humanities are found around the Religion. For example, Philosophy of Religion is a course of its own and various attempts of the Old Testament to answer the fundamental questions of life are an example of Philosophy in Religion.

³ Religion, as popularly acclaimed, "is the soul of the world..."

⁴ The Bible is considered a History of Salvation...

witness to it. This means that religion would address the human person physically, spiritually, socially, naturally, financially and politically. This is actually testified to in the Old Testament.

Religion addresses the person physically as when, in the Scriptures, we see the creator designing a perfect and orderly world to suit the physical needs of the human person. Gerhard F. Hasel captures it well:

The reality portrayed in Gen 1-2 communicates a perfectly created order and environment that "was very good" (Gen 1:31).¹ Humankind was itself created as a total entity in a perfect state (Gen 2:7, 21-22). Gen 1-2 depicts a world totally different from the one which existed after the fall (Gen 3), where the sin-caused degenerative processes sap the life forces until death comes about. Thus, a central concept of biblical religion is that health and well-being are the design of God and that illness in whatever form it appears is not an established part of the divine order of reality.

The providence of God in the Old Testament, like the gift of the land (cf. Gen 3: 1-12; 15: 1-17; 17: 1-21, the gift of manna (Exodus 16) etc. did not only make needs available to the Israelites, it also taught them the value of physical provision. There are many other instances in the Old Testament where Religion touches the physical wellbeing of the human person as direct beneficiaries or as agents of further physical impact.

The Spiritual impact of Religion on the human person is also attested to in the Scriptures. Generally, the Bible, as the word of God is seen as spiritual food. From the moment of creation in Genesis chapter 2 when God breathed unto man, he became, not just a physical being but also a Spiritual being. This is why the Old Testament talks about the soul (Gen 2: 7) and the mind (Gen 8:1) of man. The Bible, as attested to in many Old Testament passages, does not only guarantee spiritual formation for the human person, it directs him or her on the path to this spiritual vocation (cf. Deut. 6: 4).

¹ The expression: "Thus says the Lord" which always introduced the Prophetic corpus is an example of the communications styles prevalent in Religion. Every people has a culture and a peculiar manner of transmitting that culture either verbally or in deed.

² See "Contemporary Issue: Human Development" in *Catholic Social Teachings in action*. Accessed on line from <https://capp-usa.org> on 6th July 2016

³ Gerhard F. Hasel, "Health and Healing in the Old Testament" in *Andrew's University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1983, p. 191.

The Bible also witnesses socially to the eventual wellbeing of the human person. The Old Testament is an account of the life of Israel in association with God and neighbor. The Old Testament justifies the fact that man, by nature, is called to family, community and participation. There are social customs and way of life. Deut. 6: 4-9 also includes the training of children to ensure a good social setting.

The Bible also addresses the human person naturally. The import of natural theology in the formation of the human person cannot be overemphasised. Its foundation is in the Scriptures – in the Old Testament. The Old Testament gives orientation to natural formation. There are many Old Testament passages that inform about nature and teach the care for the earth. Psalm 24:1-2 says: “The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers”. Verses like this abound in Scripture. Nature is one of God's beautiful creations. Through nature, God is able to teach the human person, speak to him, and provide for him. For this reason, he is called, in Scripture, to protect all that God has created.

The Old Testament also regulates man's actions financially. The Old Testament has a lot to say about money, giving, debt and finances. The underlying principle is that the human person is but a steward of God's gift. It is God who sends poverty and wealth (cf. 1Sam. 2:7). Exodus 22: 25 and Deut. 23: 19 address the teaching on Lending. The Old Testament calls us to wisdom in the management of our resources – no borrowing, no laziness, no greed etc.

Finally, it is interesting to see that so much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament is a Political Theology. The Prophetic corpus, much more than other sections of the Bible, teaches the human person an objective appreciation of politics and political life. God detests evil-rulers and blesses the nation by the righteous king. Most of the prophets preached from the social and political background of their time. They also represent the historical background of the polity. Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah and

¹ The Old Testament teaches about natural science and helps the human person to give objective judgments to the submissions of the sciences.

