

## Questioning the Proliferation of Religious Denominations

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### Article Information

**Received:** May 03, 2023

**Accepted:** June 05, 2023

**Published:** July 28, 2023

**Keywords:** religious denominations, morality, divine presence, God, homicide

### ABSTRACT

*This paper argues that the multiplicity of religious denominations in our era is a bomb in the shell that gives rise to division, conflicts, servitude and pseudo – service in our society. We have used the argumentative approach to prove that the multiplicity can be considered as a blessing given the human quest for the closest possible religion with God that can be provided by these denominations if they respect the moral requirements of religion. On the other hand, it is a curse when the quest for material aggrandizement overshadows the spiritual quest for God through moral service. In the light of contemporary evidence of malice in God’s vine yard, we opine that the denominational multiplicity is a curse disguised as a blessing; and hence we challenge our state authorities to systematically close down all religious denominations that came into existence from the year 2000 up to the present so as to do systematic checks and take out the bad seeds for a sane society.*

### Introduction

The Human quest for divine presence is a perpetual desire that can be fulfilling especially when it makes up for human vulnerability and frailty in a material world in which evil can be overwhelming. This desire to feel the presence of God has led human beings into many acts of dramatization of divine presence, acts which may attain a goal contrary to that for which they were intended. In the midst of despair and overwhelming burdens, the human soul, in the quest for God as the ultimate source of consolation, can be misled by the consolation in acts that rather widen the gap between humans and God. The multiplicity of religious denominations in our era is originally meant to reduce the gap between man and God so that humans can feel the presence of their creator in everything they do. Unfortunately, the changing fortunes of our techno – scientific world have shaped our civilization towards the quest for material gains as a more important proof of a fulfilled life than the spiritual proof. Even if something spiritual is lacking from a life materially fulfilled, many people still consider the material fulfillment to be more important and more illustrative of success than any sense of spiritual fulfillment. That is why the multiplicity of religious denominations today casts doubts on the genuine intentions of the promoters of the multitude of “churches” in our villages and in the neighborhoods of our towns and cities across the world but most especially in Africa, and with a special focus on Cameroon.

Although there are controversies over the etymological meaning of the word “religion”, the Latin verb “religare” which means “re – bind” or “re – unite” seems to give a clear picture of the kind of relationship that religion should establish between man and God. Religion is a means by which man “reconnects” with the supernatural realm of existence which is elusive especially in times of trouble. The belief that “re-binds” us with the supernatural is heightened by the fear of suffering evil from forces that are beyond our control even if such forces may be natural. Matters become more overwhelming when the belief holds that the forces beyond our control are

supernatural. Hence, if we can be affected negatively by supernatural forces, man needs a link with the supernatural realm of existence so as to have protection from the forces beyond his control and especially when such forces may be a source of harm. In other words, if we can suffer spiritual harm, then we need to seek refuge in a powerful good spirit that can protect us from the evil spirits that we may not be able to control in our human vulnerability. In this sense, religion is an acceptance of a human weakness: man is not enough; man needs more than what he can provide to be safe in the world. Therefore, man needs God, believed to be the spiritual creator of man and the universe as well as the controller of human destiny. Since God is the creator, the Latin verb “religare” gets its real meaning as “re-uniting” man with his creator. This also means that man can wander away from his creator or live as if the creator were no longer part of his existence. The perpetual need for divine presence can, thus, be considered as the quest for a “re-union” with God through religion. How to accomplish the reunion with God then raises other issues of saving faith and moral faith which condition us to look for a more profound definition of religion.

