

## **LA CITE SANS DIEU (CITY WITHOUT GOD): LESSON FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL FOR OUR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WORLD.**

### **Abstract.**

*The power of science is dazzling: to create and clone life in the laboratory, to send words and pictures thousands of miles away by the touch of a button, etc. Today we live in a world of spaceship, of satellite, of computer and the test tube. Advances in genetic engineering have given us the power to intervene in the structure of DNA, the stuff of life itself. So in a way we are Godlike in our achievements, with the power to create and to destroy. However, it has become necessary to temper the scientific progress by the moral imperative, and to add Divine wisdom to human knowledge. To exclude God from human calculations, and to rely solely on human power, without seeking to do the will of our creator, is to build a Tower of Babel, which in itself is a symbol of self-destructive human arrogance. Therefore, religion must be seen to be very relevant and vital in our age and time, for it testifies to the spiritual values of truth, justice, love and peace, which alone can form a sound basis for lasting human fulfilment.*

### **Introduction**

The human person, at creation was endowed with the faculties of intellect and will by the Creator- God- with the injunction to conquer the earth and subdue it. These endowments confer on humans rationality and freedom, that now empower them to have dominion over other existents created by the same God. However, these powers given to humans were meant to be exercised or used in accordance with the laws governing the created order as established by the Creator. Obedience to these laws would guarantee the survival, progress and eternal happiness of humans and other existents.

The story of Babel as recorded in the Christian Holy Book, the Bible, (Gen. 11: 1-9) is a clear demonstration of human arrogance and pride in the exercise of the power of the intellect without reference to God. After the flood that destroyed the first world because of the wickedness of man, the survivors of the flood, Noah's descendants, began to increase and multiply, and were united in one mind and heart. When they came to a very level ground, they wanted to build for themselves a city with its tower reaching up to heaven, thus to bridge the gap between them and God. Observing this work human arrogance, God set confusion among them that no one could understand what the neighbour said, thereby shattering the harmony that had existed among them.

Science and technology, though good in themselves for the transformation of society, should not be pursued as ends in themselves, for they cannot guarantee the ultimate fulfilment that the human spirit craves for. It is God alone who can give ultimate fulfilment. If we try to achieve it by our own ingenuity, without reference to God, we are bound to fail. This explains why, despite the great advancements in science and technology, our generation is characterized by wickedness and evil, with the tendency towards self-destruction.

In this paper, we will briefly trace the origins of this godless-society ideology and its implications for our contemporary society. We will also examine where this ideology has brought to, and what lessons to learn from the Tower of Babel episode.

## **Background to the godless-society ideology:**

The roots of the present rejection-of-God-ideology could be traced to the humanist movements of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the scientific revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Non-religious people believed that this life is the only life we have, that the universe is a natural phenomenon with no supernatural side, and that we can live ethical and fulfilling live on the basis of reason and humanity. They trusted the scientific method, evidence and reason as the only means of discovering truths about the universe, and placed human welfare and happiness at the centre of their ethical decision making. (<http://humanism.org.uk/humanism>)

People who share these beliefs and values are called humanists, and this combination of attitudes is called humanism. Thus humanism can be described as:

...a commitment to the perspective , interests; a belief in reason and  
Autonomy as foundational aspects of human existence; a belief that reason,  
Scepticism and the scientific method are the only appropriate instruments  
For discovering truth and structuring the human community; a belief that the  
Foundations of ethics and society are to be found in autonomy and moral  
Equity...

Peers encyclopaedia, 87<sup>th</sup> edition, 1978, simply describes humanism as a “rejection of religion in favour of the advancement of humanity by it own efforts.” A humanist can therefore be seen as someone who, among other things, trusts in the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural; and believes that in the absence of the afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life, and helping others to do the same. Hence this life stance is generally understood as secular humanism.

The first Humanist Manifesto formalized at the University of Chicago in 2933 identified secular humanism as an ideology that espouses reason, ethics and justice, while specifically rejecting supernatural and religious ideas as basis of morality and decision- making. (Humanism - Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia ) This ideological stance was rooted in the scientific revolution of the period, initiated by Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon. These two philosopher/scientists claimed that by learning how the physical world works, we could become ‘masters and possessors’ of nature. And that in doing so , humans could overcome hunger through innovations in agriculture, eliminate disease through medical research, and dramatically improve overall quality of life through technology and industry. Ultimately science would save humans from unnecessary suffering and their self-destructive tendencies. (Thomas Burneth, “What is Scientism”, AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion, [http://www.aaas.org/spp/dialogue/community\\_dialogue/burneth.shtm](http://www.aaas.org/spp/dialogue/community_dialogue/burneth.shtm)) And this would be achieved in this world , not the after-life.

Both Descartes and Bacon elevated the use of reason and logic by denigrating other human faculties, such as creativity, memory and imagination, leading to scientism of the following centuries. According to Tom Sorell, scientism is a matter of “putting too high a value on natural science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture.” Ian Hutchinson sees scientism as saying that “science, modelled on the on the natural sciences is the only source of real knowledge”. That means that we can know only those things that are ascertained by experimentation through the application of the scientific method. Human inquiry is thus reduced to matters of material reality. ([http://carbon.ucdenver.edu/\\_myrder/scientism\\_este.htm](http://carbon.ucdenver.edu/_myrder/scientism_este.htm))

## **Implications of the Secular Humanist Ideology for the Contemporary Society.**

Secular humanism is associated with philosophical naturalism and with secularism and the secularisation of society. It rejects supernatural and religious ideas as basis of morality and decision-making, but rather derives its moral code from a philosophy of utilitarianism, ethical naturalism or evolutionary ethics. In brief it is,

a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality. (Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia)

With the “Happy Human” as its official symbol, it enthrones whatever that can make humans happy, here and now, as the ultimate goal worth pursuing. There is no thought of the after-life; everything ends in this world. And so whatever one can do to make oneself happy in this world is what matters. Man therefore is the measure of all things, and the worship of man’s ingenuity in science and technology has become the “new age religion”.