² The book of Genesis, in the account of creation, advances the sacredness of God's creation and hence the sacredness of nature. The psalms also testify to the sacredness of nature and creation (cf. Gen 1-3; Psalm 1, 19, 24, 65).

³ Gerald Umoren, *Political Theology for Theological Politics*, IN: Author House, 2009, p. 17ff

⁴ “Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who frame injustice by statute? They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death” (Ps. 94: 2)

⁵ Donatus Udoette, *Messengers of God*, Uyo: BricksCom, 2008, p. 17ff; Victor H. Matthew, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012, p. 12

⁶ Provan Iain et al, *A Biblical History of Israel*, Louisville: Westminster, 2013, pp. 1ff.

Ezekiel reflected the political situation of the land at the time of preaching. By so doing their oracles do not only inform the human person of the direction and relationship between religion and politics but they also serve to guide modern man on the formation of his political conscience.

Considering all the above, the Old Testament stands out as a great witness to Religion's ability to impact on the integral formation of the human person. If this is what the 21st century needs and if this is what the Humanities are expected to address, then projecting Religion alone could be sufficient basis for guaranteeing the relevance of the Humanities in the 21st century.

Religion and the Relevance of the Humanities in the 21st Century

Having identified the demands of the 21st century as a comprehensive need to realise, improve and sustain the integral development of the human person and his society; and having confirmed that Religion, as the most basic branch of the Humanities, does not only possess those developmental potentials but promises to impact same on the human person of the 21st century, then, a re-appreciation of Religion in this context could constitute adequate guarantee of relevance for the Humanities which has come under renewed attack by critics in this 21st century.

The 'if' and 'how' questions of the critics border on the possibility and manner of keeping the Humanities relevant in the 21st century. Based on the findings of our research, our answer is drawn from the projection and re-appreciation of Religion which potentials affirm that the Humanities are relevant and will continue to be relevant.

The study of religion and above all the practice of religion eventually guarantee the formation of the human person into a humane being full of respect for God, respect for life, respect for nature, improved responsibility towards oneself, improved responsibility towards the other, and improved responsibility towards the society. Combatting the challenges resultant from science, technology, economy, politics etc becomes easy when the subject of those endeavours – the human person – is objectively formed. This has been and continues to be the goal of Religion in particular and the Humanities in general. The Catholic Social teaching confirms this argument not only on the importance of a well-formed human mind to direct the affairs of national or social interest but also on the need for that human formation to be integral. Integral Human Development is an expression based upon the truth that human development cannot be reduced or divorced into constituent parts. True progress does not and cannot happen, if

only one aspect of the human person is being addressed to this end.

The relevance of religion rests on its potentials to guarantee the respect of the human person and impact on this human person in such a way that he would in turn influence the society in a positive manner. A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. Each community is defined by its purpose and consequently obeys specific rules. But as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "the human person . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions." The person represents the ultimate end of society so that in the final analysis, the social order and its development would invariably work then to the benefit of the human person. It is at that point that the relevance of religion in particular and the Humanities in general would be realised.

Whatever the needs and challenges of the 21st century as mentioned above could be, it must be borne in mind that the events of social life do not come about by themselves; they are made. Most of them are man made and as such, the problem of man and that of the human society can be solved only by man himself. This is where the Humanities in general and Religion in particular cannot be overlooked. By forming and presenting a humane human person to the society, the Humanities offer the greatest and most enduring solution to the problems of the 21st century. A person with a sense of perspective is the highest ideal of the society.

Apart from proposing relevance by ideals, Religion is actually result oriented. It translates into moral action. These moral actions are the visible proofs of relevance for the Humanities. Religious Studies becomes a constant reminder of the demand for action towards the integral development of the society. The findings of this research confirm that Religion typifies the relevance of the Humanities for the 21st century society.

