





# A Reflection on the Socio-Religious Environment of Ghana in the Wake of Religious Plurality

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## ABSTRACT

Religion has become an inevitable human institution in the society. In the wake of enormous religiosity among Ghanaians, religious plurality, as a phenomenon, has become part and parcel of the social construct of the Ghanaian society. Thus, looking at the socio-religious environment of Ghana, it can be realized that religious plurality is a reality in Ghana. Different religious groups have existed and operated in Ghana, and there is a probability of new religions cropping up in the coming days. This paper is based on data derived from published and unpublished literature in the form of books and journal articles. The researchers adopted the qualitative method for the study. The study revealed that the religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, educational, health service delivery and media environments are all characterized by religious plurality. The researchers expect that after reading this material, readers will understand and appreciate the socio-religious context of religious plurality in Ghana.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious plurality is evident in almost every society in the contemporary world. The fact that most of the societies are obviously plural, religious plurality is inevitable. Religious plurality has become indispensable in human society. According to Forman, when the world is considered as a whole, there has always been a religious plurality.<sup>1</sup> He adds that the rapid spread of religious plurality is one of the most noticeable signs of contemporary times.<sup>2</sup> Konadu, on his part, asserts that the world has reached a point where it is inevitable for human beings to co-exist continuously, regardless of their religious affiliations.<sup>3</sup> In relation to that, Eck contemplates that one significant question in the contemporary world is how people understand and discuss religious differences in an environment where everyone lives in closer proximity than ever before.<sup>4</sup>

Coming to the Ghanaian setting, Samwini writes that it is realistic that Ghana is a pluralistic nation characterized by three publicly and constitutionally acceptable religions, as well as several smaller

<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Forman, "Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1982): 5–9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693938200600102>.

<sup>2</sup> Forman, "Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church", 1.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Konadu, Frederick Mensah Bonsu, and Dorcas Amedorme, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 2022, 175–87.

<sup>4</sup> Diana L. Eck, "Religious Pluralism, on the Ground and in the Pulpit," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 56, no. 3/4 (2002): 167–78.

religious groups that are identified only upon close contact or encounter with their devotees.<sup>5</sup> He adds that, in Ghana, people of diverse religious backgrounds and affiliations encounter each other naturally and during public occasions and festivities, different religious devotees attend and participate in these observances without checks of religious affiliation or background.<sup>6</sup> Hence, in both the private and public places and organizations in Ghana, one can witness the presence of several and different religious adherents.<sup>7</sup>

It is the view of the authors of this paper that attempts should be made to look at the nature and overview of the phenomenon of Religious Plurality and how it prevails in the Ghanaian milieu.

The paper brings to light that the religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, educational, health service delivery and media environments are all characterized by religious plurality. It is the anticipation of the researchers that, this paper will make people understand and appreciate the socio-religious context of religious plurality in Ghana. The questions underlying the research include: What is religious plurality? What is the origin of religious plurality in Ghana? How is the socio-religious environment in plural Ghana?

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was adopted for the study. Using data derived from published and unpublished literature in the form of books and journal articles, the researchers discussed the nature of religious plurality as evidenced in the socio-religious life of Ghanaians. The research elucidates the fact that the religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, educational, health service delivery and media environments are all characterized by religious plurality.

## Religious Plurality

In the ordinary sense, Asadu et al, define religious plurality as the existence of a variety of religions in a given human setting.<sup>8</sup> In a broader sense, Asadu et al posit that religious plurality depicts the assertion that all religions need recognition for their own ways of beliefs, worship and practices, regardless of independence and fundamental differences. The writers add that, within the context of religious plurality, there is neither a superior religion nor an inferior religion, but all religions are considered to deserve respect, tolerance and recognition.<sup>9</sup>

In his work titled *Religious Pluralism and the Christian Responses*, Objantoro sees religious plurality as an existential recognition of the other as they are, without trying to comprehend or change them.<sup>10</sup>

## The Origin of Religious Plurality in Ghana

Religious plurality has been a phenomenon in human society from the beginning of history. Different religions have originated and co-existed in human society for long. The world has seen numerous and quite uncountable religious sects emanating and co-existing in human society. The African continent has not been an exception to the emanation, proliferation and co-existence of numerous religions.

