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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A DEMOCRATIC STATE: THE CASE OF GHANA

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Abstract:

According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of Ghana`s population is Christian, 16 percent is Muslim, and 9 percent adheres to traditional indigenous religions or other religions. Other religions include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckanker, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, Rastafarianism, and other international faiths. The multi-religious nature of the Ghanaian society, therefore, makes it very difficult for those in charge of Ghana`s affairs to ignore this reality. No wonder the preamble to the Ghana`s 1992 Constitution is underpinned by religion – “IN THE NAME OF THE ALMIGHTY GOD...”, although it does not officially declare Ghana a religious state. This paper tries to examine the role of religious bodies and the state of Ghana in Religious Education in the current democratic dispensation. In Ghana, the central government fully supports education be it faith-initiated or individual – individual and adopted by government (supply of textbooks and other logistics and teachers` salaries are borne by the central government). The only condition for this support from the government is that Religious Education is presented in a professional way. That is, religious educators do not present their lessons with the view of converting the pupils to a particular faith (this is the work of the theological institutions) but to present every religion in an objective way for the pupils to make their own decisions. This is informed by the fact that the post-independence Constitutions of Ghana guarantee freedom of Religious affiliation. This is aimed at ensuring religious tolerance in the light of the religious pluralism existing in the country today. It is for this reason that the Ghana Education Service (G.E.S.), the education authority in Ghana, had to approve of the content of the syllabus of education particularly those of first and the second cycle schools. Religious bodies in Ghana wield considerable power and in some cases have been able to influence state policies in the areas of law and politics. In Ghana, it has become a defacto condition that in the selection of Presidential candidates, the candidates` religious affiliations are usually considered. Usually, if the presidential candidate is a Christian, a Muslim is preferred as a running mate and vice versa. Christians have 25th December, 26th

December (Boxing Day), Easter Day and Easter Mondays as statutory Public Holidays. In 1995, the Muslim community in Ghana under the leadership of the national Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, was able to negotiate successfully with the then ruling government, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) under Jerry Rawlings to get two statutory Public Holidays for the celebration of the Eid festivals, that is, “Eid al-Adha” (Feast of sacrifice), which falls on February 2, of every year and the “Eid al-Fitr” (end of Ramadan), November 3-5 depending on when the moon is sighted. In view of the above, it is clear that it will be difficult for any government to neglect the concerns of religious bodies particularly, in matters of education. Therefore, it is apparent that religion and education in Ghana play a major role in the current political democratic dispensation. This conclusion does not necessarily mean that there are no impediments to the teaching of Religious Education in Ghana today. There are some problems which need to be addressed first before the country could sustain and enjoy the full benefits deriving from Religious Education.

Introduction:

Since the dawn of the *de facto* democratization of the African continent, all African countries have to a large extent tried to pursue democracy, even though with diverse degree of the true sense of the word. In other words, some African countries claim to be democratic but in reality the actions of the leaders of those countries are a far cry from true democracy. It is now the aim of African Union (AU) to ensure that true democracy thrives on the continent. This explains the reason why coup d'états are now condemned in no uncertain terms by member states of the AU, although this is not the focus of this paper now. This paper examines the role of religious bodies and the state of Ghana in Religious Education in the current democratic dispensation. In doing so, the following will be the focus of the paper:

- i) A brief overview of Religious Education in Ghana.
- ii) Ghana`s education policies and Religious Education
- iii) Justification for the inclusion of Religious Education in the curriculum of schools of a secular democratic state like Ghana.
- iv) The challenges confronting Religious Education in Ghana and the way forward.

Definition of Key Concepts

Religion

The phenomenon of religion is always difficult to define due to the empirical and the non-empirical dimensions attached to it. Many scholars from different disciplines have tried to define it but there seems to be no unanimity over the concept of religion. For Rudolf Otto (1950), “it is the feeling of the presence of the wholly other”, while E.B. Tylor (1851) sees it as “the belief in spiritual beings”. In the view of Elizabeth Nottingham (1966), religion “calls for a description rather than a definition”. This paper, however, adopts Tylor`s definition, for that is how the majority of the believers of the various religions in Ghana conceptualize the phenomenon of religion.

