PHI 943-12 Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis

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December 3, 2024

Professor

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**Assignment #3 – Essay**

**1. Write a 5-page paper using the Examination of Christian Practice essay outline [Course**

**Resources].**

**2. Paper Outline**

**a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.**

**b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.**

**c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.**

**d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the**

**remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).**

**Paper Outline**

**Religion is a historical phenomenon.**

**Is there only one true religion?**

**Is religion a mystery?**

**Growing up in church and becoming familiar with various religions.**

**Orthodoxy is the right belief and an idea or view that is generally accepted.**

**Religion is complex and can be complicated.**

**Religion, orthodoxy, and orthopraxis profoundly impact people and society.**

**Religion is a historical phenomenon.**

When I hear the word orthodoxy (or orthodox), as defined by Afaradi, “as a unifying factor that helps people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs come together under the Christian religion,” I associate it (orthodoxy) with various religions, mainly traditional and often outdated methods, and impractical practices, but multiple religions and religious practices nonetheless (Afaradi, 2024, p.3).

Religion is a historical phenomenon and an assortment of things that play a crucial role in society (Schel, 2024 & Chen, 2024). According to research, there are 4000 to 10,000 religions, and about 85% of the world's population claims to be religious.

The profound role of religion in shaping personal and social identity is not just fascinating. It is a crucial aspect of our human experience that we should all be eager to explore further. Understanding how religion shapes our identity can provide valuable insights into our beliefs and actions, making this exploration intriguing and necessary, especially if you are a Christian.

Christianity has the most participants, comprising about 2.4 billion followers. Christianity is the most profound world religion, and although its dominance in America may be dwindling, it is still the top religion in the United States. According to Pew Research, although the numbers are declining, Christianity is still America's primary religion. In a Pew Research Center telephone survey conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults described themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade (Smith, 2019).

As Christianity is the dominant religion in America, with a high percentage of the population professing to be Christians, it is safe to conclude that Christians and Christianity profoundly impact American society (Whitehead & Perry, 2020, & Tominsin, 2020). Although by most, if not all metrics, Christianity is the most popular American religion, does that guarantee that it is the sole correct, accurate one?

**Is there only one true religion?**

If there are thousands of religions, many, if not all of which profess to be the correct one, who determines which one hits the mark, and how is that determined? As the author Corduan says. “Many people think that all religions are true in their own way” (Corduan, 2024, Introduction). Knowing what I know about religion and religious people, his observation is correct in that people who belong to religious groups believe there is not “a” way but “the” way, and their religion is the way.

For example, several times during Sunday sermons, I have heard the preacher say, “Christianity is not a way; it is “the” way, as he references John 14:6. My understanding is that if Christianity is “the” way, then all the thousands of other religions must not be. Corduan also says, “There is a large diversity among religions; logically, they exclude each other” (Corduan, 2024, Introduction).

Although religions unify, to some degree, by spreading peace and love, they divide by claiming and believing their religion is the only proper one. Moreover, many people find religion in and of itself somewhat of a mystery, which leads to asking several questions to be revealed in upcoming reading.

**Is religion a mystery?**

What is religion anyway, and why does it play a key role in our society?

According to Brodd, “Religion begins with a mystery. Being human inevitably prompts deep questions about our existence: Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? For that matter, what is “here”? That is, what is the nature of this world? What is the nature of supreme ultimate reality? Beset with such questions, we find ourselves confronting mysteries on all sides. By responding to the questions, religion provides a way of living and dying meaningfully amid the mystery” (Brodd, 2009, p.13). As a devout Christian, I understand Brodd’s comment; however, Christianity, which is my religion, is not mysterious to me. In summary, Christianity is simply forming a natural relationship between individuals (me) and Christ; nothing is mysterious about that!

As stated by Chen, “Religion is “an assortment of various things,” so there is no singular religion, but there is a unified religious attitude” (Chen, 2024, p.2).

Chen’s statement calls for the question again, “What is the true (correct) religion (or religious studies)? How is it defined? Who gets to define it? How is it communicated? “

As articulated by Schel, “Each person has a fundamental capability for religious communication, and the expressions and utterances of religious sensibilities provoke or arouse others to articulate and disclose their feelings and intuitions of the world. At the same time, religion remains a historical phenomenon everywhere, and its expressions vary widely according to historical context and circumstance” (Schel, 2024, p. 8).