The definitional approach of religion proposed by the German thinker, Immanuel Kant, seems to be more adequate to the preoccupations of this paper than the etymological meaning. Kant considers religion as the “recognition of all duties as divine commands”<sup>1</sup>. This definition implies that religion is actually the consideration of moral laws as the laws of God. Hence we become religious when we seek moral uprightness as the only means of becoming pleasing to God. This definition also implies that the faith in grace is not enough especially when such hope for grace is used as a consolation to indulge in evil while still pretending to be “religious”. From a moral point of view, religion would be universal as there is only one (moral) way of having the closest possible relationship with God. However, the multiple religious denominations are “faiths” defined by their diversity in modes of divine worship. Yet, since we have to distinguish the multiple faiths from the universal moral faith, the multiple religious denominations today can best be considered as “ecclesiastical faiths” (Kant, 1793, 98) which are beliefs in the dogmas of revealed religion. The multiplicity of ecclesiastical faiths appeals to our senses and may dissipate the hidden universal foundation of religion that is supposed to unite all of us in hearts through moral dispositions as the ultimate way of achieving the divine presence we seek. This definitional clarification then creates the logical field for us to pose the central problem of this paper: Is the multiplicity of religious denominations more of a blessing than a curse or more of a curse than a blessing in the quest for the closest relationship with God? If the multiplicity is more of a blessing than a curse, then we need to evaluate the possible achievements of such a blessing in a world in which evil seems to have defeated the goodness in human nature. If the multiplicity is more of a curse than a blessing, then we need to find ways to limit the destructive impact of the multiplicity in the possible relationship between man and God.

In the spirit of this paper and in the light of contemporary evidence of multiplicity and its multifaceted effects, we shall do a comparative analysis of the possible merits and demerits of the phenomenon in our quest for divine presence in the first part of this paper. In the second part of this paper, we shall pave the way forward to show that even if the multiplicity has come to stay and there may be no turning back, we can at least take moments to re-evaluate the progress made and find ways to revisit the moral foundation of religion which, if ignored, leads all efforts to doom. We actually argue that the multiplicity in itself may not be a curse but what we make of it makes it a curse. Hence, if the purpose of the multiplicity is to make material gains, as proven by contemporary evidence highlighted in this paper, then we need to find a way to stop the mushroom propagation of the denominations so as to bring sanity to a sector that can breed evil where the good is supposed to dwell. We take side against the materialistic propagators of multiple ecclesiastical faiths which do little or nothing to nurse the important moral and hence religious seed in our hearts such that the conditions of possibility of an ethical community as God’s moral kingdom on earth can be met.

## Should we Celebrate or Condemn the Multiplicity of Ecclesiastical Faiths?

From a philosophical standpoint, the multiplicity of religious denominations can be interpreted as a growing desire in man to seek the closest possible relationship with God. This means that man creates new religious denominations every day with the hope that he will be able to devise the means through which he can have better communication with God through prayers than what obtained in his previous denomination as well as better moral ways of living to become more pleasing to God than in his previous denomination. The objective here is purely to get closer to God which is noble. In another paper entitled “Seeking Divine Presence: The Moral Pathway for the Contemporary Era”, we have shown that many people actually become “atheists” or are brandished by the society as such simply because they are looking for a way to express their frustration and disappointment with what is practiced as “theism” in the numerous ecclesiastical faiths they have been to. This “atheist” is actually a genuine theist who is using what many may see as “atheism” to express his disappointment with theism as it is practiced in our churches today. He wants us to return to a more solid foundation of theism than the quest for material aggrandizement that seems to be the highest motivating factor in the creation of the numerous denominations. In this perspective, the “atheist” is a symbolic representation of frustration in theism whereby the seeker of divine presence moves from one faith to another and does not find an adequate way of relating with God through the seed of morality that is supposed to be nursed by religion. In his frustration, he has two options: to express the greatest frustration in what society may see as “atheism” or to continue moving from one religious denomination to another in search of divine presence that becomes elusive every day.

If the multiple denominations are created to satisfy the human need to get the closest possible relationship with God, then it is a noble task. In this case, the multiplicity becomes a vehicle of expression of frustration. This kind of frustration is not very far from the kind described by Karl Marx: “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>iii</sup> The intention of Marx is to reject religion as a ‘drug’ that prevents us from taking up our essence in the universe. However, this could be interpreted positively as using religion as a tool to accept a destiny that does not seem to tie with our original needs. In this case, the frustrated seeker of divine presence may use the multiplicity to accept a diversity of imperfect situations rather than sticking to one unsatisfying situation.