Education

Education like religion may mean different things to different people for it embraces a lot of issues, but it is generally agreed that it is a process. For Peters (1966), education is “an initiation into worthwhile pursuits”. That is, education concerns itself with “initiating young people into what is “worthwhile”. Farrant (1988) also sees education as the “process of changing behaviour patterns of people by exposing them to a kind of knowledge, which is worthwhile and capable of achieving a voluntary and committed response from the learner.” Emile Durkheim (1971) defines education as “the systematic socialization of the younger generation by which the later learn religious and moral beliefs, feelings of nation and collective opinion of all kinds.” The traditional Ghanaian people whose education is basically informal, is meant to prepare the young ones to fit into their respective societies. This type of education is all-encompassing – religious, social, economic and so on. Again, this study adopts Durkheim`s definition of education, for it

fits into the scope of education as it is viewed in Ghana. Following from the definitions of religion and education, one can posit a working definition of Religious Education as any conscious effort to impart into the young ones the various belief systems and cherished values of the people in a living community or state/nation (see also Awuah and Afiriyie, 2005).

Democracy

The word democracy is derived from two Greek words: “demos” which means “people” and “krates” meaning “rule”. Democracy from its root word means government or rule by the people. It is in the light of this that Abraham Lincoln, one time the President of the United States of America was reported to have defined democracy as: “The government of the people by the people and for the people.” According to Ninsin and Drah (198, p.12), for some people, the word democracy is equivalent to equality of all citizenry in all spheres of life; while to others it is the expression of the supreme or “sovereign will of the people” or the “general will”. They furthermore add that to many people democracy stands for nothing more than “one man, one vote” or now “one person, one vote”; although others add, “plus real choices”.

A lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies on January 21, 2004, emphasized that we can think of democracy as a system of government with four key elements, which are:

- i) A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections
- ii) The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civil life
- iii) Protection of the human rights of all citizens.
- iv) And a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

The above tells us that the word democracy has been subjected to various kinds of interpretations, however, the above throws some light on what the concept democracy is about.

State

Gyekye (1997, p. 80f) tries to make a distinction between a “state” and a “nation”. In this paper; however, the word “state” should be understood as “ a country or nation with its own sovereign independent government (Encarta, 2009) and possesses “ a well-defined and recognized territorial boundaries” (Gyekye, 1997, p. 80). Following from the above, the term “democratic state”, therefore, may refer to a country or nation with its own sovereign independent government where all the characteristics of democracy listed above exist and the responsibilities of the citizens are clearly spelt out in its constitution and are strictly adhered to by both the rulers and the ruled.



The Map of Ghana Showing its Location and Neighbours

Religious Demography of Ghana

According to the International Religious Freedom Report of 2003:

The country (Ghana) has a total land area of approximately 92,000 square miles, and its population 20,467,747. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the country's population is Christian, 16 percent is Muslim, and 9 percent adheres to traditional indigenous religions or

other religions. The Muslim community has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent. Other religions include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckanker, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, Rastafarianism, and other international faiths, as well as some separatist or spiritual churches or cults, which include elements of Christianity and traditional beliefs such as magic and divination. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam. There are no statistics available for the percentage of atheists in the country. Atheism does not have a strong presence, as most persons have some spiritual and traditional beliefs. Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, F'eden, numerous charismatic faiths, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, and the Society of Friends. Christianity often includes an overlay of traditional beliefs.

The above demography is a pointer to the kind of influence that religious bodies can exert in Ghana. And this multi-religious nature of the Ghanaian society, therefore, makes it very difficult for those in charge of affairs of Ghana to ignore this reality. No wonder that the preamble to the Ghana's 1992 Constitution is underpinned by religion – "IN THE NAME OF THE ALMIGHTY GOD...", although it does not officially declare Ghana as a religious state. Another challenge from the above religious demography is which religions should form part of the syllabus of Religious Education in such a religiously pluralistic society? (See Tumwesigire, 1991).

Methodology

There is an increasing desire among most countries of the world today to find other partners to help in the provision of quality education to their citizenry due to the population explosion that has engulfed particularly the developing countries of the world. I have, therefore, decided to use

Ghana for two main reasons: first although democracy is yet to take a firm root in the country, it is one of the countries in Africa today whose efforts at true democracy have been recognized worldwide. The five successful democratic elections--1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 attest to this fact. Secondly, as a Ghanaian and being familiar with its democratic trend and educational policies and growth, my work will be much easier than if I had chosen another state. My method was primarily a description, analysis and interpretation of the data. In order to put the study into the correct perspective, data from historical printed news articles, pastoral letters, selected books chapters and scholarly journals focusing on the historical development of Religious Education and the religious bodies` involvement in formal education and the role they played, and continue to play, in the democratization of Ghana were consulted. The various Constitutions of Ghana as well as some Members of Parliament, officers of Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service (G.E.S) teachers of Religious Education and pupils, leaders of some of the religious bodies (Christian Council, The Catholic Secretariat, some Imams, etc.), were also consulted.

A brief overview of Religious Education in Ghana.