The utilitarian/hedonistic orientation characteristic of secular humanism tends to relativise morality: whatever that appears good or right for you, go for it, and no one has the right to hinder you. People are encouraged to live their lives without any transcendental referent. This has left humans with more frustrations, for the fact that the satisfaction and happiness that secular humanism and scientism propose are ephemeral and transient. They do not offer the fulfilment that the human spirit yearns for.

Moreover, the value of human life is judged by the Humanists from its utility and ability to give happiness to the individual concerned. Hence issues like abortion, euthanasia, contraception, and homosexuality have become major policy issues in America and Britain. And because these nations see themselves as the world’s super-powers, they are today trying to force their secular humanist ideologies down the throat of other countries, especially the developing countries, through their aid programmes. All these have had, and continue to have, their consequences on our contemporary society.

## **The Effects of Secular Humanist Ideologies and Scientism on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society.**

The menace of secular humanism and scientism have had some devastating influence on the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Although science and technology are an attempt to conquer nature and use it for man’s own good, it is evident that the same nature is over-exploited not only to the detriment of nature but also of the exploiter – man. As Nasr (1968: 19) observed, there is everywhere the desire to conquer nature, but in the process, the value of the conqueror himself, who is man, is destroyed and his very existence threatened.

When we pursue science and technology without reference to our eternal destiny, we will only be producing things with which to destroy ourselves. For example, technological advancement in nuclear weapons technology has seriously threatened the continued existence of humanity and even the whole range of living things. (Arua 2012) Our technology today, because of the materialistic outlook of secular humanism and scientism, views the human being as a mere lump of matter with which anything can be done. Man’s personhood and humanity are

no more recognised by our medical technology when an unborn baby's life is cruelly taken and a natural death unnecessarily prevented.

With their official symbol of "the Happy Human", the secular humanists have gone further to dehumanize and debase the human person, through homo- sexualism and same sex marriage that they propagate. In their effort to do away with God an religion from all human calculations, they have succeeded in reducing the dignity of humans below those of the brutes. It is a common physical dictum the 'opposite poles attract'.

Brutes and other creatures obey this principle, but humans endowed with reason go about teaching that individuals could mate with their likes, provided that gives them pleasure No cock will ever mate with another cock And so it is with other creatures. But because the super-powers of Europe and America have adopted the Humanist position as state policy, they are doing everything in their power to universalize it .

### **The Lesson Of Babel (Genesis 1: 3-10)s**

That God in creating man and woman charged them to "be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it...." demonstrates God's faith on human's ability to master the universe , using the intelligence communicated by God Himself. By this intelligence God made man His vice-regent among all creatures. For man therefore to side-track God and to place more trust on himself and on the work of his hands, is to sow the seed of confusion. That was exactly what happened to our forebears at Babel. God gave them the mission to occupy the land and make it fruitful, but people

preferred their own security and saw in national power a means to satisfy their pride.

Rather than solving the problems of injustice and misunderstanding existing in every society, they prefer to concentrate their efforts on accomplishing projects which will add to their prestige.

The same is true of our generation. By our neglect of God and religious values in the pursuit of science and technology, we have created more frustrating situations that our world today by evils of various dimensions and magnitude; wars, sicknesses, poverty, all forms of man's inhumanity to man, and general confusion in all societies. And the works of our own hands, our technology, are precipitating us towards self-annihilation.

It is one thing to celebrate science for its achievements and remarkable ability to explain a wide variety of phenomena in the natural world. But to claim there is nothing knowable outside the scope of science would be similar to a successful fisherman saying that whatever he cannot catch in his net does not exist. Once you accept that science is the only source of knowledge , you have adopted a philosophical position (scientism) that cannot be verified or falsified by science itself. And to affirm that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning to their own lives, without reference to anything external, is to create a state of chaos returning man to the Hobessian state of nature.

### **Conclusion**

The human person is a composite of body, soul and spirit. True human development can only be had when the three dimensions of man are equally catered for. To focus our attention only on the bodily (material) wellbeing/happiness of man to the neglect of his spiritual and transcendental goals is to dehumanize man. Though wonderful in its continued conquests, technology has often impoverished people in their essential human life, by depriving them of their inner spiritual dimension and stifling their sense of true and higher values.

The world is increasingly suffering from the pernicious influences of the anti-kingdom values of glory and honour, status and power, authority and independence. Many people possessed by powers that empty them of their true selves, do not seem to belong to themselves. Their freedom is in fetters. They are at the mercy of forces more powerful than they are. Hence their wills are frustrated by so much despair, and their hearts are so blemished that it is difficult for them to find love in them.

Therefore, despite the great exploits in science and technology characteristic of our generation, we must allow human ingenuity to open up for divine guidance. God and religion must be seen to be very relevant to our contemporary society. The neglect of God and religion, whether in our personal or corporate projects, can only be to our detriment. For whenever God/ religion is divorced from the mainstream of human life, the consequences are usually immense. A society that did not furnish its members with beliefs and practices that gave them a means of dealing with the ultimate problems of human existence and destiny would have to struggle along with an unsupportable burden of tradition unalloyed and hostility unrestrained if at all it would continue to exist. In other words, no society can live which does not give to its members a vision of an ideal form of life and ritual expression of the ideal.

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