With reference to the Ghanaian milieu, Nonterah asserts that the phenomenon of religious plurality as witnessed in Ghana can be traced to the coming of the colonial masters somewhere in the fifteenth century AD.<sup>11</sup> The colonial masters came with Christianity to meet the indigenous people, the majority of which already practised the Indigenous African Religion. Later, in the eighteenth century,

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<sup>5</sup> Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, "Religious Toleration as a Key Factor for Social Stability in Plural Ghana" ISSN 2225-0565, 4, no. 12, (2014), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, "The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations," *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, no. 6 (2011): 9–14.

<sup>7</sup> Adam Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana" (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> George C. Asadu, Benjamin C. Diara, and Nicholas Asogwa, "Religious Pluralism and Its Implications for Church Development," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Asadu, Diara, and Asogwa, "Religious Pluralism and Its Implications for Church Development."

<sup>10</sup> Engaar Objantoro, "Religious Pluralism and the Christian Responses," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–9.

<sup>11</sup> Nora Kofognotera Nonterah, "The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Northern Ghana," in *Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century* (Springer, 2016), 197.

Islam joined the two already existing religions (Christianity and African Indigenous Religion). Due to the high religiosity of Ghanaians, they embraced and incorporated these new religions.<sup>12</sup> All the three religions harboured the belief in God and coupled with the interrelatedness of some of their beliefs and practices, the three religions co-existed in the country.<sup>13</sup> Since then, there have been constant relations between people of varied religious traditions in numerous and diverse ways, both structured and unstructured. The interreligious relations and co-existence have been both mutual and somewhat frictional.

### **The Socio-Religious Environment in Plural Ghana**

With the advent of religious plurality, the Ghanaian society found itself in a somewhat different socio-religious system. The plurality of religions and the co-existence of varied religious practitioners in the country made Ghana witness a paradigm shift.

This section seeks to discuss the socio-religious environment or setting in which the nation and its people found themselves in the prevalence of diverse religions. It shall discuss the religious, social, political, cultural, economic, educational and health environments that characterized Ghanaian society in the wake of religious plurality.

#### **a. The Religious Environment**

Religion has a significant influence on the lives of Ghanaians, shaping their individual and social experiences. The religious landscape in Ghana is characterized mainly by Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Christians are dominant, followed by Muslims, with African Traditional Religionists forming a minority but actively carrying out their religious practices. These diverse religious faiths play pivotal role in shaping the cultural and social fabric of Ghanaian society, illustrating the pervasive impact of religion on the lives of its people.<sup>14</sup> Aside from that, there are other faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Eckankar, and Hare Krishna, which are becoming popular in the nation.<sup>15</sup>

The most recent estimate from the 2021 Ghana Population Census indicates that approximately 70% of the country's population identifies themselves as Christians, while nearly 20% are Muslims, and the remaining percentage consists of indigenous worshippers and individuals with other religious affiliations. Additionally, the specific religious groups within Christianity and Islam are diverse, encompassing various denominations and practices. This demonstrates the religious plurality present within the country.<sup>16</sup> All these religions co-exist peacefully, exhibiting respect and recognition for the other and their individual religions. For Samwini, it is quite common to find individuals in Ghana who practice Indigenous African Religion, Christianity, and Islam, with various denominations of Christianity and Islam peacefully co-existing within many homes.<sup>17</sup>

During religious festivals in Ghana, interfaith encounters and cooperation are held. For instance, during Christian religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, Christians open their homes to host Muslims for gatherings, where they come together to celebrate the significance of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ, sharing in the joy of these events.<sup>18</sup> Christians exchange visits with their Muslim friends during *Eid* festivals.<sup>19</sup> During the celebration of the *Eid* festivals, Muslims receive well wishes from Christians and traditional religious adherents throughout the country. Moreover, during Ramadan, Muslims appreciate the Christian message that focuses on sacrifice, self-denial and serving the community's shared interests. Similarly, Christians appreciate a Muslim message at Easter that

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<sup>12</sup> Nonterah, "The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Northern Ghana." 197.