Evaluation and Conclusion

For the sake of objectivity, we would proceed first by summarising the findings of this research. From there it should become possible for us to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

¹ See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican: Vatican Press, 2004, no. 132

² Vatican, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., Vatican State: Vatican Press, 2000, 1881

³ Following this procedure is both a format and a strategy. The movement is from the particular to the general; from relevance of Religion to relevance of the Humanities. The submissions of the social teachings of the Church confirm the credibility of the progression. See more in: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 132. It should also be recognized that literature, drama, history, philosophy, and other nonscientific disciplines contribute significantly to our understanding of

Summary of Findings

From the onset, our aim has been to appraise the relevance of the Humanities by re-appreciating and re-projecting Religion, confirmed by the witness of the Old Testament, as an imperative standard of assessment of the Humanities and a proof of its relevance. In the wake of the recurrent criticism of the value of the Humanities in general, we discovered that there have been considerable number of works and studies on its relevance but that they were segmented (those who wrote on the relevance of the Humanities dwelt only on that and those who wrote on the relevance of Religion also dwelt only on that. There was little or no correlation), their approach, based more on rhetoric of words than on pragmatic evidence was more apologetic than confirmatory and that did not yield the desired results. There was therefore the need to fill the gap with an approach that sought confirmation for the avowed relevance of the Humanities for the 21st century society.

In our research, we found out that the 21st century society is polarised in many ways and is in search of a future characterised by a society that promises integral formation. In our research we also found out that this integral development of the society can only be realisable if the integral development of the individual human person is guaranteed. We found out that the relevance of the Humanities in general could then be in its proposal to guarantee the integral development of the human person. In the course of our research, we also discovered that Religion, a central branch of the Humanities, possesses a lot of the potentials that could guarantee a more meaningful integral development of the *human* person into a *humane* person. By the witness of the Old Testament, we discovered that it was possible to project Religion as a standard for the assessment of the relevance of the Humanities. Religion does not only share the vision of the Humanities of which it is a part, we discovered that it also guarantees relevant actions necessary for the realisation of the dreams and demands of the emerging 21st century. Our working argument could be reframed thus:

1. The 21st century is yearning not just for sustainable but integral progressive development
2. But progressive development of the society can only be a reflection of the progressive development of the human person (Robert Macfarlane)
3. Therefore, logically, the integral development of the human person, which can only be guaranteed by the Humanities in general and Religion in particular, is the most basic, most important and most relevant strategy towards meeting the

¹ This argument, based on our theoretical framework confirms the driving force and direction of our research towards practical results.

demands of the 21st century. Hence, there is the need to re-appreciate Religion as an imperative for repositioning the Humanities for contemporary relevance¹

Conclusion

Following from the findings of this research as summarised above, it is possible to confirm the veracity of our working thesis and conclude that the 21st century society needs the Humanities and that Religion, more than every other branch of the Humanities, proves to be an imperative standard for confirming the relevance of the Humanities. Hence, this standard needs to be re-appreciated and re-projected in order to achieve the desired aim and results – the integral development of man and his society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to realise and sustain the submissions of this paper thus:

First, it is proposed that Religion be made a GST course in the universities especially in the Humanities.

Second, it is also proposed that the significance of Religion in the different branches of the Humanities should be re-emphasised and re-appreciated.

Third, that the teachers and students of the Humanities in general and Religion in particular be proud enough to showcase the rich heritage of their academic discipline especially by witnessing to its relevance in their words, deeds and actions in the public domain.

Fourth, it is recommended that teaching and research in the Humanities be re-designed to address the growing need for integral development of the 21st century society.

Fifth, it is equally recommended that future research works on the Humanities would capture tangible results to argue for its relevance instead of remaining theoretical.

Sixth, it is recommended that government funding for the Humanities should be increased to make it possible for Humanities scholars to reach their full potentials in research and project implementation.

Seventh, that only, or, at least more, proven humanist with guaranteed humane tendencies be entrusted with the responsibility of 'town planning' and 'governance.'

Eight, that public lectures, debates, symposia and seminars on the

interdependence between science, arts, business and the Humanities be encouraged with particular reference to their complementarity for integral development of the society.

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