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CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: CASE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."
Einstein

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the link in between spirituality in christianism and social scientific research methodologies. To attain that goal, key terms such as spirituality, religion, mysticism, christianity, superstitions, science, research methodology and logic are mobilized. In order to follow a structured pattern and organised methodology, we chose a model based on interpretivistic philosophy corresponding to an inductive approach for an exploratory nature based on interviews, observations, and textual analysis. The result of our analysis show that spirituality as the study of the relationship between the Triune God and humanity encompass science and by such research methodology i.e. the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. As perspectives, the creation of the universe by a rational, intelligent God explains why the universe is so intelligible and open to our scientific investigation (LR Brand, 2024). The study of Philosophy and the universe in its various forms is necessary for the life of the scientific researcher, the believer and the witness of the Church.

Keywords: spirituality, religion, mysticism, christianity, superstitions, science, research methodology and logic.

Introduction

In the world of science, a great number of scientists are resistant to the compatibility between christian belief and scientific research. They are said to disagree profoundly on how we obtain knowledge of the world. While science is based on observation and reasoning from observation. Religion and spirituality believe the contrary by assuming that human beings can access a deeper level of information that is not available by either observation or reasoning. Authors such as Guillermo Paz-y-Miño-C and Avelina Espinosa believe that the historical conflict between evolution and religion is intrinsic to the incompatibility between scientific rationalism/empiricism and the belief in supernatural causation.

On the contrary, some Authors believe science and religious beliefs or spirituality are not incompatible. In that line Einstein stated that there is no inherent conflict between religion and science. In fact, he sees them as complementary, and each in different ways dependent on the other. Religion, he writes, needs science as a practical means of doing good works in the world.

Studies establishing the complementarity or not in between science and religion are numerous and usually concern the following subjects : science and religion conflict ; science and religion dialogue ; magic science and religion ; science and religion debate ; science and religion similarities ; victorian science and religion ; science and religion compatible ; science and religion god.

It appears that studies intending to demonstrate how sciences and their methods are sourced from the bible or better still how the biblical principles contains all what we need to know and understand in terms of scientific methodological processes are scarce. This is the main reason why this analysis is undertaken in order to unveil this « hidden » truth.

The main Authors dealing with the topics relating on the compatibility between religions, spirituality and science are usually theologians such as John Haught, Sarah Coakley , philosophers with an interest in science like Nancey Murphy or former scientists with long-standing interests in religion, some of whom are also ordained for instance the physicist John Polkinghorne or the molecular biophysicist Alister.

Very few authors on social sciences and other domains of studies have tried to explore the bible as a source of their principles and methodologies. For the present study we shall base our guideline on social management sciences and the causal or dependent relation in between various sciences and biblical revelations. There is



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therefore a gap that need to be explored, hence in our analysis we are going to work on the following aspects namely context, conceptual background, literature review, problem rationale, research aim and objectives, research interests, theoretical background, research methodology, link bible and sciences, spiritual principles and research methodology, results, innovation and conclusions.

Contextual background

According to Chakale (2018) the formation of spirituality is always cultural-contextual. African spirituality involves deeper human values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices. God within the context of African spirituality is seen as "The Great Spirit, The Creator and Sustainer of the Universe" and "the Very Source of Being" C (Singh, 2020). Knoetze (2019) believe that African spirituality is a holistic concept that stemmed from the historical, cultural and religious heritage of Africa. Religiosity and spirituality are deeply rooted in Africa; indeed, they are the reason for living for many people (Namatovu et al., 2018).

Just like in Africa many other countries and culture are attached to spirituality and religions. 83% of all U.S. adults believe people have a soul or spirit in addition to their physical body. 81% say there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we cannot see it. 74% say there are some things that science cannot possibly explain (Pew research center, 2023). Many top universities in the western world, such as Oxford University, Harvard University, and Princeton University, had religious background. In Asia, it is noticed that spirituality as service to the kingdom of God occupies a central place in Asian theologies of liberation (PC Phan, 2006). In Europe, Religion has been a major influence on the societies, cultures, traditions, philosophies, artistic expressions and laws within present-day Europe (Sheldrake, 2011). In Oceania, Oceanic art history is very rich with a foundation of complex mythological and cosmogonic systems. Religion and ritual strongly influence every aspect of life (Rowland, 2019). There are more than 25 religions in the world and 85% 85 percent of people around the globe identify with a religion (Wasserman, 2024). According to Émile Durkheim one of the principal architects of modern social science, religion is the most fundamental social institution through history, humanity has been inextricably tied to the expansion of religious life.