One way people express their beliefs is in their church, a gathering place for religious people to congregate and learn, share, and confirm their religious beliefs and practices.

**Growing up in church and becoming familiar with various religions.**

There are more than 300,000 churches in America, and I have attended my fair share of them (Carter, 2023). Growing up in the church has been an experience, to put it mildly. Each church I attended did not have “a version” of true/correct/right religion, but all professed to have “the version” of the right/true/correct religion. Parker rights, “The teaching of world religions within religious education programs has evolved. Still, many churches approach this topic from a confessional standpoint, aiming to reaffirm their beliefs while presenting other religions through apologetics” (Parker, 2024, p.5).

During my fifty-five years as a church member, I have been affiliated with many denominations under the religious/Christian banner. When I was five, I attended First Baptist, followed by Second Baptist at the age of nine. I was a part of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) system during my teenage years and twenties. In my thirties, I joined the Apostolic system, and in my forties, I started ministering at nondenominational churches. In between it all, I visited Catholic churches and met with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Muslims, all of whom claimed to be sure that they were connected to the one true religion.

**Orthodoxy is the right belief and an idea or view that is generally accepted.**

A word usually has more than one meaning. For example, my studies found that orthodoxy means the right belief. However, according to the Oxford and Collins dictionaries, Orthodoxy is an idea or view that is generally accepted. The two definitions do not conflict but complement one another; a right belief is usually a generally accepted belief, and a generally accepted belief is often viewed as the correct belief.

**Religion is complex and can be complicated.**

As Petrovic eloquently states, “Religion is a complex construct that defines not only the historical and social identity of a nation but also the personal identity of an individual. The attitude towards religion can be conditioned by tradition, political ideology, true faith, education, etc.” (Petrovic et al. 2044, p. 1).

I concur with Petrovic's statement that religion and religious studies are complex and sometimes complicated. Going back to my church/religious experience, when I was meeting with ministers from different religions, all claimed to have the answers to my questions regarding how to maximize our time on earth and what should be done to prepare for the afterlife. Moreover, what complicated things even more is that once I knew with all my heart that Christianity was the way to go, I had to decide which denomination to join.

Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Catholics, and Apostolic Christians are careful to respect other religions, especially those built on Christ, yet often infer that their doctrine and practices, which are all distinct, are correct. Deciding to join a nondenominational bible-led church took a lot of soul-searching and prayer.

**Religion, orthodoxy, and orthopraxis profoundly impact people and society.**

When I hear the word orthodoxy (or orthodox), as defined by Afaradi, “as a unifying factor that helps people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs come together under the Christian religion,” I associate it (orthodoxy) with various religions, mainly traditional and often outdated methods, and impractical practices, but multiple religions and religious practices nonetheless (Afaradi, 2024, p.3).

Moreover, like any other subject, religion is a child of its time (forged and shaped over the twentieth century), and it should be constantly evolving to meet the needs of current times (Cornelio et al., 2021).

Religion is a historical phenomenon and an assortment of things that play a crucial role in society (Schel, 2024 &Chen, 2024). According to research, there are 4000 to 10,000 religions, and about 85% of the world's population claims to be religious. Understanding how orthodoxy (as a traditional church) shapes our identity can provide valuable insights into our beliefs and actions, and this cannot be understated (Khrystonkin & Lozovytskyi, 2023).

Religion and religious practices color and control the world we live in. Although there may be thousands of religions, enticing people to debate whether there is one that’s correct and, if so, what it would be, for me, it is simple: Christianity, the most popular religion, stands in a class all its own.

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**An Examination of Christian Practice Within a Personal or Professional Context**

1. **Event Selected for Reflection**

**1.1. Describe the setting, occasion, or repeated experience, which for you involves a stretch (new learning) or a struggle (problem-solving).**

Several years ago, I started feeling that I was no longer spiritually fed at my church. This had a ripple effect on my perspective regarding a laundry list of things associated with the Apostolic system I was involved in. This situation placed me at a crossroads. I had to determine if I would stay connected with the church I had been attending for ten years or move to another one (Proverbs 3:6).

**1.2. Why did you select this experience? What makes the selected event a stretch (new learning) or a struggle (problem-solving) for you?**

I selected this experience because it was significant in my life, and I am sure other people have found themselves in the same or at least similar situations.