It is very difficult to determine when Religious Education began in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, for its beginnings is as old as the Indigenous Religion of Ghana (African Traditional Religion) of which, the main mode of instruction was formal training for the functionaries (priests and priestesses) and participant-observation for ordinary adherents of the faith. But Religious Education as we understand it today (being part of formal education) could be traced to the time that the Gold Coast people, now Ghanaians, had contact with the Western Europeans. That is, from 1471 when the Portuguese landed on the shores of the country. Formal education was started by the colonial administrators in collaboration with the missionaries. The school

education was to train people for the systematic economic exploitation of local resources and the extension of European civilization. Christian missionaries saw education as means of proselytizing indigenous people (Hagan, 2009, p.3) and to bring Christianity to bear on the pupils (Wise, 1956:17). In other words, it was meant to make their converts good Christians. The history of the castle schools attest to this (Buah, 1998, p.134f; Anti and Anum, 2003, p. 34). The Education Ordinance of 1887 made provision for mission- or church-initiated schools to benefit from government financial support under certain conditions.

It is on record that many of the good Senior Secondary Schools (now Senior High Schools) in Ghana were begun by the Christian missionaries before they became government assisted (government took full control by way recruiting teachers and other supporting staff and paying their salaries). Some examples could be cited here: Wesley Girls School in 1836 and Mfantshipim College in 1876 (Methodist), Adisadel College in 1910 (Anglican), St. Augustine College in 1935 and Holy Child in 1945, (Roman Catholic), all in Cape Coast, the citadel of education in Ghana, the Presbyterian Boys School, formerly at Odumasi-Krobo, and now in Legon in Accra in 1938. It is important to note that Religious Education in these mission schools before government interventions was geared towards Christian theology with special emphasis on the doctrines of their respective denominations.

Now there are private universities established by religious bodies. Some of them include: the Valley View University (Seventh Day Adventist) in Accra in 1979, Methodist University in Accra in 2000, Islamic University College in Accra in 2002, the Catholic University at Fiapre in 2003, Evangelical Presbyterian University College, in Ho in 2008, and others. This also confirms

the fact that religious bodies' contribution to formal education in Ghana cannot be overemphasized.

Ghana`s Education Policies and Religious Education

Ghana`s education policies began at the colonial era when the country was then known as Gold Coast under the British Empire. The major education policies in relation to Religious Education are surveyed in this section.

i) Religious Education in pre-Independence Era

During the castle school era, Religious Education was known as Religious Instruction (RK) and it featured prominently in addition to Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (see Wise, 1956, p.9).

As stated earlier, the education ordinance of 1887 made provision for both government and assisted schools. The mission or the church schools came under the assisted schools. To be assisted or to qualify for public funds, the following conditions were to be satisfied:

- a) The school must have a minimum of twenty pupils
- b) Staffed by certificated teachers
- c) Teach English (reading and writing), arithmetic and needle work (in case of girls schools)

[see Anti and Anum, 2003: 35] .

The 1925 governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg`s 16 principles of education endorsed the teaching of Religious Education (see McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975, p. 57). It also emphasized the cooperation between the government and the missions. The mission schools should get subsidy from the government for educational purposes and the government would have ultimate control

of education throughout the country. When Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became the head of government business in 1951, he introduced the “Accelerate Development Plan for Education”, in which Religious Education under the name; Religious Instruction (RI) was part of the curriculum. There was, however, a clause in the plan that, “in future no new primary school opened by a denominational religious body or by a person or group of persons will be eligible for assistance from public funds unless prior approval of the local authority concerned under powers delegated by the central government have been obtained”. The church did not take kindly to this condition, for it felt it was a threat to Religious Education. The church argued that democratically the government measure was not right (see Anti and Anum, 2003: 35f for details). It is however, on record that Dr. Nkrumah was instrumental in the changing of the name of the Department of Divinity at the University of Ghana, Legon to the Department for the Study of Religions in 1962 (The Educator, 2007/2008, p. 4). Dr. Nkrumah did that when he learnt that it was only Christianity that was being taught at the department. This was aimed at paving way for the inclusion of other religions particularly, African Traditional Religion. This was in line with his Africanization vision. But it is interesting to note that it was only the name that was changed, for the syllabus continued to be the same for some time before Islam and African Traditional Religion were included in the department`s programme (Professor C.R.Gaba, [a former lecturer in the Department] personal communication, May 4, 2010) .

ii) 1961 Education Act and Religious Education

Although the religious bodies` contribution towards education in Ghana was not in doubt, somewhere along the line, many of the religious bodies (churches) were admitting pupils based on religious affiliations. This discriminatory attitude came to the notice of the government. The

government swiftly dealt with this problem by passing the education Act of 1961. Section 22 of this Act emphatically stated among other things that:

- a) “No person shall be refused admission as a pupil to, or attendance as a pupil at, any school on account of the religious persuasion, Nationality, race or language of himself or of either of his parents.
- b) No tests or enquiries shall be made of or concerning the religious belief of pupils or students prior to their admittance to any religious school or college.”