If one faith could not provide the needed satisfaction in divine presence, then moving from one faith to another may be a better expression of frustration than sticking to one. This is because moving from one to another is at least a sign that there is an expression of dissatisfaction and hope in the new denomination as a possible source of the needed divine presence. The multiplicity gives the frustrated seeker of divine presence the feeling that there is hope elsewhere, there are alternatives to choose from, things could be done better elsewhere. In this way, hope is not lost; all hope is not lost though the hope may not be gained in the movement. Yet the act of moving and seeking for better days in God’s presence gives consolation that what we seek is not impossible, what we seek can be obtained if we organize our modes of worship in a better way than what we have now or if we choose to give up old ways to adopt new ways of relating with God. The analogy with the situation described by Marx can then be stated fully as follows: in the same way that religion in general is a source of consolation to a man who is not satisfied and cannot do anything about his material conditions, the multiplicity of religious denominations becomes a source of consolation to the seeker of divine presence who is not satisfied with the previous conditions of his faith and may not do anything about it other than the perpetual hope to seek elsewhere (the ability to seek elsewhere being a sign that what we seek is not as elusive as it seems).

On the other hand, the multiplicity, seen as a mere consolation in what we have not yet had and may not have is not a satisfying condition for the seeker of divine presence. To maintain the analogy with Marx, we can say that being consoled with what we have which is not what we deserve is not the best feeling for someone who wants progress. In the same way, being consoled that, at least one can move to a different denomination if one does not feel divine presence in one denomination, does not mean that one has found or can actually find the needed divine presence. It only proves that the divine presence sought after is more elusive than expected. It actually means that probably the movement from one denomination to another is not the right way to seek divine presence. One cannot move from one faith to another indefinitely. At one point, one has to settle somewhere. The consolation of being able to move is not an achievement in itself, it is just hope for better days which does not mean that the better days will come. In many cases, when one finally settles in one denomination despite the divine presence which is still elusive, it is more of a sigh of relief due to fatigue than an expression of satisfaction for having found what one wanted. The sigh of relief is like the leap to religion as a means of forgetting the troubles of our day in Marxian terms. The sigh of relief when one chooses to settle somewhere does not necessarily mean that the needed divine presence has been found. It could be a temporary moment waiting for other options to come up so that one can try again.

Hence, the movement from one denomination to another is an expression of a desire that may never be fulfilled if we do not understand that the movement in itself is not the solution to the problem. For example if there are five denominations in my neighborhood and I have been to all of them, if at any moment I am at my fifth denomination with a sigh of relief, it does not necessarily mean that I have had the satisfactory relationship I seek with God; it only means that I have exhausted all the options available at my disposal for the time being. Since I have to keep on with ecclesiastical activities especially on Sundays, my fifth denomination is not the ideal but just the numerical last option I took which is still not satisfactory but I do not have another option and going back to any previous denomination is out of the question. As the seeker of divine presence consoles himself in the current denomination waiting for better options to come up, he does not really end up waiting for long because the “churches” sprout out of the ground like mushrooms. The “better” option, or to be more precise, another “better option” emerges suddenly with a caravan of men and women announcing the “birth” of another denomination in the neighborhood in the form of an advertorial.

The emergence of new “churches” in Cameroon is a very dramatic phenomenon. The use of the word “church” in this circumstance is abusive as it refers more to a building than the invisible element that unites men and women in hearts towards the service of God which is a moral service. It is actually the emergence of a new sign post on a building in the neighborhood announcing the “birth” of another denomination of divine worship with better methods of giving man the closest possible relationship with God. Rodrigue Nana Ngassam puts it squarely when he highlights the kind of words used by these peddlers of illusions to gain new members in their denominations: “‘Great crusade against demons and provision of miracles, special program of divine healing, night of deliverance and prophecy’ are some of the types of adverts polluting the walls and publicity placards in the economic capital of Cameroon which is Douala.”<sup>iii</sup> When it comes in the form of an “advert” it already implies an ulterior motive of making material gains from the “crusades”. Yet it is considered as another opportunity for the seeker of divine presence who is already in his fifth denomination to have a new experience in his sixth denomination, and the movement from one church to another continues *ad infinitum*.