**1.3. How did you react/respond initially**?

My first response to the situation was to pray about it, followed by seeking advice from people who were connected to God. One person who had spoken to me five years before bringing this situation to her again reminded me that she believed I would be there for a season that had come to a close. Other people were on the map, but many told me the same thing: try Destiny Church. The decision was somewhat challenging since I had been approached about teaching at the Bible College at the Apostolic church. I needed to stay and dive deeper or cut bait. I did not trust that I would make the right decision; therefore, I needed to trust the Lord to make it for me (Proverbs 3:5).

1. **Situational Dimensions**

**Roles functions needed:**

I need to be a solid listener and an effective leader. If I was not being adequately fed at the church, I had a responsibility to take advice from the ministerial team and be a leader in approaching the Pastor or Assistant Pastor to let them know my honest thoughts (Proverbs 19:20).

* 1. **Design: (Capabilities used/limitations surfaced; or those of others)**

Speaking up would be difficult because I did not want to offend anyone. Moreover, although, for some reason, many people came to me to share the same thoughts, I did not feel it was my responsibility to convey the message on behalf of a group. I wanted to keep it singular.

* + 1. **Capabilities (God-given abilities)**

God has given me the ability to lead and inspire people to follow. God has also endowed me with the ability to understand and relate to leaders. I know there was a need to inform the Pastor of what was going on in a strategic, respectful, and loving manner. When you lead with love, things seem to fall into place.

* + 1. **Limitations (temperament)**

I wanted to be sure that the Pastor or senior ministerial team knew that I did not mean any harm and that I was not judgmental or critical of the church. This would be a fine line to walk, so I asked God for wisdom(James 1:5).

**1.4. Why does it provoke reflection about God, yourself, and ministry?**

The situation was all about being in the best possible position to be used by God; therefore, it is only natural that it provoked reflection on God regarding my ministerial assignments and aspirations (Psalm 119:105).

* + 1. **Strengths (virtues)**

My strengths are that I have worked as a counselor for years and am in a leadership position in my current profession. Both would impact my approach to the situation. As a counselor, you learn to become an expert listener. As a leader, you know how to approach other leaders.

* + 1. **Weaknesses (vices)**

My weakness during this ordeal was that I wanted to approach it perfectly, which would never happen. I wanted to ensure that it was the perfect time and location and that the verbal, well-thought-out exchange would be ideal. I learned not to strive for perfection but for excellence.

* 1. **(God’s presence or grace in the situation or your response to it)**

Through God’s grace, everything worked out. When you start with prayer and lean into His word, things work out best (Jeremiah 29:11).

* 1. **View of God, Biblical Truths, Principles:**

This answer is like the previous one. God has a plan for us, and when we connect ourselves to His plan, things work out for the better. I did not want to leave my church home, but it was my best move.

**3. Operational Beliefs**

What implicit Operational Belief is guiding your [or others’] decision-making? Be willing to discover less-than-ideal tendencies. If you were to say in a sentence the belief/s demonstrated by your actions or others’ actions in the situation, how would you state it/them?

I believe God is calling me to work for Him in another format at another location. My role as a minister is to be sensitive enough to hear His call and obedient sufficient to respond to it.

**3.1. How would you distill your operational belief in the event?**

When I was at a crossroads, what was most important was responding with an answer I truly believed was led by God. In Him, I live, move, and exist (Acts 17:28).

**3.2. To the best of your understanding, what are the possible roots of this operational belief? What do you think may have contributed to its development?**

To the best of my understanding, God has a plan for all of us, and our journeys will be custom-made to help us reach our full God-given potential. Although some people have been in the same church, my assignment differed. Being open to change after being comfortable was challenging. Also, as far as other contributors to the situation, I perhaps was growing in another way outside of the masses at the church.

**3.3. What are the consequences of this belief On your relationship with God? On your relationship with others? On your ministry?**

The consequences varied. Some people applauded me for following God’s lead, and others were not open to a long-term church member moving to another location. My ministerial duties expanded in the new church.

**4. Christian Critical Thinking**

**4.1. Scripture (What biblical images speak to your chosen situation/issue? What biblical doctrines, commands, or promises speak to scripture/biblical images? What passages address the situation/issue?)**

I believe Jeremiah 29:11 would be my anchor verse. God’s plans for us are individual; as He reveals it, we should respond with yes and amen. Matthew 9:36-38 comes to mind as well. It was time to go to work on the building of His kingdom.