The Act still recognized the teaching of Religious Education but the subject was renamed Religious Knowledge (RK).

Also, the Republican Constitutions of Ghana (the 1st to the 4th) have explicitly prohibited discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of one`s conscience which include religious belief (see Article 27 clauses 1-7 of the 1979 Constitution; Article 17 clause1-3 of the 1992 Constitution). The situation is a bit better now in terms of admission of students. For instance, the latest statistics at the T.I Ahmaddiyya Senior High School in Kumasi indicates that there are more students of Christian background than Islam, even though the school was established by the Ahmaddiyya Movement (60th anniversary cerebation report, 17-01-10).

It is important, however, to add that some traces of discrimination continue in the area of appointment of heads to schools set up by religious bodies and are government assisted. Today, it is an open secret that if one is not affiliated to the mission that started a particular school (particularly the first class Senior High Schools), no matter one`s efficiency, subtle means usually engineered by members of that mission, will be used to prevent one from becoming the headmaster of the school (my interaction with some of the heads of the Senior High Schools and

even officials of G.E.S. and some Members of Parliament who had been teachers before confirmed this).

iii) 1972 Dzobo Education Reforms and Religious Education

In 1972, an education Review Committee was set up under Professor N.K. Dzobo. This Committee recommended that RK should be an integral part of a new discipline known as Cultural Studies, where religion, music and dance should be the main elements at the basic school level. This integration was the beginning of the problems that the teaching of Religious Education in Ghana was to suffer thereafter. At the secondary school level, however, Bible Knowledge (BK) and Islamic Knowledge (IK) were used at the General Certificate of Education “Ordinary” Level (GCE “O” Level). BK was made compulsory for all students from form one to form three, but those who wanted it could select it as part of their elective subjects to continue to form five, the final year where the GCE “O” Level examinations were taken. There was a kind of unfairness in this arrangement, for all students (whether a Christian, Muslim or a believer of African Traditional Religion) in all the public schools and the Christian mission schools which became government assisted had to offer BK at least up to form three whereas students in the Islamic missions which became government assisted had to offer IK irrespective of their religious background.

At the General Certificate of Education “Advanced” Level (GCE “A” Level), however, Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) and African Traditional Religion (ATR) were used to designate courses. But in 1996 when the Advanced Level was phased out, ATR, which used to be a subject on its own at the GCE “A” Level was removed from the

curriculum of Secondary Schools in Ghana. It was, however, retained and was taught along side the Christian and Islamic Religions as part of Cultural Studies at the basic school level.

iv) 1987 Education Reforms and Religious Education

The 1987 Education Review Committee was a sequel to the 1972 Dzobo reform, for this review committee was to address the deficiencies identified in the 1972 reform. In addition to the replacement of the four-year Middle Schools programme with the Junior Secondary School (JSS), which reduced the secondary school years from seven to four years, the committee recommended the removal of Cultural Studies from the basic school curriculum. This meant Religious Education ceased to be part of the basic school curriculum. This attracted incessant protests from the religious bodies (particularly Christian denominations and Islam).

v) 1994 National Education Reform Review Committee and Religious Education

Following the public outcry and the religious bodies' protests, the then government had to set up the National Education Reform Review Committee (NERRC) in 1994 to review education in the country. Among the recommendations of the Committee, was the re-introduction of Religious Education. This was accepted by the government but Religious Education was re-designated as Religious and Moral Education (RME).

Article 38 of 1992 Constitution of Ghana made provision for Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) for all Ghanaian children of school going age. Religious Education was given a place under the FCUBE Programme. Based on this constitutional provision, a new syllabus was developed in 1998 for the teaching of RME at both the Basic and Senior Secondary levels (see Asare –Danso, 2010, an unpublished research paper).

vi) 2007 Anamoah-Mensah Education Reform and Religious Education

This Committee was to overhaul education to reflect the current situation in the country. For instance there was public outcry that the basic schools were overburdened with many subjects, therefore, there was the need to reduce them. But contrary to the recommendations of Professor Anamoah Mensah's Education Review Committee's Report, the government removed RME from the curriculum of the basic schools. The Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Secretariat vehemently opposed this move by the government. The government responded by reinstating the RME but made it non-examinable subject (that is, it is examined internally only). The religious bodies are not satisfied and are still pressing for RME to be made one of the externally examinable subjects as it used to be (see Saturday, January 5, 2008 Edition of the "Daily Guide" for the arguments of the Catholic Bishops' Conference).