<sup>13</sup> Makafui Margaret Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2019). 40-43.

<sup>14</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana." 3.

<sup>15</sup> Samwini, "The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations." 1.

<sup>16</sup> Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, "I Am Because We Are": A Precondition to Peace in a Religious and Political Pluralistic West African Country," *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought* 3, no. 1 (2014): 44.

<sup>17</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana." 3.

<sup>18</sup> Abdul-Hamid Mustapha, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana," *WAATI Papers No. 7 on Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa*, 2012. 37.

<sup>19</sup> *Eid* refers to the annual Muslim celebrations that follow the end of the Ramadan fast and the celebration that commemorates Abraham's abortive attempt to sacrifice his son Ishmael in obedience to God's command.

demonstrates how suffering and sacrifice can be instruments of reconciliation in the community.<sup>20</sup> During traditional religious festivals, relations and encounters between people of different religious backgrounds are witnessed. According to Konadu, in 2014, the Asante King and traditional ruler, Otumfuor Osei Tutu II, celebrated his 15th anniversary, and one of the festivities constituting the celebration was the Akwasidae festival.<sup>21</sup> On this occasion, several Christians and Muslims joined the celebration. Thus, people of various religions in Ghana joined in the commemoration of the 15 years of leadership of the king and traditional leader.<sup>22</sup> This is a comprehensive way of promoting plurality in society. According to Tayviah, all these mark a sense of belongingness and religious freedom of each religious group and further promote good interfaith relations and dialogue.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, there have been efforts by religious bodies in Ghana to ensure and promote interfaith encounters and co-existence which are characteristics of religious plurality. However, the interfaith organizations have not sufficiently engaged with the indigenous culture in a respectful and mutual manner, according to Acquah.<sup>24</sup> This lack of participation limits the sustainability of interfaith initiatives in Ghana. Therefore, interfaith connections cannot be truly significant without considering the needs of the local population.<sup>25</sup> Acquah adds that African indigenous contributions are excluded from national engagements. Interference consistently impedes local participation in initiatives across different religious groups to advance peace within the nation.<sup>26</sup>

### **b. The Socio-Cultural Environment**

According to Kenny, the well-being of society is defined by all the social conditions that make it easier for people to achieve their full potential.<sup>27</sup> Osemeka indicates that, in a society with religious plurality, all religious beliefs are considered legitimate and accurate. However, beyond just acknowledging these beliefs, the legitimacy and accuracy of each religion within a community are demonstrated through its influence on social interactions and practices. This means that the presence of diverse religious beliefs is not only accepted but also reflected in the way people live and interact with one another in that society.<sup>28</sup> She adds that the combined contributions of all community sectors will result in a form of religious diversity that considers the needs of both religious and non-religious groups.<sup>29</sup>

The established social systems in Ghana support the prevalence of religious plurality. Moreover, as Kenny further puts it, it is certain that the current generation desires the freedom to express their religious beliefs openly, both in private and public settings.<sup>30</sup> He adds that, indeed, the majority of national constitutions have already recognized religious freedom as a basic civil right, and it has also been formally acknowledged in various international agreements.<sup>31</sup> The Constitution of Ghana has a provision that gives a mandate to freedom of religious expression and peaceful co-existence.<sup>32</sup> The implication is that people and groups should have the freedom to act as they choose as long as it does not infringe on the equal rights and freedom of others, whether those rights are religious or otherwise. This

<sup>20</sup> Stuart E Brown, *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches* (WCC Publ., 1989). 51-52.

<sup>21</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."30.

<sup>22</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."30.

<sup>23</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment*. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values," 2020. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values," .37.

<sup>26</sup> Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values."37.

<sup>27</sup> Kenny O. P. Joseph, *Views on Christian-Muslim Relations* (Dominican Publication: Ibadan, Nigeria, 1999).37.

<sup>28</sup> Irene N Osemeka, "The Management of Religious Diversity in West Africa: The Exceptionalism of the Wolof and Yoruba in the Post-Independence Period," *Historia Actual Online*, no. 33 (2014): 62.

<sup>29</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious Diversity in West Africa: The Exceptionalism of the Wolof and Yoruba in the Post-Independence Period."73.

