

On the Essentiality and Non-Essentiality of Religion: Whither Religion

Speaker 1 - Introduction & Historical Background

Good morning everyone.

Our topic today asks a big question: Is religion still important for people and society, or can we live well without it?

This question has been debated for hundreds of years by philosophers, religious leaders, and ordinary people.

Some believe religion is at the very heart of human life, while others think we can build good lives without it.

In this work, we look at three things:

1. Religion's history - how it shaped human society.
2. Philosophical arguments - for and against religion being essential.
3. Religion's future - what role it might play in years to come.

We also refer to the ideas of famous thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Taylor.

In ancient times - like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome - religion was not just personal belief. It was part of government, law, and everyday life.

It explained how the world began, what happens after death, and how people should live. Religious rituals and festivals helped communities stay united.

In the Middle Ages, especially in Europe, Christianity influenced almost every part of life - politics, education, and even science.

Thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas said that faith and reason were not enemies, but worked together.

Aquinas taught that morality comes from God's law and that human life should be guided by divine truth.

But in the Enlightenment period, things started to change. Thinkers like Kant, Voltaire, and Hume began to question the authority of religious institutions.

Kant, for example, believed that morality can be based on human reason, not only on faith.

In modern times, religion has been challenged even more. Karl Marx called religion "the opium of the people," meaning it could be used to keep people calm and prevent them from questioning unfair systems.

Sigmund Freud thought religion was like a dream - a human-made illusion to comfort us from life's fears.

That's how religion started as the heart of society and then began to be questioned.

Now, [Speaker 2's Name] will explain the main arguments for and against religion being essential.

Speaker 2 - Arguments For & Against Religion Being Essential

Thank you [Speaker 1's Name].

Now let's look at the different sides of the argument.

First, why some people believe religion is essential:

- Morality: Thinkers like Aquinas believed that morality comes from God's eternal law. Without religion, they say

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morality loses its firm foundation.

Alasdair MacIntyre also said that without strong religious traditions, morality becomes confused and based only on feelings.

- Meaning and purpose: Viktor Frankl - who survived the Holocaust - believed that religion helps people find meaning in life, especially in suffering.

In Nigeria and many African societies, religion plays a big role in shaping identity, giving hope, and helping people endure hardship.

- Social unity: Sociologist Emile Durkheim said religion brings people together through shared rituals and values.

In Nigeria, churches and mosques are not just for worship - they are also places for community support, education, and moral guidance.

Now, why others believe religion is not essential:

- Morality without religion: Immanuel Kant taught that people can know what is right and wrong through reason alone.

Modern thinkers like Peter Singer and Martha Nussbaum say ethics can be based on empathy and respect for human dignity, without needing religion.

- Religion as a human creation: Ludwig Feuerbach believed that people created the idea of God as a way to express their best hopes and ideals.

Sigmund Freud saw religion as a comforting illusion. Michel Foucault argued that religion can be used to control and discipline people.

In Africa, philosopher Kwasi Wiredu criticized how foreign religions replaced African traditional beliefs.

- Secularism and personal spirituality: Charles Taylor says that many people today search for meaning outside of traditional religion.

Some call themselves "spiritual but not religious" and create their own mix of beliefs, often through meditation, mindfulness, or connection to nature.

So, both sides have strong points. Religion can give morality, meaning, and unity, but people can also find these things without religion.

Now, [Speaker 3's Name] will talk about what this means for the future of religion.

Speaker 3 - Future of Religion & Conclusion

Thank you [Speaker 2's Name].

So, what is the future of religion? Is it disappearing, or just changing?

In some parts of the world, especially in Europe, fewer people go to church or follow traditional religious rules.

But in many other places, religion is still strong - especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Charles Taylor says even in secular countries, religion doesn't vanish. Instead, it becomes one choice among many in a "marketplace of beliefs."

We are also seeing new forms of religion:

- Online churches and virtual worship.

- Religious influencers who share messages on social media.

- People who say they are "spiritual but not religious," choosing personal beliefs over formal institutions.

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At the same time, some religious groups are becoming more strict. For example, Pentecostal churches and Islamic revival movements are growing in Nigeria.

These groups often speak out on moral, social, and political issues.

Philosophers have different views about this:

- Emmanuel Levinas says that ethics comes from meeting and caring for others - an idea with deep religious roots, but not tied to one religion.
- Paul Tillich says religion is about what matters most to you, not just about following rules.
- Friedrich Nietzsche believed that religion should be reformed so it focuses on life, creativity, and human growth.

All this shows that religion is not disappearing - it is adapting. It might not be as dominant as it once was, but it still plays an important role for many people.

In conclusion, religion is neither completely necessary nor completely useless. It changes with society and survives in new forms.

The real question is not "Will religion exist?" but "What kind of religion will exist in the future, and how will it guide morality, meaning, and community?"

Thank you.