One important fact that needs to be stressed here is that it is the contribution of these religious bodies (particularly Christianity and Islam) to the development of formal education, coupled with their power and the influence in the country that the various governments from the time of independence have not been able to remove Religious Education completely from the public school system.

It is important to note here that apart from the religious bodies' role in the development of formal education in Ghana, their role in Ghana's road to democracy cannot be ignored (see Pobe, 1988; 1991 for details). Kwasi Yirenkyi's (2000) research has also confirmed this. His preliminary results corroborated the view in Ghana that since the 1980s, the Ghanaian Christians have been more actively involved in politics than before. Much of the churches' political activity was initiated collectively under the umbrella of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and the Ghana

Catholics Bishops` Conference (GCBC) with its related body, the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS).

Furthermore, literature on religion and politics in Ghana (Ninsin and Drah, 1987; Assimeng, 1989; Aboagye-Mensah 1994) reveals that since the 1980s and 1990s, the Church in particular has taken a more activist role in national politics than at any time in its history. For instance, Assimeng`s research among the Evangelical Presbyterian Clergy on the churches participation in politics, revealed that 73 percent of them preferred their involvement in politics (1989, p.205). On whether the clergy should continue to involve themselves in national politics, the belief of the laity was that “the clergy constitutes a class not easily intimidated by any government for they are insulated from the risks individual laypersons may face from brutal regimes” (Yirenkyi, 2000). Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah, for instance, state “we ourselves are clear in our minds, that the church has a valid case to be involved in the affairs of the state in all aspects including national politics” (1991, p. 33). It may be argued that it was this perception that gingered the church up to confront the military regimes in Ghana most especially that of Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) led by Jerry John Rawlings from 1981 - 1992.

Historical and recent developments in Ghana`s political scene, also confirms the strong influence of religion on both public life and democracy (see Pobee, 1988; 1991 for details). Religious bodies in Ghana wield considerable power and in some cases have been able to influence state policies in the areas of law and politics. For instance, it has become a *defacto* condition that in the selection of presidential candidates, the candidates` religious affiliations are usually considered by the political parties. Usually if the presidential candidate of a party is a Christian, a Muslim is preferred as a running mate and vice versa. According to Yankah (1992), “suddenly it

has been realized that the shortest route to the Castle - the seat of government of Ghana - is the church...” as quoted in Dovlo (2006).

Christians have 25th December (Christmas Day), 26th December (Boxing Day), Easter Day and Easter Mondays as statutory Public Holidays. In 1995, the Muslim community in Ghana under the leadership of the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, was able to negotiate successfully with the then ruling government, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), under Jerry Rawlings to get two statutory Public Holidays for the celebration of the Eid festivals. That is “Eid al-Adha” (Feast of sacrifice), which falls on February 2, of every year and the “Eid al-Fitr” (end of Ramadan), November 3-5 depending on when the moon is sighted.

About a decade ago, the religious bodies led by the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) petitioned the government to give back to them all the mission schools that were taken over from them by the government following the promulgation of the 1961 Education Act. The Act, however, allowed the mission-related education Units to remain to do the posting of teachers to their schools even though it is the central government that takes care of the salaries of such teachers, learning materials (text books etc.) and other logistics like the provision of accommodation especially for the head teachers of the basic schools. The government has accepted this petition in principle and has even allowed pupils of such schools to wear the uniforms that were in use before the take over. The above indicates that religious bodies are a force to reckon with in Ghana`s affairs.

It is, however, worthy to note that in spite of the influence or the pressure from the religious bodies on the government, one thing is clear and it is the fact that the curriculum of all these schools of the religious bodies` – basic, secondary and tertiary -- run the normal academic

courses which are run at the public schools and the universities as required by the National Accreditation Board (a statutory body which gives approval to the establishment of a university or tertiary institution in Ghana). It must be mentioned in addition that in such faith organizations' tertiary institutions, are Religious Studies Departments where Comparative Religion features. This is aimed at ensuring religious tolerance in the light of the religious pluralism existing in the country today. The purely faith-based institutions are the Theological Seminaries/Quranic schools (meant for training of their clergy and other leaders) which do not receive funding from the public purse.