<sup>30</sup> Kenny, *Views on Christian-Muslim Relations*.37.

<sup>31</sup> Kenny, *Views on Christian-Muslim Relations*.31.

<sup>32</sup> The Constitution of Ghana states that "Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedom of the individual contained in this chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for public interest." Source: Articles 22, 23 12(2) of the 1969 and 1992 Constitutions of the Republic of Ghana.

has created an environment where various faiths can function without unwarranted disruption.<sup>33</sup> According to Kenny, it is the shared duty of individuals, groups, civil authorities, the Church and other religious communities to safeguard the freedom of religion.<sup>34</sup>

In the Ghanaian society, it is typical for followers of African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity to co-exist, and share living spaces and communal resources. They frequently collaborate with individuals of different faiths to contribute to community development, motivated by their shared humanity and mutual interest in advancing their community and nation.<sup>35</sup>

As Ghanaians engage in their daily routines in urban and rural areas, such as visiting marketplaces, football parks, bus stations and other venues, they come into contact and engage with individuals from different religious backgrounds.<sup>36</sup> Developing connections and empathy can foster a sense of unity and comprehension. This personal level of understanding is crucial to maintaining peace and harmony between people of various beliefs, as Ghanaians have consistently shown.<sup>37</sup>

During child naming, funerals, weddings, sporting activities and other festivities, individuals from various religious backgrounds join to honour and support one another without focusing on their religious beliefs. Their primary goal is to partake in the happiness of a neighbour's new baby or wedding, or to offer comfort and support in the event of a neighbour's loss. In Ghana, employment opportunities and public positions are available to all capable individuals regardless of their religious beliefs. For example, Konadu states that during his visits to business agencies and establishments in the Sekyere Kumawu District of the Ashanti Region, he observed that the workforce, which included both employers and employees, represented diverse religious backgrounds.<sup>38</sup> He adds that, sometimes, all faith-based groups join to work on communal projects for the benefit of the community. During these times, religious differences are set aside as they all work together for the common good.

Konadu has pointed out that members of nearly all religions often gather to discuss important national issues or commemorate significant events. At these times, religious leaders are usually asked to offer prayers in their own unique ways. The indigenous devotees pour libation, the Muslims perform *Du'a* and the Christians offer prayers in their respective ways.<sup>39</sup> The government has established national holidays for Christian celebrations, such as Christmas, New Year and Easter. Since 1996, the government has also revised the holiday laws to designate *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adhar* as national statutory holidays to promote unity and equality among different faiths. Followers of the African Traditional Religion in Ghana also feel that the government should go further by adjusting the holiday laws to encompass traditional celebrations. This would guarantee a comprehensive and fair acknowledgment of the main religions in Ghana.<sup>40</sup>

Acquah suggests that the tradition of interfaith dialogue and co-existence in Africa has organically stemmed from the close-knit family and communal bonds within African society. This notion highlights the interconnectedness and sense of belongingness that foster peaceful interactions among individuals of different faiths.<sup>41</sup> He views this occurrence as a native practice that has been happening within family and community environments in many communities across Africa, including Ghana. In this scenario, individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds co-exist and interact in their daily lives.<sup>42</sup> This is why Gyekye asserts that "To be born into Africa is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious and that means and requires participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Konadu, Bonsu, and Amedorme, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders."176.

<sup>34</sup> Kenny, *Views on Christian-Muslim Relations*.3.

<sup>35</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."3.

<sup>36</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana."37.

<sup>37</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana."37.

<sup>38</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."90.

<sup>39</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."4.

<sup>40</sup> Konadu, "The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian Society: Case Study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana."80.

<sup>41</sup> Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values."37.

<sup>42</sup> Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values", 37.