**4.2. Christian Tradition (Which level of Scripture, tradition, historical church trends still in effect, denomination, or local practice contribute to this event?)**

When it comes to church traditions, there are too many to select from. Each church and denomination has a myriad of traditions. Since I have attended Pentecostal, Apostolic, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, and non-denominational churches, the one tradition that comes to mind is that many people believe that when you join a church, it is for life, or you would be classified as a church hopper. My position is slightly different; I believe God may have you at a church indefinitely or for a particular season.

**4.3. Cultural/Reason (What cultural trends affect the situation? What do resources from [other academic/scientific disciplines or spheres of life/culture] provide here?)**

During this time in my life, trends were that people were changing churches rapidly or deciding not to attend church at all (Smith, 2019). Many people were experiencing “church hurt.” The church leadership was falling short of their attendee's high expectations.

**4.4. Personal Experience (How do your past experiences, temperament, gifts, ideas, feelings, or values contribute to the experience? On reflection, how do you sense God at work?)**

God has his hand on the entire process. Looking back over the year-long process, God brought the right people along my path at the right time. I had several random divine appointments with people. For example, I was out to dinner and felt a pull towards a stranger. I began a conversation regarding the weather and spoke about Jesus and His plan for me. Like many others, she mentioned that I should try Destiny Church (Psalm 37:23).

**5. Theological Significance**

**5.1. Understanding the interaction between the sources of theology, what principles or values emerge that can contribute to your growing philosophy of ministry?**

To begin with, my ministerial philosophy is to stay connected to God and allow myself to be molded and utilized by Him. He is the potter, and I am the clay! Each life lesson is associated with a growth opportunity. I learned to stay sensitive to His calling and be prepared to do what He calls me to do, which frequently extends beyond my comfort zone (Isaiah 64:8).

**5.2. What were the key sources? Why?**

The key sources were the bible and trustworthy spirit-filled ministerial leaders. I wanted to ensure that I was operating with God’s will, which His word can confirm. Also, spirit-filled people can and did confirm the path I should embark upon (Psalm 119:105).

**5.3. Has the authority of Scripture shown itself in any practical ways?**

The authority of scripture is the foundation that sustains me daily, especially 1 Chronicles 4:10, John 10:10, James 1:5, and James 2:17… I constantly ask the Lord to keep His hand in mind and expand my territory.

Expanding my territory is a continuous movement toward reaching my God-ordained potential (1 Chronicles 4:10). Applying this scripture has led to many promotions and financial blessings. John 10:10 has shown me that we need to go through a process to get the things the Lord has for us in abundance. I am in a leadership position, so I need the Lord to give me wisdom so I can effectively guide his people, James 1:5. James 2:17 provides a constant reminder that He has brought me a long way. He continues to open doors to unlimited possibilities.

**6. Contextual Application**

**6.1. What are you going to do/what did you do?**

I joined the ministerial team at Destiny Church, and things are working out exceptionally well. I communicate with many people from the other church and have built more relationships in my new location. God has expanded my territory (1 Chronicles 4:10).

**6.2.** **How do/did you need to trust God to work in the situation or your life?**

I needed God to lead me where He wanted me to go. His Word is lamp upon my feet and light upon my path. Psalm 119:105

**6.3.** **What values drive/drove your mission in the situation?**

The values that drove my mission in this particular situation were living Matthew 6:33. I needed to ensure I was seeking His kingdom assignment first. Everything else would fall into place from there.

**6.4**. **What are/were your goals?**

My goals were to go where I was being led and make myself available for service when I arrived. My goal was accomplished.

**6.5.** **What personal courage issues require faith steps?)**

Leaving your comfort zone takes much faith. Leaving my familiar church and church family was beyond complicated; my heart was aching, but when you have a calling, you should move toward fulfilling it. The process consisted of prayer, seeking advice, and trusting God’s Word, especially Jeremiah 29:11.

**6.6.** **Comments on what happened:**

When you move according to His will, you will have a great outcome. Everything worked out extremely well, and the movement from the apostolic system to a nondenominational one has proven to be rewarding in several ways(Deuteronomy 31:6)**.**

**References: Holy Bible**

Acts 17:28

1 Chronicles 4:10

Deuteronomy 31:6

Isaiah 64:8

James 1:5

James 2:17

Jeremiah 29:11

John 10:10

Matthew 6:33

Matthew 9:36-38

Proverbs 3:5

Proverbs 3:16

Proverbs 19:20

Psalm 37:23

Psalm 119:105