Ultimately, the movement from one denomination to another actually only creates in us the desire to continue moving from one denomination to the next in search of divine presence. This is because it is the desire to move that is fulfilled and not the desire to feel the presence of God which does not actually need movement. The desire to feel God’s presence needs a reorientation of our modes of worship toward the quickening of moral dispositions in us. Even if the seeker of



divine presence spends years in a particular denomination, there is no guarantee that he will not move when he gets the chance to seek a better relationship with God elsewhere. The ideal, here, would be to stick to one's original faith. For example, if you were born into Catholicism you remain a catholic and find ways to make the faith a means of quickening the moral dispositions in you, and the case will be same for Muslims, Presbyterians and other ecclesiastical faiths in our towns and villages. These are just a few examples of ecclesiastical faiths, but we know the now popular expression of "Pentecostalism" manifested by other uncountable ecclesiastical faiths of the protestant charismatic Christian movement which seeks to put man in a direct personal relationship with God so that divine presence can be felt in a more personal and more intense way than in the so-called "mainstream churches". The seeker of divine presence has a choice from the multitude and at times the choice may even be difficult to make; and in some extreme cases, the seeker of God may find himself in two or more denominations at a time. This raises more questions than answers about the achievement of such moves. The seeker of God may actually be confused by the numerous advertorials of "churches".

The use of adverts gives a commercial connotation to the emergence of ecclesiastical faiths in our towns and villages. This, in itself, may not be a bad idea given that it can be a call to service and can actually lead to the consecration of more pastors, priests and other preachers of the word of God to the multitude. In this case, the multiplicity can be interpreted as a symbol of growth of religion in the sense that moral dispositions will be quickened more easily when there are more visible churches than when there are few of them. With the growing world population, it is obvious that we need more "churches" and more preachers. This is the promotion of vocational training in divine service which gives rise to a career (even if such a career is not supposed to directly give rise to material payment as a reward). If divine service is purely a sacrifice of the self on the altar of interpreting the scriptures and helping people to become morally better, then it does not require financial or material compensation as the preacher himself is already using the vocation to also have a personal experience of divine presence for his own spiritual good. Everything being equal, the numerous denominations should create more avenues for moral sensitization and the need for a good life - conduct as the main way of becoming pleasing to God. Despite the multiplicity of the religious denominations, there are still many people in many remote areas of Cameroon who do not have access to some of the denominations because many of them operate exclusively in big towns and cities.

The case of the economic capital of Cameroon (Douala) mentioned by Rodrigue Nana proves that operating in big cities is lucrative to the new denominations if the aim is material aggrandizement for the founders. In 2012, we already noted with dismay that "some ecclesiastical faiths operate only in towns or cities while avoiding the suburbs because of the more juicy financial gains to be made in the former than the latter."<sup>iv</sup> We cannot say that only the people in big cities have stronger desires to be closer to God than those in the suburbs. The use of advertorials is a harbinger of the materialistic intentions of the founders of ecclesiastical faiths of divine worship. We are not saying that the service of God is proven to be genuine when it is done in misery. We are saying that the materialistic intentions raise suspicion if the moral goals of a denomination are sidelined in favour of materialistic goals. The noble intentions of having a vocation in divine service can be soiled by the emphasis laid on material gains in the course of such service. The vocation can be considered a blessing but the commercialization of the vocation makes the seekers of divine presence victims of manipulation and exploitation making the multiplicity a source of fulfillment of selfish aims. Even if there are few denominations, and exploitation and manipulation become the order of the day, the evil remains the same: the use of the natural human desire for divine presence to manipulate and exploit the vulnerable seekers of God's presence.

## Consolidating the Blessings of Moral Service in Denominational Multiplicity

The solution to the quest for divine presence amidst the multiplicity of religious denominations draws inspiration from Kant in form and content, not because the author of this paper did previous research works on Kant's moral religion, but because the delay of the solution only makes the problem more acute than ever before. In 2022, we already used Kant's model to decry the absence of morality in the midst of the multiplicity of divine modes of worship:

*The mode of operation of the 'revival churches' in Cameroon is characterized by everything decried by Immanuel Kant especially the absence of morality in the theatrical display of divine worship in moral indifference and thus losing the substance of religion to chase its shadow. [...]The moral message is completely ignored and the good – life conduct that is supposed to make us pleasing to God and thus ready for salvation is replaced by dramatic displays by miracle – seekers and the pastors become miracle - providers peddling illusions in God's vineyard.<sup>v</sup>*

The point made is that many of the religious denominations are theatre houses for the commercialization of illusions leading to servitude and pseudo service. The seekers of miracles become slaves to the supposed “providers” of the miracles in the numerous ecclesiastical faiths. The resulting pseudo service is the performance of acts that are either amoral or immoral and end up doing the contrary of the original intention to make man pleasing to God. To avoid the drama that neither serves God nor makes us pleasing to God, we have to carry out a revolution that intends to instill morality in form and content in our religious denominations even if their multiplicity is to be maintained.