<sup>43</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra-Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

The nature of marriage in Ghana is evidence of religious plurality in Ghana. For Osemeka, marriage serves as another means of assessing the level of religious tolerance within and between religious communities, and it also plays a crucial role in maintaining cooperative relationships among these groups.<sup>44</sup> In recent times, it has been common to blend different religious customs, especially in Ghana. Typically, a marriage ceremony starts with the practice of certain local traditions, followed by additional celebrations in a church or mosque.<sup>45</sup>

Most religious beliefs regard love as the primary purpose of marriage. It is widely acknowledged that marriage plays a crucial role in upholding stability within a society. In Ghana, it is common for people of different religious backgrounds to enter into marriage. These interreligious unions have the potential to foster peaceful co-existence among different religious communities, ultimately contributing to a harmonious society. Abdul-Hamid emphasizes that, choosing to marry someone also entails a commitment to respecting their beliefs and ensuring that their right to practice their religion is not compromised in any way.<sup>46</sup>

### c. *The Political Environment*

In the 1950s, politics played a crucial role in fostering cooperation and understanding among Muslims, Christians and practitioners of African Traditional Religions in Ghana. An example of this was the formation of the Muslim Association Party (MAP) in Ghana, which, despite being centred around the promotion of Islam, embraced leaders who were Christians.<sup>47</sup> Since then, the collaboration between Muslims, Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion has influenced the activities of all political parties in Ghana. In the words of Abdul-Hamid, politics in Ghana has significantly become a theatre of love<sup>48</sup> in which people of various religious backgrounds participate, where their religious identities merge into their political identities.<sup>49</sup>

In Ghana's prominent political parties like the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), individuals from diverse religious affiliations often compete for different roles at the local level. This results in strong unity and camaraderie across African Indigenous, Christian and Muslim communities within the political traditions.<sup>50</sup>

In the choice of presidential candidates and running mates, there is the exhibition of a coalition between Muslims and Christians in the operations of the political parties in Ghana. For the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), there is almost an unwritten constitution that whenever the appointed or elected Presidential candidate is a Christian, his or her running mate should be a Muslim, and vice versa.

For example, Jerry John Rawlings (a Christian) chose Hudu Yahya (a Muslim) to be the chairman of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Similarly, John Agyekum Kuffour (a Christian) chose Aliu Mahama (a Muslim) to be his vice-presidential candidate and later Vice President of the country after the NPP won the 2000 general elections. In 2008 and 2012, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo (a Christian) chose Mahamadu Bawumia (a Muslim) as his vice-presidential candidate, and he is the previous Vice President of Ghana.<sup>51</sup>

Abdul-Hamid describes a scenario in Ghana where whenever a political party selects a Presidential candidate, the candidate participates in both Muslim and Christian thanksgiving services. This was evident in 2010 when the NPP chose its Presidential candidate for the 2012 elections.<sup>52</sup> On Friday, August 13, 2010, Akuffo Addo, a Christian candidate, and party leaders participated in the Friday

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<sup>44</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious Diversity in West Africa: The Exceptionalism of the Wolof and Yoruba in the Post-Independence Period."69.

<sup>45</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious Diversity in West Africa: The Exceptionalism of the Wolof and Yoruba in the Post-Independence Period."65.

<sup>46</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana."37.

<sup>47</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana."69.

<sup>48</sup> Abdul-Hamid uses the term 'theatre of love' to refer to an avenue or phenomenon in which people irrespective of their background show love and concern towards each other in unison.

<sup>49</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The case of Ghana", 39

<sup>50</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The case of Ghana", 39

<sup>51</sup> Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 21–32.

<sup>52</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace", 12.

Muslim worship at the Abossey Okai Mosque. During this time, they sought prayers from the National Chief Imam. Subsequently, they held a Christian thanksgiving service at the Ridge Church in Accra. This event showcased a harmonious convergence of faiths, demonstrating a message of unity and inclusivity within the political sphere.<sup>53</sup> The same thing has been done in the past when a Presidential candidate won national presidential elections. He goes to the national mosque and a big or famous cathedral to have a thanksgiving service.