Although the contribution of religious bodies towards education in Ghana in general and Religious Education in particular is recognized by all well-meaning Ghanaians, people's concern is that the inclusion of Religious Education in the school curriculum in a secular democratic state like Ghana, must be justified on educational rather than on religious grounds. It is important to explain that the use of secularization here does not suggest the "decline of religion" (see Casanova 1994; Martin 1996; Moynagh & Worsley 2000; Stark & Fink 2000). Rather it is used to mean freeing society of the hegemony of one particular religion (Martin 1995). It is also used to mean the lack of one religion having monopoly over a society but in its wake several religions serving as optional and often competing avenues for allegiance of society. Secularization, therefore, means, among others, religious pluralism which is an observable reality in contemporary Ghana (Dovlo 1991). Pluralism also means differentiation (Sommerville 1992), a theory that religion especially Christianity, no longer has the monopoly over other spheres of life, just as African Traditional Religion had in the pre-colonial era. Rather, other phenomena (including other religions) do partake in the contestation for ideological influence in society. Thus, society is freed from the ideological clutches of any particular religion and opened up to

other influences. Incidentally this ideology is what democracy is about—freedom of speech, association, conscience etc. This also implies that Religious Education must have a place in any state that calls itself democratic.

Justification for the inclusion of Religious Education in the curriculum of schools in a Secular Democratic State like Ghana

This paper strongly believes that Religious Education, no matter the sense in which it is understood cannot be neglected by any meaningful national development programme in today`s world and that any attempt at national development which sidelines Religious Education will be erecting structures on no strong foundation at all (Gaba,1991). The following among others are the supporting reasons:

In the first place, it is clear from the above that the nature of the phenomenon of religion itself justifies its continuous study in order to understand it better, for it has continued to be a permanent feature in the affairs of humankind. Anti and Anum (2003) agree to this fact when they pointed out “to omit from the classroom all references to religion and the institutions of religion is, therefore, to neglect an important part of human life, for knowledge about religion is essential for a full understanding of our culture, literature, art, history and current affairs.”

Also, Ghana, like any other nation of today, will participate without a choice in the life of pluralism that has become a permanent feature of our planet. This pluralism manifests itself in both secular and religious matters. Many Ghanaians of today order their lives by at least one of the three main religious traditions in the country-- the host religion of the various ethnic groups [collectively known as African Traditional Religion(s)] and the different brands of the impinging faiths of Christianity and Islam. The inroads of some Eastern faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahai and others cannot be overlooked. Even naturalistic humanism also has

attraction for some Ghanaians now (Gaba, 1991).

All these persuasions are lenses through which Ghanaians view life today and these thus determine for them their relationship with one another. What, therefore, this means is that there is the need to impart to Ghanaians, without exception, the knowledge of the various religions or worldviews that we find in our midst which if properly imparted will be functional rather than dysfunctional to our national development. In other words, knowledge about religions is not only characteristic of an educated person, but is also absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity, something which can promote democracy and world peace due to its potentiality to eliminate or reduce religious fundamentalism to the barest minimum. This responsibility obviously lies on those in charge of Religious Education; that is presenting each religion as the believers themselves consider it to be.

What is being said here is that the study of religion can weld society together if it is properly imparted. That is, if the teaching is not geared to favour a particular religion with the view to getting converts for that particular religion. But if the lesson is presented in an unbiased way where every religion is fairly treated as essentially as one of the alternative blueprints for the meaningful life, as experts of Comparative Religion recommend, then the student will appreciate the fact that he/she is living in a world where people live by different worldviews. The possible result will be that the student is likely to show some level of religious tolerance which is needed for national integration and development. Development will never take place in a religious intolerant or religious conflict prone area. It is this, which will make democracy abide in a country like Ghana.

Furthermore, the human person has been noted to compose of two essential elements—material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual)—[even though some secular humanists will disagree with this view], and since it is religion that deals directly with the spiritual part of humans, it is, therefore, prudent to continue to study religion at all levels of education both in the faith-oriented and the non-faith oriented way for humans to understand themselves in this “meaningless” world. This is in consonance with Tom-Clark`s (1960) view that one`s religious beliefs determine how one should live and what constitutes the good life.

It is important also to note here that religion is nothing but human behaviour or activity and, therefore, the study of religion is another meaningful way of complementing the work of the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and others.

It is also an indubitable fact that any society that loses its culture automatically loses its identity and since religion is an essential element of culture, the study of religion in a democratic state will give the student particularly the Ghanaian, the opportunity to know more about his/her cultural heritage and thereby protect and safeguard it. In this way, the student will also be espousing the philosophy of *negritude`* which is also known as “African Personality”, something which Africans are proudly protecting in the face of globalization. Furthermore, “religion plays a significant role in history and society, study about religion is essential to understanding both the nation and the world. Omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant.” (Charles and Oliver, 2001).