In its form, the revolution in denominational multiplicity has to do with the return of the moral message in all interpretations of scriptural passages. This means that “divine inspiration” in the earthly meaning of the expression is no longer enough to make one a preacher of the word of God. This is because the expression “divine inspiration” is used in our neighborhoods to minimize the impact of the scholarly training needed to be a moral interpreter of the scriptures. The contemporary preacher of the word of God should be seen more as someone who can do a moral interpretation of sacred texts than someone who has a mystical insight to remake the miracles of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Even if there is a spiritual insight in the job of a preacher, that spiritual insight (made mysterious) must never overshadow the scholarly abilities needed to give a moral interpretation to scriptural passages whose moral lessons are not obvious to first time readers. In this way, we can use the scholarly training to reinforce the vocation considered in daily worship as a “call” similar to that of Abraham in the Bible to serve God. Even if God calls his servants and gives them a mystical insight to perform wonders, even if God passes through other human beings to realize miracles in our lives, a moral revolution in religion implies that a scholarly training is indispensable especially when the supposed mystical insight from “divine inspiration” does not give rise to the needed moral dispositions needed to become pleasing to God. This leads to a contradiction in terms as God cannot call someone to serve Him in a way that is amoral or immoral and thus displeasing to the same God who called us to service.

It is true that to write books, one needs a special intellectual talent and this talent may be intuitive but even if it is a natural seed implanted in us by God, our training in school helps to nurse this seed to blossom so that we can use it for the good of the human race. We contend that if someone has a natural gift that is not groomed and harnessed in the right academic conditions, he will not be able to exploit his potentials fully for the good of the human race. Hence, our priests, pastors and other church leaders who preach the word of God to the faithful must be trained intellectually to reinforce the supposed mystical insight in them. To take it to the extreme, we would rather prefer preachers without the mystical insight but who have the intellectual ability to give a moral interpretation to scriptural passages than those with the

supposed mystical insight and who cannot quicken the moral dispositions in us thereby indulging in amoral and immoral preaching and acts that end up making us displeasing to God with whom we want to have the closest possible relationship.

Secondly, to reinforce the need for moral interpretation of the scriptures as a requirement to become a preacher, our government authorities must check the intellectual qualifications of the founders of the faiths to be sure that intellectually they can deliver the moral message needed for a sane society. Unfortunately, this can be difficult if the government officials are corrupt and are called to check the moral aptitude of the church officials. The situation is very complicated in Cameroon because “Many of the new churches in Cameroon [...] operate clandestinely and the public gets used to the nuisance of the noise they create at every time of the day. The authorities only intervene when there is a scandal and the scandals are never too far to fetch in these churches” (Nyuysemo, 2022, 228). The government, in this case, has to be pro – active and anticipate the scandals before they occur. Everything being equal, scandals are likely to occur when the church ministers do not have the intellectual capacity and moral aptitude to give the right interpretation to scriptural passages. The state has to ensure that the role of a church minister is based more on scholarship than anything else that cannot be proven. If the government waits for scandals to occur before reacting, then we will only move from one scandal to another in a vicious circle.

In August 2020 at the heart of the Corona pandemic in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, a popular pastor of a popular church known as “tabernacle de la liberté” operating at the ‘Jouvence’ neighborhood was arrested and later released because he prevented students of the school under his church from writing their official examination as he did not want them to wear face masks which were a prerequisite for gaining access into the examination venue. As per instructions by state authorities, no student could be allowed access to the examination centres without a face mask. The students of the school owned by this pastor returned to their pastor and missed the examination leading to a blank academic year for them. Contacted on phone, the pastor declared that “his followers do not wear masks because they are protected by the blood of Jesus and that the corona virus does not even exist.”<sup>vi</sup> The pastor was arrested and later released and his church sealed. We contend that if all pastors were to have intellectual or scholarly training to go with the divine insight they claim to have, such scandals will be easily avoided. If the state authorities give up on this sector of life, then the denominational multiplicity will only sow more seeds of discord in our societies that are already deeply divided by numerous conflicts of interests.