Spirituality or religion have always been associated with superstitious beliefs. In fact Some people and especially scientific enthusiasts and regard spiritualism as meaningless or superstitious. Mysticism, religion, superstition are usually confused states Chopra (2022). She added that this is very far from the requirements of logics or mathematics. Mysticism, spirituality or religion are often associated to a belief, not based on human reason or scientific knowledge, that future events may be influenced by one's behaviour in some magical or mystical way. Magic rituals, beliefs continue to be widely perceived as an archaic worldview, a form of superstition lacking the intrinsic spiritual value of religion or the rational logic of science. Very few are those who believe that science is just an infinite reflect of spirituality.

Key concepts

Spirituality, religion, mysticism, christianity, superstitions, science, research methodology, logic are the key words mobilized for this research.

3.1. Spirituality

In hebrews, spirituality refers to what is mental, unworldly, psychological. The word spirituality comes from the Latin "spiritus" which literally means "breath", signifying Life. According to others, It is derived from the Old French esprit, which comes from the Latin word spiritus (soul, ghost, courage, vigor, breath) and is related to spirare (to breathe). In the Vulgate, the Latin word spiritus is used to translate the Greek pneuma and Hebrew ruach.

Tanyi (2002) found that spirituality is an inherent component of being human, and is subjective, intangible, and multidimensional. Spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably, but the two concepts are different. Spirituality involves humans' search for meaning in life, while religion involves an organized entity with rituals and practices about a higher power or God. Spirituality may be related to religion for certain individuals, but for others, such as an atheist, it may not be. Whilst the construct of workplace spirituality is being clarified, spirituality can be approximated and operationalized through one of its major elements, meaning in life (Klerk, 2005). Spirituality is linked to « spirit » i.e in latin spiritus, whose original meaning was "breath, breathing" and hence "spirit, soul. Therefore what is spiritual or spirituality would refer to the non-physical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character.



3.2. Religion

According to Burnett Tylor (1871) religion involves a direct, personal relationship between humans and spiritual forces; that relationship is with a personal, conscious omnipotent spiritual being. Religion differential with magic which on the other hand is characterized as external, impersonal, and mechanical, involving technical acts of power. Tylor perceived the modern religious belief in God as a "survival" of primitive ignorance. However, Tylor did not believe that atheism was the logical end of cultural and religious development, but instead a highly minimalist form of monotheist deism (Strenski, 2006, p. 93.). There are nearly 4,000 recognised faiths around the globe. However, almost 75 percent of the people follow one of the five main faiths which include Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism are considered the five major religions 5 Pew research center, 2024).

While religion seek to establish a relationship of dependence between men and spiritual forces, magic instead seeks to manipulate spiritual powers. Functionnalism state that religion acts as a conservative force by reinforcing social norms and promoting social solidarity. Unlike Durkheim, Malinowski did not see religion as reflecting society as a whole, nor did he see religious rituals as involving the 'worshipping of society' – he argued that religion had a more specific function: that of reinforcing solidarity during times of emotional stress that threaten to undermine the stability. Émile Durkheim (1916) found that religion is communal because its adherents, bound together by shared belief, form a church. Magic, on the other hand, involves no permanent ties between believers and only temporary ties between individuals and the magicians who perform services for them.

3.3. Mysticism

According to the centenary dictionnary, Mysticism and rationalism represent opposite poles of theology, rationalism regarding the reason as the highest faculty of man and the sole arbiter in all matters of religious doctrine; mysticism, on the other hand, declaring that spiritual truth cannot be apprehended by the logical faculty, nor adequately expressed in terms of the understanding. Christian mysticism refers to some form of contact with the divine or transcendent, often understood in Christian tradition as involving union with God. What is mystical is therefore seen as enigmatic, obscure, symbolic, what is concealed, illumination achieved by initiation.

What is mystical will usually be perceived as a belief in union with the divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation, and belief in the power of spiritual access to ultimate reality, or to domains of knowledge closed off to ordinary thought. Hence mysticism will be at the opposite end of anything rational, logic, accessible, clear, nonambiguous or obvious.