In addition to the above, today research (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009: 251-282, Tucker and Grim as cited in Pandey, undated) has confirmed the role religion can play in environmental

conservation. It has been established that belief systems of every culture establish a relationship between its people and the environment. Several species of trees have long been protected by the followers of all the major religions of the world. No wonder that today, “the religious environmental movement is blooming in depth, diversity and impact particularly outside Africa. Most faith groups are actively pursuing environmental goals, and thousands of individuals motivated by faith are addressing environmental concerns, often through personal behavior or secular groups” (http://www.religionlink.org/tip_071112.php). Some religious groups in Ghana now are planting various species of plants to help in the environmental conservation. This should be a pointer to the policy-makers, policy implementers, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like: Friends of the Earth, Friends of the Animals, and in fact all the eco-biased groups in Ghana to take notice of this fact and thus support the study of religion in our schools.

In spite of the justification for the teaching of Religious Education, the teaching of Religious Education in Ghana is not without some problems, which need mentioning in this paper.

Challenges Facing Religious Education in Ghana

As Alves (1967, p.24) rightly puts it, Religious Education gives students the sense of direction in life and helps them achieve a valid perspective on the whole business of living, but the way of achieving this goal of Religious Education depends on the availability of instructional resources (syllabus, textbooks, manuals, magazines, visual-aids etc.). Unfortunately, instructional materials on Religious Education in Ghana are not sufficient. A visit to the schools particularly, the basic and the second cycle schools will attest to this fact (see Annobil, 2005).

Also, and more importantly, some of the teachers of Religious Education in Ghana lack the required academic and professional competencies (Annobil, 2005, p.109f). That is, they do not

have the requisite training in imparting Religious Education. This goes to confirm Ryan`s (1962:370) assertion that: If teachers are incompetent or misfits, excellent material resources in the form of buildings, equipment and textbooks are likely to be ineffective, if not wasted”. In Ghana for instance, in the case of Christian Religious Studies (CRS), some head masters feel that once one is a Christian and thus knows the content of the Bible, one can teach CRS. The same thing applies to Islamic Religious Studies (IRS). This obviously is far from right. In the case of African Traditional Religion (ATR), the situation is worse, because Christianity and Islam have made tremendous inroads in Ghana and most often those who handle ATR are either Christians or Muslims whose knowledge in the indigenous religion is very limited. The result of this situation is that teachers end up projecting their faiths more than the others.

Furthermore, modern educational theorists are of the opinion that any teaching methodology or process that is not based on student-activity may not be effective in the teaching and learning process. Kelly (1989, p.73) for instance, is of the view that “educational process is fully educational only if both teachers and pupils are active within it.” In Ghana, however, the teaching of Religious Education is mostly teacher-centred. That is, most of the time, it is the lecture method that is used and at times, the dictation of notes to students (see Annobil, 2005, p.58). This indeed does not enhance effective delivery of Religious Education lessons.

Another challenge is the instability that Religious Education has suffered in the school curriculum in recent times. At one time, it is integrated with other subjects (Cultural Studies) and at another; it is a total removal from the school curriculum as the above survey has shown.

In addition, Religious Education in Ghana has so far been limited to the three dominant religions in Ghana—Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. But Ghana is now religiously a

pluralistic state as evident in its religious demography. This situation is not fair to other religious traditions that have emerged gallantly in the country. The real challenge is how the education authorities can accommodate or formulate a useful and viable syllabus for the many religions or worldviews that have engulfed the country now.

The way forward

Education reform process in Ghana is ongoing, and in this paper's view, the consideration of the following suggestions could be the vision for the future of Religious Education in Ghana:

- a) The Ministry of Education and the G.E.S. as a matter of urgency should reconsider their position and give Religious Education the dignity it deserves by restoring it to its former status. For, if it is not included in the final examinations that the basic school leavers take, both teachers and pupils may not give it the attention that it deserves but Religious Education is crucial in the early stages of the pupils' educational development.
- b) Even though, African Traditional Religion has been re-introduced into the second cycle school curriculum, its impact is yet to be felt, for only few people are aware of it due the low publicity it has received so far. There is, therefore, the need to publicize it through the media, both print and electronic. Teacher training Institutions in the country should also be equipped to prepare teachers to handle this course.
- c) Closely connected with the above is the need for the re-training/training of teachers of Religious Education for them to be well equipped to handle the subject matter effectively and professionally. This calls for a new teaching methodology to facilitate the study of

Religious Education. It implies that research backed by the needed funding from the stake holders particularly the central government is imperative.