In its content, the revolution in denominational multiplicity has to do with the practice of morality as an obsession. If we really want to feel the presence of God that we seek every day, then everyone has to take the firm decision to remain steadfast to the respect of moral laws despite the material temptations of the evil world we live in. Unfortunately, this seems easy to prove concretely only in the face of miserable circumstances. It does not mean that we have to live miserably to prove that we are morally upright, but can we continue to remain morally upright in the face of compelling situations that may make our material situation better but resulting from immorality? In the case of the church ministers, have their bank accounts become swollen as a result of exploitation of the faithful in their churches? Was the original intention to make money or to quicken the moral dispositions in us? We do not need to belabor this point with the numerous alarming cases of scandals which prove that many “church ministers” are out to enrich themselves as they consider the church they operate as a commercial activity like all others. In such cases, if genuinely proven, the state has to close down such churches for the sake of a sane moral society we are looking for. If the goals of morality are not just ideals but realizable objectives, then someone needs to do something concretely to save the masses from manipulators and exploiters in God’s vineyard.

## **A Curse Disguised as a Blessing: The Ultimate Solution**

Our society needs to establish mechanisms to check the multiplicity of religious denominations in our era. This is because the multiplicity looks like a blessing but it is actually a curse in disguise. For reasons already discussed in this paper, there is a semblance of a blessing that hides a curse that can endanger social sanity. It looks like a blessing when we assume that it is important to create more avenues to quicken moral dispositions in us and so make us pleasing to God as well as the necessity to create other avenues for a career (or rather a vocation) in divine service. Yet it also creates avenues for the commercialization of the service of God which is intrinsically a free service. Even if the multiplicity creates chances of “winning souls for Christ” in popular parlance, the intentions of many who venture into this activity are not divine. The use of adverts and the hidden agenda to make profits breed unnecessary competition by numerous denominations that want to outsmart each other and gain popularity to do business instead of making their faithful morally upright. The multiplicity becomes a bomb in the shell as it breeds divisions that later leads to social tension and conflicts where peace is needed. If we cannot know whether the heavenly race has been won or lost, we can at least know when our society is facing serious problems of moral decadence that genuine religion can solve. Even if salvation is personal and its judgment strictly reserved for the creator of the world, we can at least know and see when we are working in “fear and trembling” to attain it (Philippians 2:12).

The ultimate goal of religion is a spiritual reunion with God which means that religion actually detaches us from the things of the world so that we can focus on the things of the spirit. It is therefore antithetical to the purpose of religion for a religious denomination to be created to make material (earthly) gains. Since many religious denominations actually undermine the very foundation of religious beliefs by attaching people to earthly instead of spiritual things, the solution to the evil inherent in the multiplicity of religious denominations has to be radical. Counting on the masses to carry out the intellectual revolution to mitigate the evil in the multiplicity of denominations is a noble task; but the masses need to be educated at a very good level about the real meaning, purpose and above all moral foundation of religion. This can be problematic given that life has a way of bringing down even intellectuals on their knees to the point where they can be manipulated and exploited by malicious individuals who may not have their level of education. The education of the masses is a process that will eventually rid our society of self – seekers in God’s vineyard. Yet, many enlightened people consider religion as a personal endeavor and do not feel the need to educate anyone they think is being manipulated by malicious founders of numerous ecclesiastical faiths. This is because the enlightened few may think that the “eyes” of the ignorant ones will open one day; but that may be too late as the effects of religious servitude and pseudo service are damaging to the body and the soul. As difficult as it may seem, we must educate the masses, but that is not enough to put an end to inherent evil in the cacophony of denominational multiplicity.

Our church ministers have to sit up and take up their responsibilities to lead the vulnerable flock in an era where manipulation can easily have a massive effect through the use of the social media. Yet they will not sit up if their original intention is material gain and not moral uprightness in the society. At least they should do their best to give a moral and not a divisive interpretation to the scriptures. They should preach to convert people to moral ways and not to prove that they are “favourites” of the heavenly race that no one has won yet. A scholarly training of church ministers is an important step to bring sanity to the religious sector in our societies. This will still not be enough because bad intentions can still be hidden within genuine intellectual capacities to preach the moral message in the scriptures. The shock in the contemporary society comes from the disappointment in seeing acts of evil perpetrated by people with special training or special enlightenment; it becomes even difficult to speak about it because of the apparent respect that the grandeur of their position entails. Hence a good intellectual and/ moral training of church ministers is a step in the right direction but not the ultimate step to solve



the problem of evil in denominational multiplicity.

