

Geography of Religion; a cultural geographical Analysis

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Abstract: This research paper examine the geography of religion from a cultural, geographical perspective. At first sight, Geography and religion can be considered as a phenomenon that has no co-relationship with each other. On the other hand, it could be argued that the feasibility of geography to study religion. This research wholly based on the literature review, and it was undertaken to define the following questions; what the religion is? Besides, what is the relationship between religion and geography? Finding revealed when the religion is referred in a geographical context, it could be seen that the Geography has a unique capability in analyzing the distribution patterns because the religion's diffusion process directly develops on geographical spaces.

Keywords: *Geography of Religion, Cultural Geography, Diffusion Process*

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1. Introduction

Geography and religion appear that they have two different way of interest and perspectives (Kong, 1990). Because of the relationship between geography and religion not been directly ostensible. On the other hand, it subjected to argue the feasibility of geography to study religion. The common understanding about the contribution to religion from geography, which is limited to, mapped in various scales, from the global to the local to study the global patterns of diffusion of religion. Further, most of the religious studies carried out through Theologise, Sociologist anthropologist and Philosophers so on. The main objective of this article is to examine the concept that has explained the religion from a geographical point of view.

2. Definitions of Religion

The “religion” is broadly considered as a process of diffusing ideas related to the way of living and a way of feeling the world. For many people, religion is more than any other cultural trait, and it defines who they are and how they understand the world around them. Like language, religion confers identity. It observed religion dominates the lives and behaviour of billions of people worldwide. Because "religion is tied to almost all aspect of human culture and social systems, studying the geography of faith needs to understand significant factors, including culture and society affecting it.

In many parts of the world, especially in non-western areas, Religion is such a vital part of a culture that it practically constitutes the culture. Thus, it becomes difficult to define precisely what religion is because religion manifests itself in many different ways. In many societies in Africa and Asia, religious doctrine exerts tight control over much of the behaviour of the people (Carrette, 1999).

The philosopher Feaver in 1967 defines religion as follows, "Religion is a manifestly a content or element of human experience. The institutions, traditions, convictions, sacred writing, are observables open to inspection" (Feaver and William, 1967).

The sociologists' Weber in 1962, analysed the relation between religion and social change. Weber believed that God did not create humankind, but rather humanity created God, just as humanity created wage labour and democracy. His ideas directly influence to the geographers in the contemporary period.

They define: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.”

Another definition of religion was formulated by two American sociologists Glock and Stark, 1971 from the views of several writers on religious institutions. "Religion, or what societies hold to be sacred, comprises an institutionalised system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on questions of ultimate meaning"(Rogers, 1962).

When taken into consideration of different definitions, it can be argued that the religion has spiritual and institutional qualities acceptable to people who can value and practice generation by generation which is a necessity for the diffusion of religion.

3. Geography of Religion: Theoretical Background

The geographers, in the history of the subject, had shown much interest in understanding the religion through their approaches. Some of the critical issues were tried to understand the distribution of beliefs which was the period of origin. However, the 20th century becomes significant because most of the revolution geographical concepts such as environmental determinisms influence the thought of religion. For example, Ellen Semple, in 1911, argued, imagery and symbolism of religion were affected by its place of birth. Further, Ellsworth Huntington, (1945) explained the objects of worships are significantly influenced by the geographical factors such as rain. Also, Isaacs, (1959-60) define, “the geography of religion is the study of the part played by the religious motives in man’s transformation of the landscape” (as reviewed by Kong, 1990). In 1966 Hultkrantz’s thought about religion has explained through an ecological approach. He mentioned the relationship between environmental material caused to religious action and conceptions.

The differences in the diffusion of various religions have prompted the geographers to study further the factors affecting distribution. For instance, the transportation factor had made a significant impact on this diffusion. It has been argued that geographers have been slow to fully acknowledge the place of religion alongside such axes of identity as race, class, nationality and gender in their analyses (Brace et al., 2006). While the spatial practices and performances of the site have been explored through a wide range of economic, political and cultural institutions (Barnes and Gregory, 1997, Braun and Castree, 2001), geographers have spent relatively less time investigating the form and meaning of developing institutional frameworks of religious organisations and spatial and temporal patterns of such organisations. Although some necessary steps made towards the examination of contemporary geographies of religion, rarely have geographers attempted to uncover a sense of temporal dynamism and depth by drawing on historical sources to enhance their understanding (Brace et al., 2006).

In the last 10–15 years, that religion has attracted attention from some geographers interested in the politics of identity, space as a social product and the interplay of secular and sacred meanings in place (Levine, 1986; Campo, 1991).

Further, the literature related to ‘geographies of religion’ is located across a wide range of disciplines, but has to be adequately contextualised within geographical debates. Kong (1999) has recently identified some common theoretical strands in this literature but notes how difficult it is to distinguish work on religion within the discipline of geography from a broader literature emerging from across the social sciences.

Geographers can make a distinct contribution to our understanding of religions, because of the various articulations between faith and conceptualisations of landscapes and place, and the gift of belief in sustaining distinctive material cultures. Indeed, most geographers would acknowledge that aspects of religion – of faith, sacredness and spirituality – intersect with geography at every turn: from understanding the construction of an identity or the meaning of bodily practices at a personal level to unpicking the complex relationships and politics of institutional space and place at a regional or national level (Barnes and Gregory, 1997).

As geographers, our interest in the study of religions is different from that of, theologians, Sociologists, philosophers or historians. Geographers are more interested in the distribution of religions patterns and processes of diffusion once they developed, with the spatial distributions they achieved, and with their impact on the landscape (Lewis, 1965).