Meaning of mysticism has not been exhausted. According to WP Downes (1920) mysticism means an immediate union with God, through Christ. Institutionalism means the mediation of the Divine Spirit. There can exist various types of mysticism such as christian mysticism, platonic mysticism, hindu mysticim, Buddhist mysticism, muslim mysticism, etc (Barrois, 1947). Christian mysticism refers to the sense of some form of contact with the divine or transcendent, often understood in Christian tradition as involving union with God.

Mysticism played an important role in the history of Christian religion and emerged as a living influence in modern times. Platonic spirituality is based precisely on the fact that the soul has an origin and the purpose outside the body and that it belongs solely to the Realm of Forms. The Platonic view of the nature of reality states that the ideal entities of beauty, justice, equality, and evil, also known as forms, are eternal and unchanging realities. Plato believed these Forms provided absolute values that exist independent of one's senses and perception. As far as Hindu spirituality is concerned, Hindus believe in the doctrines of samsara (the continuous cycle of life, death, and reincarnation) and karma (the universal law of cause and effect). Buddhism is one of the world's largest religions and originated 2,500 years ago in India. Buddhists believe that the human life is one of suffering, and that meditation, spiritual and physical labor, and good behavior are the ways to achieve enlightenment, or nirvana. Islam means "surrender" and its central idea is a surrendering to the will of God. Its central article of faith is that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger".

3.4. Christianity

Chritianism is a religion based on the teaching of Jesus christ. It is a an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life of Jesus Christ. A brief and clear picture is given by Martin E. Marty & William Richey Hogg (2024) who stated that Christianity is a major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ, or the Anointed One of God) in the 1st century CE.



It has become according to them the largest of the world's religions and, geographically, the most widely diffused of all faiths. It has a constituency of more than two billion believers. Its largest groups are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches. The Oriental Orthodox churches constitute one of the oldest branches of the tradition but had been out of contact with Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy from the middle of the 5th century until the late 20th century because of a dispute over Christology (the doctrine of Jesus Christ's nature and significance).

Moreover, they added, significant movements within the broader Christian world and sometimes transcending denominational boundaries are Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, Evangelicalism, and fundamentalism. In addition, there are numerous independent churches throughout the world such as Anglicanism; Baptist; Calvinism; Congregationalism; Evangelical church; Lutheranism; Oriental Orthodoxy; presbyterian; Reformed and Presbyterian churches, etc.

3.5. Superstitions

Someone is defined as superstitious when he has a belief or way of behaving that is based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck. Such a person usually develop a belief that certain events or things will bring good or bad luck. As a matter of illustration, Superstitious people describes a belief in chance or magic. In some cases knocking the left leg is a sign of bad luck ; biting your tongue or a spoon falling while eating can be synonym of gossips against you. Some people may avoid walking under ladders, spilling salt, or passing black cats all because you think they will bring you bad luck. Is superstition spirituality backed or justified ? Wanting more control or certainty is the driving force behind most superstitions. We tend to look for some kind of a rule, or an explanation for why things happen. Superstition relates both to belief and to behaviour. In general, superstition begins in an idea, or a feeling, that our destinies are somehow influenced by external, or supernatural forces. Christianity seems to be skeptical about spirituality linked to superstition. What we learn from this is that we tend to go into superstitious practices and behaviours hoping for more control over our lives and have good outcomes, but these stories show that doing this sort of thing can be catastrophic for our mental wellbeing.

3.6. Science

When we talk about science, we generally refer to a coherent body of knowledge relating to certain categories of facts, objects or phenomena obeying laws and/or verified by experimental methods. According to philosophy, science is opposed to superstition, magic, opinion, even sensation. It is identified with any rational knowledge obtained by demonstration or by observation and verification. Depending on whether it precedes the experience or whether it starts from it, its approach is said to be either hypothetico-deductive or inductive. While Science is the systematic study of the physical world through observation and experiment. It differs from spiritual matters which are centered on inner values and meanings, and involves practices like meditation and prayer to discover one's essence.

3.7. Research methodology

Research methodology is defined as the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. In a research paper, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability.

Scholars such as Grix (2001) advocated that undertaking a research in general and a doctoral or (PhD) one in particular should be seen as a learning process, an apprenticeship in the art of research in which candidates will learn to reflect on the origins of theories and concepts, how to theorise, how to 'mesh' theory with practice, and how to organise vast quantity of materials in a limited time period.

For majority of scientists, Science is based observation and reasoning from observation. The scientific knowledge system is ever-evolving, while religious belief is based on an absolute knowledge system. The main concern of science is the physical, while religion focuses on the supernatural world. Scientific knowledge is gained through empirical methods, such as experiments. Science is a way of knowing that differs from other ways in its dependence on empirical evidence and testable explanations.