Ultimately, we have to think of the governments of our states to make use of the famous administrative tool of authorization issued for anyone to operate a church just like any other activity in the society. Unlike other activities that clearly declare their business intentions and pay taxes to the state, if a church minister has commercial intentions, they can easily be hidden in the purported mission to win souls for Christ. The mission to win souls for Christ is actually the tree that hides the forest of the evil intentions of material aggrandizement. At first sight (and this is the disguise), the mission to win souls for Christ is the “blessing” that becomes the foundational mission of every denomination. This is where the malicious church ministers have their way through what was supposed to be a blessing but which is actually a curse as they use the blessing to disguise the curse of their evil intentions to acquire wealth through evangelistic missions. How do we unveil the curse disguised as a blessing so as to stop the sprouting of unwanted religious denominations in our society? How do we even detect the curse? Since there is a blessing disguised as a curse, at first sight, anyone who speaks against the multiplicity is considered as the enemy of God’s people and probably an enemy to the moral uprightness needed to become pleasing to God. This leads to frustration and what we describe in another paper as ‘atheism’ used as a tool to express disappointment in the current practice of theism. Those who express such disappointments and are treated as “atheists” are actually more theistic than those who use theism to perpetrate evil disguised as a blessing. Given the hypocrisy in the sector, we need a more radical measure to curb the negative effect of the phenomenon.

In Cameroon, the use of the administrative tool of authorization is not enough to put sanity in the religious sector as the malicious actors have a way of bypassing the administrative procedure put in place by the State. As from July 2012, the Cameroon government officially recognized only 46 religious organizations in the country.<sup>vii</sup> This official number is not even up to half of the denominations found in the country. Soiron Fallut holds that when a pastor creates a church in Cameroon, it always starts as a prayer unit, the unit becomes an assembly. When they do not get the necessary authorization from the state, they operate under the ‘cover’ of another church that is already recognized by the state.<sup>viii</sup> To avoid the malice used by the actors of this sector to achieve their evil goals using the blessing of evangelization to hide the curse of material gain, our state authorities have to be more radical and stop granting authorization to any new religious denomination till further notice. If that is done, we will then have enough time to fish out the unscrupulous individuals operating under the “cover” of authorized denominations and at the same time use the opportunity to close down the denominations that give ‘cover’ to unauthorized denominations.

The ultimate solution is a destructive – constructive process: we stop granting authorization to any new churches and we carry out an in-depth process of sifting the bad seeds in the sector. This requires honesty and firmness from the government officials who should have the masses at heart because the masses are the victims of these malicious actors in the religious sector. Given that the phenomenon has become very alarming in our era, we can give a time frame for the checks to be done on all individuals operating “churches” in our neighborhoods. The author of this paper proposes that we should start from every denomination that came into existence from the year 2000 at the turn of the new century and the new millennium. This is because at this time, the advent of information and communication technology became a tool in the hands of self – seekers for religious intoxication online and offline. When there are rotten fruits in a basket with fresh fruits, we take out all the fruits from the basket and start examining them one after the other so as to throw away the bad fruits and keep the fresh fruits. We need to systematically close down all denominations that came into existence from the year 2000 so as to verify their authorization and reevaluate the form and content of their activities over the years before they can be re – authorized to continue to operate. This should not be a problem for those that have been doing the right thing which is basically the quickening of moral dispositions in the masses

so as to have the closest possible relationship with God. Obviously, the proposal to close down all the denominations from the year 2000 will be a problem for those who have been doing the wrong thing, and that is the real target. It is a radical solution to bring sanity to the religious sector and to avoid religious servitude and pseudo – service.