According to Philip L. Wagner (1967), the investigation and exposition of the relations between religion and geography is the scientific task of the geography of religion, which thus forms a branch of cultural geography. In the article of fundamental questions in the geography of religion, Paul Fickeler discussed the idea same as Wagner. According to his argument, the relations between religion and environment are mutual, so that their investigation can be approached under two main headings:

1. How does the environment, including the people, the landscape, and the country, affect a religious form? And,
2. How reciprocally, does a religious form affect people, landscape, and country?

The investigation of the first topic is a task for the science of religion, to which geography furnishes the necessary particulars about landscape and regions; the analysis of the second problem, in contrast, is more a task of the geography of religions, to which the science of religion and other cultural sciences provide the necessary foundation (Wagner et al., 1962).

Cultural geography is concerned with two kinds of relationships: the interaction between the culture and its complex earth environment, and the spatial interaction among different cultures. The geography of religion investigates these relationships, concentrating its attention on the religious component in culture (Spencer, 1954).

Some geographers paid their attention to religion through a cultural aspect. Geographers like Julian Huxley, Wilber Zelinsky tried to understand the religion as a component of culture. Culture is such a complex and all-embracing thing; Huxley proposed the simplest way to categories culture. Huxley's model has three parts:

1. Mentifact
2. Sociofact
3. Artifact (Haggett, 1977).

Religion was included under this mentifact, and it incorporates religion, language, magic and folklore, artistic traditions, and the like. They are abstract and mental. They related to the human ability to think and to forge ideas, and they form the ideals and images against which other aspects of culture are measured (Haggett, 1977).

Wilber Zelinsky has created a model of culture using a three-dimensional cube which can be analysed in terms of (a) its intrinsic component, or (b) the cultural characteristics of a given region, or (c) the artistic elements of a distinctive group or subculture. In 1972, Haggett in his *Geography: A Modern synthesis* has been elaborated this mentifact as the most durable and centred component of a culture (Haggett, 1977). This can be defined in figure No. 1.1.

4. Discussion

In this paper, the “religion” is broadly considered to be a process of diffusing ideas related to the way of living and a way of feeling the world. For many people, religion is more than any other cultural trait, and it defines who they are and how they understand the world around them. Like language, religion confers identity. It can be seen that religion dominates the lives and behaviour of billions of people worldwide. Because "religion is tied to almost all aspect of human culture and social systems, studying the geography of religion needs to understand significant factors, including culture and society affecting it. In many parts of the world, especially in non-western areas, Religion is such a vital part of a culture that it practically constitutes the culture. Thus, it becomes difficult to define precisely what religion is because religion manifests itself in different ways. In many societies in Africa and Asia, religious doctrine exerts tight control over much of the behaviour of the people (Carrette, 1999).

Religion has an unperceiving power to control over the people. The most common statement of Desmond Tutu expressed how belief has been affected to the developing countries in the process of invasion, "when the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible, and we had the land, they said 'Let us pray'. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land"².

Further, it observed the religious prophets considered as geographers because the most critical religious sources such as Indo- Gangetic hearth is based on the lowland plains of the Northern edge of the Indian subcontinent are drained by the Indus and Ganga rivers. Buddhism, Hinduism were born there and the culture, belief and values based on their environment. For, instance based on water sources, they encourage people to not to harm the animal and cultivated for their consumption. Differently, the religion such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam that origin from the Semitic Hearth, which has centred on the margin of the deserts, has different cultural values and belief.

On the other hand, it observed that every religion has its limits of spatial diffusion patterns. Based on the physical and socio-economical geographical factors such as location, availability of resources, accessibility, culture, and way of living and social structures (Fernando, 2020).

Finally, religion work as a hidden agenda that implemented to attain the power of the world in the past and even today. Therefore, sometimes religion can be define under political geography, rather cultural geographical perspective.

²Desmond Mpilo Tutu is a South African Anglican cleric and a theologian also a human right activist.

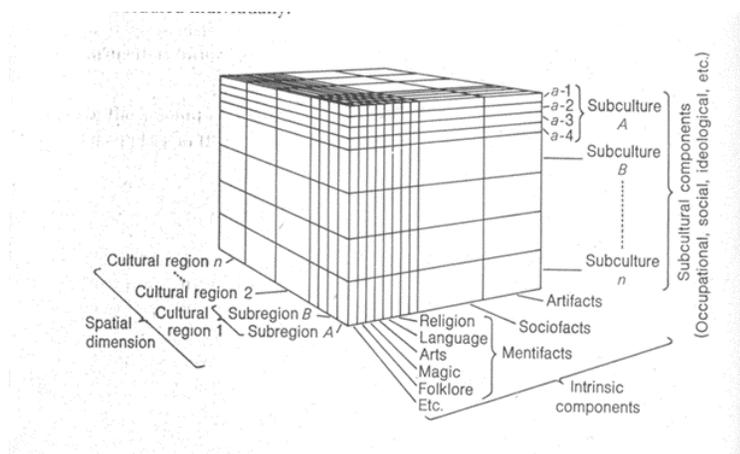
Conclusion

Religion has been considered as a "phenomenon which has an unprecedented potentiality in transforming human thinking, history and the civilisation (Fernando,2011)." Religion, further explained as a mentifact related to the human being within the culture, Although religion is introduced as one aspect of the culture or social thinking, in a geographical context, it can be defined as a complex process that spread through time and space. Studying these temporal and spatial processes is the core of Geographical Science today. And every religion that has been diffused in the world can be analysed through these temporal and spatial perspectives. When the religion is referred to in a geographical context, it can be seen that the Geographical Science has a particular capability in analysing the patterns of religions diffusion process past, present and future.

Table and Figure

Figure No: 1.1

Huxley’s Model in Characteristics of Culture



Source: Peter, Haggett. "Geography: A modern synthesis", 1972

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