However, other researchers believe that Science investigates the natural world, while religion deals with the spiritual and supernatural. Hence, the two can be complementary. There need not be any conflict between religious faith and the scientific perspective on evolution.



3.8. Logic

Most often spirituality lies in what is called faith while science is usually a matter of logic. Many scientists, as well as some theologians and philosophers, have argued that religious faith and logical reason are not compatible. Some scientists and humanists have further suggested that natural reason alone is sufficient to provide us with answers to questions about the meaning or purpose of human existence. However if logic is considered as a science that deals with the principles and criteria of validity of inference and demonstration. It appears to some great thinkers that logic is demonstrating the veracity of something and that God is exactly the truth of all things. They went as far as stating that Logic is God thinking. Christ himself is represented as wisdom, logic, or right thinking. Logic is an attribute of God. God is not subject to logic in the sense that he is beneath it.

Brief literature review

Most studies do not address specifically the link between christian spirituality and research methodology, taking the case of social sciences. The available literature turns around issues such as the methodology in christian spirituality, theological research methodology, the relationship between christian spirituality and human sciences, etc. Christian spirituality as an academic field of study can be defined within its material objects and methodologies (Y Jeongho, 2024). According to de H Rolston (2024) science is a study of causes and religion is an inquiry into meanings. In material content, science and religion typically offer alternative interpretations of experience, the scientific interpretation being based on causality, the religious interpretation based on meaning.

Surveys, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and similar methods have been used in the great majority of spirituality studies to date. These research methods have a long history of usage in the social sciences. According to Schneiders (2023) Spirituality as an academic field is the study of spirituality as an existential phenomenon (the material object) under a formality (the formal object) which distinguishes it from theology, on the one hand, and religious studies, on the other. Anthropologically oriented studies in Christian spirituality tend to emphasize hermeneutical methodology. Hence, the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts, may include the art of understanding and communication as earlier stated by Friedrich Schleiermacher ; Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Concerning the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity largely used in research or the ying and the yang in spirituality. It appears that the divine nature is absolute and at the same time specific to situation. It identifies contradiction but at times seem to associate them depending on circumstances. The root of the words subjectivity and objectivity are subject and object, philosophical terms that mean, respectively, an observer and a thing being observed. Objectivity is the perception or experience of the external; subjectivity is the perception or experience of the internal. Subjectivity and objectivity are both necessary pathways to knowledge and are dependent on each other.

Research problem

The popular image of the relationship between science and Christian faith is one of antagonism, conflict, and even warfare. According to Pew research center¹, Some 59% of Americans say science and religion are often in conflict, while 38% say the two are mostly compatible. The share saying that science and religion often conflict is up modestly from 55% in a 2009 Pew Research survey, while the share saying the two are mostly compatible has stayed the same at 38%.

If The late German-born physicist Albert Einstein believed that science without religion was lame, and religion without science was blind. The debate over faith and science in terms of conceptions and methodological issues is not really over.

In fact, Over the centuries, the relationship between science and religion has ranged from conflict and hostility to harmony and collaboration, while various thinkers have argued that the two concepts are inherently at odds and entirely separate. Thereby the following questions :

- i) *In between science and spiritual belief should we talk of conflict or cooperation ?*
- ii) *What are the similarities between science and religion in terms of research methodologies ?*
- iii) *Can theology and spiritual studies be ranged along social sciences ?*

Research aim and objectives



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The aim of our study is to analyze the link between christian spirituality and research methodology, taking the case of social sciences. In order to attain our goal are our objectives are the following ones :

- *Determine the nature of the relationship between science and spiritual belief.*
- *Identify the similarities between science and religion in terms of research methodologies.*
- *Derive perspectives concerning theology and spiritual studies in the realm of social sciences.*

The Pew Research Center (also simply known as Pew) is a non partisan American think tank based in Washington, D.C. It provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the United States and the world.

Research methodology

In order to follow a structured pattern and organised methodology, we chose the model of the research onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Therefore, epistemologically we referred to an interpretivist philosophy assuming that reality is socially constructed. In other words, that reality is subjective, and is constructed by the observer through their experience of it, rather than being independent of the observer. An interpretivist philosophy also typically manifests in the adoption of a qualitative methodology, we relied on data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. These types of studies commonly explore complex social phenomena and individual perspectives, which are naturally more subjective and nuanced. The analysis of the data collected was done through content analysis which is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text). Using content analysis, researcher can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts.