## Conclusion

Before the multiplicity of religious denominations became scandalous, religion was not void of problems that could lead to “atheism” as an expression of disappointment in the practice of theism. Even as the multiplicity has become an alarming problem today, many problems of religion are actually inherited from ancient times. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Immanuel Kant already sounded the alarm bell to warn against religious servitude and pseudo – service as obstacles to the establishment of the ethical commonwealth or God’s moral kingdom on earth: “[...] the philosophical millennium, which hopes for a state of perpetual peace based on a league of peoples, a world-republic, even as a theological millennium, which tarries for the completed moral improvement of the entire human race, is universally ridiculed as a wild fantasy” (Kant, 1793, 30). The obstacles to the establishment of a contemporary ethical commonwealth constitute an issue that we shall treat in another paper. We can say that even if the seed of the problem is inherited from ancient times, the seed seems to have germinated and grown at incredible rates in our era. It goes without saying that there were fewer religious denominations in Kant’s time than in our time. Hence, in this paper, we have sought to know if the contemporary phenomenon of the multiplicity of religious denominations is more of a blessing than a curse or more of a curse than a blessing.

In our analyses of religion as a set of beliefs and practices aimed at re-uniting man with God, we have proven that the hope of grace is not enough as the right attitude to attain salvation. Rather, the practice of morality, with or without the hope of grace, is the attitude that makes us pleasing to God and becomes a condition for divine presence in our evil – infested society. At the beginning of this paper, we adopted an argumentative approach to show the pros and cons of denominational multiplicity in our era. We proved that the multiplicity can be considered a real blessing if it is used to fill the moral void in our society where moral decadence is illustrated in its highest level by numerous cases of homicide all over the world. The multiplicity can then be used as a timely means to propagate the moral message inherent in any religion worthy of the name. Consequently, the need to get the moral message in religion far and wide implies the need for personnel as people will then happily get a career or rather a vocation in divine service to fight evil in our society. Unfortunately, the blessings of multiplicity have been overshadowed in our era by the malicious intentions of the founders of ecclesiastical faiths who use the human vulnerability in the quest for divine presence to enrich themselves.

We have, thus, noted, with regret, that the multiplicity is a curse disguised as a blessing which is the thrust of this paper. This is because the use of the supposed intention to preach the moral message or win souls for Christ is used cunningly by ill – intentioned individuals to get authorization to operate “churches” in our neighborhoods which actually promote religious servitude as the faithful are enslaved mentally (not to see the malice in the church ministers) and materially (as they are exploited to enrich the church ministers). To put an end to the negative effects of denominational multiplicity or at least to reduce its negative impact in our society, we have hatched a plan to uncover the curse disguised as a blessing in these denominations. This plan involves the education of the masses by the enlightened ones (even if they may feel the need to give up on such a venture and live as disappointed atheists which is theism in disguise as they just wish to see theism practiced differently). We have also projected the need for the scholarly and moral training of church ministers to put an end to the cacophony in a sector where anyone and everyone can get up from bed and become a preacher and an interpreter of scriptural passages.

This paper has proven that even if there is a divine or mystical insight in the abilities of a preacher, such abilities must be harnessed by formal training in morality and interpretation of texts. Since asking the malicious church ministers to sit up or reminding them about their moral duties to the society is not enough (because of their malice which means that they know the right thing but deliberately choose to do the wrong thing for personal gains), we have gone more radical to propose thorough checks to be done by the state officials on the founders of new “churches” with the intention to detect their evil intentions hidden under the canopy of divine or moral service to the society. The ultimate solution that we have proposed is the systematic closure of all religious denominations from the year 2000 up to the present day. This measure will permit us review the efficiency of the system of authorization put in place and to re – evaluate the works of the denominations so as to re – authorize those who have remained true to their moral obligations to the society and to fish out those who only use the divine mission as an avenue to accomplish selfish acts of exploitation and enslavement of the masses.

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<sup>ii</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), trans. Joseph O'Malley, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>iii</sup> Rodrigue Nana Ngassam, « Les églises de réveil à Douala », *Fondation Jean Jaures*, (online), available at <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/les-eglisese-de-reveil-a-douala/>, 06/02/2020, (retrieved 28/01/2021).

<sup>iv</sup> Marcel Nyuysemo, “God, Morality and Religion in Immanuel Kant’s Critical Philosophy”, Master’s Degree Dissertation, Supervised by Godfrey B. Tangwa, University of Yaounde 1: Faculty of Art, Letters and Social Sciences, 2012, p. 139.

<sup>v</sup> Marcel Nyuysemo, “Immanuel Kant’s Universal Moral Religion : A Solution to Contemporary Religious Servitude and Conflicts” in *International Journal on Integrated Education*, Volume 5, Issue 1, Jan 2022, p. 228.

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<sup>viii</sup> *Idem*.