

Prayers, spirituality, religion and science

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In the last few weeks, there have been articles posted on the internet to prove that prayers, religion and spirituality are of no effect; that science is all, that is, the beginning and the end. This is obviously a view from one school of thought. We agree that there are many perspectives to view from. It may be possible to show in the course of this discourse that there is a strong relationship between prayers, religion, spirituality and science.

Prayer is a form of religious practice that seeks to activate a volitional connection to some greater power in the universe through deliberate intentional practice. Prayer may be either individual or communal and takes place in public or in private. It may involve the use of words, song, or complete silence. Prayer may take the form of a hymn, incantation, formal creedal statement, or a spontaneous utterance in the praying person. There are different forms of prayer such as petition, supplication, thanksgiving, etc.

Prayer is directed to a spirit, deceased person (ancestors), a deity for the purpose of worship, assistance, guidance or confession of sins to express one's thoughts and emotions. Thus, people pray for many reasons; for personal benefit or for the sake of others.

The active word in the definition above is that prayer is a deliberate intentional practice learned from parents, elders or the community and the culture one was born into. It is agreed that one is most likely to imbibe the culture and religion of his/her parents.

Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of the sick or injured people. The efficacy of petition in prayer for physical healing to a deity has been evaluated in numerous studies, with contradictory results. I can confidently say that those who prayed before and during assisted conception treatment cycle tended to achieve a pregnancy and subsequent better take home baby rate although the methodology was criticised.

In the scientific analysis of the role of prayers in the outcome of ill patients, cognisance of the spirituality and/or the belief systems of the patients were not taken into account. Those who believe in the supreme nature of God, believe in faith and they receive in faith. That is the corner-stone of answered prayers. Prayer does not return void. It will also be the way you wish it to be when you pray. That is the role of prayers.

This is also similar to placebo effects of drug administration. Studies have shown when two groups of individuals diagnosed as suffering from the same condition were treated; one with true drug and the other with a placebo, the outcome was similar as the patients and those administering the medication were blind to what they were administering. This research shows that the belief of the patients may underlie the outcome of his or her treatment in most cases. In motivational speeches, we say if you believe you can, then you can and the converse is also true; if you believe you can't, you cannot. In the thought of the week, I posted a few days ago, we agreed that boldness has the power, the genius and magic in it to succeed so it is with prayers. While you pray, you have to work towards manifesting the object of your prayers .

The term spirituality refers to the search for the Absolute amongst animists, or God among Christians, Allah among the Moslems. Different people experience spirituality in different ways and religion is one way of experiencing spirituality.

One can therefore be “spiritual but not religious and the converse is also true that one can be religious and not spiritual and it is only those who are spiritual and religious at the same time which we term as being “born again” that can really benefit from prayers.

People generally believe in the existence of many different “spiritual paths” - emphasising the importance of finding one’s own individual path to spirituality. Whereas religion is externally practised, spirituality is practised in the mind and only keen observers can see the spirituality of another person.

The experience of “spirituality”; the human emotions of awe, wonder and reverence, are also the province of the secular or scientific, in response to their highest values, or when observing or studying nature, or the universe.

Religion on the other hand, is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a supernatural Being usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. There are many aspects of religion which include narrative, symbolism, beliefs and practices that are supposed to give meaning to the practitioner’s experiences of life. Whether the meaning centres on deity or the ultimate truth, religion is commonly identified by the practitioner’s prayers, ritual meditation and music. Religion also encompasses ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history, and mythology as well as personal faith and religious experience.

Science is, in its broadest sense, any systematic knowledge-base or prescriptive practice that is capable of resulting in a prediction or predictable type of outcome. In its more restricted contemporary sense, science refers to a system of acquiring knowledge based on scientific methods and the organised body of knowledge gained through such research. Science is a continuing effort to discover and increase human knowledge and understanding through disciplined research.

From our primary education days in Benin City, we were informed that the acquisition of knowledge is a march which will never end as long as man is keen to increase his store of knowledge.

There is a link between spirituality, science, prayers and religion. All questions were once spiritual as man grappled with the unknown. Once a phenomenon can be explained by scientific knowledge, then it is no longer spiritual and may not be approached in prayers or religious terms.

Since the beginning of time, spirituality and religion were called upon to fill the gaps science did not understand. The rising and setting of the sun were once attributed to Helios. Earthquakes and tidal waves were then referred to as the wrath of Poseidon. Science has now shown that these belief systems are false as earthquakes and the rising and setting of the sun can be explained scientifically. Science has now provided answers to the numerous questions although there are still some questions that continue to bog the mind especially the esoteric ones. Questions like where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the purpose of life? This quest for knowledge we call science does not undermine the existence of God but rather reinforces it. So one can say that

science, religion and spirituality are not enemies but allies, which are two different paths or languages telling the same story. It is a story of symmetry and balance for example heaven and hell, night and day, hot and cold, God and satan. Both science and religion rejoices in God’s symmetry.

<http://www.tribune.com.ng/index.php/opinion/1786-prayers-spirituality-religion-and-science.html>