Research results

The historical conflict between evolution and religion is intrinsic to the incompatibility between scientific rationalism/empiricism and the belief in supernatural causation. studies intending to demonstrate how sciences and their methods are sourced from the bible or better still how the biblical principles contains all what we need to know and understand in terms of scientific methodological processes are scarce. Very few are those who believe that science is just an infinite reflect of spirituality. Almost 75 percent of the people follow one of the five main faiths which include Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

According to Martin E. Marty & William Richey Hogg (2024) who stated that Christianity is a major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ, or the Anointed One of God) in the 1st century CE. Christianity seems to be skeptical about spirituality linked to superstition.

While Science is the systematic study of the physical world through observation and experiment. It differs from spiritual matters which are centered on inner values and meanings, and involves practices like meditation and prayer to discover one's essence.

Some Researchers believe that while Science investigates the natural world, religion deals with the spiritual and supernatural. Hence, the two can be complementary. It appears that logic is demonstrating the veracity of something and that God is exactly the truth of all things. Logic is God thinking but below Him. Christ himself is represented as wisdom, logic, or right thinking. However God is not subject to logic in the sense that he is beneath Him.

Science and spirituality are complementary but the former is just a parcel of the latter. In this respect and according to de H Rolston (2024), science is all about explaining causes and effects while spirituality goes above to inquiry the deep meanings of the cosmos and the creation. If science is limited to the creation and try through theology to perceive the creator, spirituality goes deeper to know him in his ways and thoughts in both objective and subjective ways. Science and religion typically offer alternative interpretations of experience.

Analyses and perspectives

Spirituality as the study of the relationship between the Triune God and humanity encompass science and by such research methodology i.e. the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. According to the Research onion (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 108), a research approach can be inductive or deductive. Its selection completely depends on the earlier research aims, personal opinions, limitations, choices etc. The deductive approach flows from generic to specific. This tends to



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demonstrate that all source of knowledge are first of all spiritual before being materialized scientifically. By such social science research methods are an infinite part of the study of man and the universe or segmentation of spirituality in a small and evolutive process. It is believed that science and religions or even spirituality are not in essence contradictory nor even complementary. Science is part and parcel of the spiritual or cosmic realm trying to discover the world, the interactions between men through nature laws or through their inner being which is nothing else than their spirit.

As perspectives, God encouraged the scientific exploration of the world when He commanded us to rule over and subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28). Scripture speaks of the fixed nature of the universe that makes scientific discovery possible (Jeremiah 31:35-36; Colossians 1:17). Science, religion and spirituality are in fact good things as long as they are not use for any other purpose than honouring the creator and seeking the well being of humanity. Otherwise they become perverse or evil. All the steps of social science research methodologies are Divine connected and embedded. Therefore an excellent social researcher must have as source of inspiration God's rules and principles as he is the creator of humans, society, organisations. He is the way, the truth and the life we are seeking through knowledge. As stated in Proverbs 2:6, The LORD God is the source of wisdom; knowledge and understanding come from his mouth.

Conclusions

The historical conflict between science and spirituality in general and religious beliefs in particular. Specifically, Very few authors on social sciences and other domains of studies have tried to explore the bible as a source of their principles and methodologies. It appears in that vein that God's existence is the precondition to knowledge itself. Since humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:28-29). According to GT Ladd (1891), the Bible and philosophy both fix the attention of men upon the same Object of knowledge and belief, the situation encompasses social research philosophies such as realism, interpretativism, subjectivism or positivism, etc. However it appears clearly that scientific research encounters limitations as there are matters that transcend the capacity of research. The Book of Job asks, "Can you search out the deep things of God? This is why every social researchers who need to deep deeper into the realities of social matters must find God as source of inspiration.

The people of God are instructed to be philosophers in the sense that they love Christ who is the wisdom of God. It is obvious from Colossians 2. Throughout the Bible, God calls Christians to be "philosophers," that is, seekers and lovers of wisdom (cf. Prov. 16:16; 19:8; James 1:5). Also good christians should involve in research in all domain to know God, His revelations to men in order to make public things revealed by the source of all wisdom the Lord God.

The creation of the universe by a rational, intelligent God explains why the universe is so intelligible and open to our scientific investigation (LR Brand, 2024). The study of Philosophy and the universe in its various forms is necessary for the life of the believer and the witness of the Church.

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