The diverse and harmonious co-existence of different religions is apparent in Ghana's government appointments. Past and present administrations have recognized Ghana as a pluralistic state, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among Ghanaians of all religious affiliations to improve society. As a result, individuals from Christian, Muslim and traditional backgrounds are appointed at various government levels, reflecting the nation's commitment to inclusivity and unity.<sup>54</sup>

In Ghana, Christians and Muslims have been actively involved in various government administrations, working towards the country's development. It is not unusual to see Muslims and Christians holding positions as government ministers and deputy ministers, which reflects a focus on appointing individuals based on their skills and expertise rather than their religious affiliations. The government has established the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs to manage religious issues in the country. Tayviah reiterates that while this ministry continues to recognize chiefs and other traditional authorities, it is also receptive to establishing collaborative relationships between the government of Ghana and various religious groups in the country.<sup>55</sup> The ministry ensures the promotion and protection of the constitutional mandate that champions respect for individual religious affiliation. It seeks to regulate the activities of the various religions so that they do not trample on the liberty and operation of each other.

Another approach the Ghanaian government has used to promote religious tolerance and prevent the dominance of a single religion, as the state religion, is a tradition established since the country gained independence. This tradition involves all three major religions in the country participating in public events, such as Independence Day celebrations or presidential inaugurations, by offering joint prayers during the occasions. This practice aims to prevent any single religious group from being perceived as the state religion, and during public or state events, representatives of African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity take turns to offer prayers.<sup>56</sup>

#### **d. The Economic Environment**

The phenomenon of interfaith co-existence and cooperation, which is characteristic of religious plurality, is also evident in the economic life of Ghanaians. Businesses, both public and private, in the country are operated by people from diverse religious backgrounds, including both employers and employees. It is common to see Muslim-owned stores or shops next to Christian-owned ones, and vice versa. Customers also buy goods without considering the religious affiliation of the shop owner. Market centres are characterized by an atmosphere where individuals from various religious beliefs come together to participate in the exchange of goods and services. According to Konadu, one could see some Christians selling Islamic materials like veil, *tasbar*, and others. It is also possible to see a Muslim selling a photograph of the baby Jesus and Mary, his mother. The interest here is not religious inclination, but the desire to get a means of livelihood or survival.<sup>57</sup>

#### **e. The Educational Environment**

The educational sector in Ghana is characterized by diversity, particularly in the ownership of public schools by Christian and Islamic groups, as well as community schools overseen by traditional councils. Students from different religious backgrounds attend these schools, and the relationship between Christian and Muslim students is generally peaceful and harmonious. In terms of academics, students

<sup>53</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace", 13.

<sup>54</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment*, 207-208

<sup>55</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment*, 210

<sup>56</sup> Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 225-226

<sup>57</sup> Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and its Effects on Ghanaian society*, 5.

understand that their focus is studying and achieving academic success, irrespective of their religious affiliations.<sup>58</sup>

A detailed examination of students across educational institutions in Ghana reveals a strong interfaith interaction among them, leading to lasting relationships and a tolerance for each other's traditions, culture, values and religious practices. Students of different faiths sit together in classrooms and freely interact without religious discrimination. They also reside in the same dormitories and sometimes share living spaces, fostering inevitable interaction. Additionally, teachers from diverse religious backgrounds effectively perform their duties without hindrance. Regardless of their religious beliefs, staff members receive support during times of bereavement or merrymaking, as there is no discrimination based on religious reasons. The underlying belief is that everyone is equal, regardless of their beliefs and method of worship, and this should not result in discrimination or victimization.<sup>59</sup>

The government has taken steps to promote religious tolerance through education, highlighting its dedication to teaching young people about respecting different religious beliefs and preferences. Religious and Moral Education (RME) has been integrated into the school curriculum as a compulsory subject for all students in basic school and as an elective for students in the senior high school. Additionally, some universities in Ghana have a Religious or Religious Studies Department where students receive a certificate in Religion or Religious Studies, rather than specialized degrees in Islamic Studies, Christian Religious Studies, or Traditional Religious Studies, as in other countries.<sup>60</sup> The main areas of study here are the beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam and other foreign religions. Thus, by the time one graduates, one would have taken at least a course on each of the major religions in Ghana. The main objective is to deliberately introduce to the pupils or students the beliefs, practices, sacred objects and customs of these religions, in order to make them have recognition for their religious rights and religious differences from a young age.<sup>61</sup> For Abdul-Hamid, the effect is that by the time students get to the university, they have gotten an understanding of the faiths that other Ghanaians live by. This will make the various religious adherents in the country able to empathize with one another and appreciate the complex elements in the different religions. This will instill in people the knowledge and desire to relate with others and peacefully co-exist in the society.