- d) In addition, religious leaders (pastors, imams, traditional priests/priestesses etc.) could from time to time be invited by teachers of Religious Education to share their belief systems with pupils/students for them to have first hand information. This will obviously complement the work of Religious Education teachers.
- e) There is the need for Religious Education to stand as a subject on its own and not integrated with other subjects. This is because it will make Religious Education an “appendage” to the subject(s) that it is integrated with as Guney (2007) quotes the Catholic Bishops` Conference Pastoral letter as intimating. Also, limiting Religious Education to the three principal religions in the country is misnomer. Because this is not the true reflection of the situation on the ground now. You cannot just continue to select three out of the many religions in Ghana today and say you are teaching Religious Education whilst the situation on the ground points to the contrary. This implies, the difficulty notwithstanding, there is the need to find a way of developing a new Religious Education syllabus where the faiths other than the three dominant religions are incorporated. Even if this cannot be done now, at least, a greater number of the religions present in Ghana now may be considered whilst efforts are made to accommodate the rest in the near future. What this paper is advocating, is what Sam Tumwesigire (1991) calls, “Educational Religious Education”. This will be a true reflection of the pluralistic society of Ghana today. This also has the potentiality to equip the pupils to appreciate and respect

each others faith, something which will ensure all hands on deck for social, economic and political development of democratic Ghana.

- f) Moreover, appointment of heads to the schools should be based on competence and not on religious affiliations. This will reflect the secular state nature of Ghana as it is enshrined in its Constitution.
- g) There is need for the Ministry of Education and the G.E.S. to consider as a matter of urgency to facilitate the provision of basic textbooks and other relevant materials. The teachers themselves should spend time in gathering and developing teaching and learning materials as suggested by Lueck et al. (1966, p.205) since this will go a long way to enhance the teaching and learning of Religious Education.
- h) Furthermore, in order to ensure that Religious Education teachers do not project their faiths over and above other faiths in the syllabus, only “Circuit Supervisors” (senior teachers from the District Education Directorates) who have background in Religious Education should be allowed to go round to check to ensure that Religious Education is handled professionally. That is, presenting each religion as what the believers themselves say constitute their faith and not what the teacher perceives it to be. In this way, the citizenry stands the chance of benefiting from Religious Education in a secular democratic state like Ghana.

Conclusion

The discussion thus far has shown the role of religious bodies in formal education in Ghana and how Religious Education came to be part of the curriculum of public schools in Ghana and the various Education reforms that have affected Religious Education in Ghana. It has also

demonstrated the justification for the continuous study of religion in the public schools in Ghana. It has emphasized the fact that the purpose of Religious Education in public schools in a democratic state like Ghana is to educate students about a variety of religious traditions, not to indoctrinate them into any tradition, rather it must be taught objectively and neutrally (in professional way), the cumulative effect of which will help the students to be properly educated about history and cultural heritage of their own and that of others. This means that teachers who are not academically and professionally competent should not be allowed to handle Religious Education in a democratic state like Ghana.

The essence of education whichever form it takes, formal or informal, is geared towards the purpose of transmitting from one generation to the next one the culture of the societies concerned with the view to preparing the young people for their future membership of their societies and their active participation in their (societies) maintenance and development. In other words, the manifest aim of education is to prepare the pupils to develop mentally, physically, morally and socially so that they can understand their environment so as to be able to function as a useful member of their societies. This will also equip them to compete in the reality of globalization that confronts them today. But before this dream could be achieved, stakeholders in education, particularly the government, must ensure that all the factors that impede the teaching of Religious Education in the Ghanaian public schools at all levels are removed and as well from time to time revise the syllabus of Religious Education to reflect the realities on the ground.

The discussions have furthermore shown clearly the influence of religious bodies in Ghana and thus any political party in Ghana that claims to be democratic in the true sense of the word and wish to win political power, through the ballot box cannot ignore religious factor in its scheme of

things, particularly in its educational policies. This explains the reason why in the selection of presidential candidates, religious affiliations are considered. But in spite of the denominational nature of the schools established by the various religious bodies in Ghana, the contents of the curriculum to be used by all schools (particularly the basic and the second cycle schools) in Ghana are drawn by the Curriculum Development Division of G.E.S. under the strict supervision of Ministry of Education. This decision is informed by the fact that Ghana is a secular state as found in the pre-independence educational reforms and as enshrined in all her post - independence Constitutions (1960; 1969; 1979 and 1992).

This notwithstanding, the paper's submission, therefore, is that any person or group of persons who may argue for the exclusion of Religious Education from the school curriculum may be classified among those who are seen as anti-development. From the look of things, especially the significant inroads which religious bodies in Ghana especially Christianity and Islam have made in the affairs of the state, it is reasonable to suppose (in spite of the challenges confronting the teaching of Religious Education in the country now) that Religious Education will continue to be with democratic Ghana for a very long time if not for ever.

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