#### **f. The Health Service Delivery Environment**

Health is very important to human survival. Therefore, Ghanaians do not joke about their health needs or care. Tayviah states that, in Ghana, people look for healthcare wherever they can find a solution, regardless of the background of the healthcare provider.<sup>62</sup> Thus, people of different religious backgrounds are not reluctant to indicate that whenever they are sick, what they are interested in is where they can get healing or treatment. They do not care if the healer or the healing centre is of Christian, Islamic or Traditional background. Abdul-Hamid also states that, the religious affiliation of those in charge of the health centres has no bearing on seeking health and well-being. Thus, whether the place of healing is a church or a mosque is also inconsequential.<sup>63</sup>

In the country, there are hospitals run by Christian and Islamic groups, as well as traditional healing centres. People go to great lengths to find remedies to their health problems, without being concerned about the healer's or health centre's religious background. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (AMM) has established modern hospitals in Ghana at places or regions such as Kaleo (Upper West), Techiman (Bono East), Asokore and Kokofu (Ashanti), Swedru (Central) and Daboase (Western).<sup>64</sup> In an interview, Nana Obour mentioned that people of various religious backgrounds visit his shrine to seek medical and spiritual solutions to their problems. He emphasized that he does not show favouritism or discrimination, and his main goal is to help every patient find a solution. Nana Obour believes that African Traditional Religion is inclusive and hospitable, and he feels that his actions should reflect these

<sup>58</sup> Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and its Effects on Ghanaian society*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Oteng George, the School and Staff Welfare Officer of the Oforikrom District. Interview date: 12/08/23.

<sup>60</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace", 14.

<sup>61</sup> An interview with Frederick Mensah Bonsu, a Lecturer in Religious and Moral Education at Wesley College of Education Kumasi - Ghana. Interview date: 14/08/23

<sup>62</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment*, 151

<sup>63</sup> Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love & The Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The case of Ghana", 37

<sup>64</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment*, 151

qualities to honour the spirits or divinities.<sup>65</sup> Osemeka asserts that, in Africa, Christian and Muslim leaders, as well as priests of the Indigenous African Religion, provide healing and other services to people from different religious backgrounds. It is common for Indigenous African Religious priests to have clients who are Muslim or Christian.<sup>66</sup>

Tayviah also indicates that the health institutions or centres established by the Christian, Islamic and traditional institutions pave way for interfaith relations and encounters because the health officials or experts provide healthcare to patients without considering their religious backgrounds.<sup>67</sup> In other words, scenarios of dialogue of life are experienced in the healing centres. Konadu mentions that, in Besoro, a suburb of Kumawu in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, there is a Christian clinic called Jesus' Care Clinic where both Muslims and non-Muslims seek medical care. Despite being a Christian hospital, there is no favouritism towards only Christians when it comes to giving medical attention. Patients of all faiths wait in queue and receive consultations from doctors without discrimination.<sup>68</sup>

#### **g. The Media and Entertainment Environment**

The media in Ghana has been an avenue for interfaith encounters and interactions. The radio, television and other social media platforms are characterized by interactions between varied religious adherents. There are numerous advertisements on the media such as television, radio and the internet to promote religious programmes, while weekly and monthly religious meetings have become the norm.<sup>69</sup> It has become fashionable to paste stickers on cars, in homes and offices containing messages, prayer lines and the names of churches, miracle or healing centres and meeting places having Christian, Islamic and traditional origins.<sup>70</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

The Creator intended for individuals to follow the religious path of their choice. It is essential for human beings to co-exist in society peacefully, despite their religious differences. Religious differences can lead to conflict, especially when there is a lack of understanding about each other's beliefs and teachings. To avoid such conflicts, leaders of various faiths should engage in dialogue based on the guidance provided in their respective religious texts and traditions. This approach can help prevent misunderstandings and crisis, fostering a more harmonious society where diversity is appreciated and celebrated. This work has elaborated on the various ways in which religious plurality has been made manifest in the Ghanaian society. It has been realized that religious diversity and interfaith relations, co-existence and cooperation are evident in the Ghanaian setting.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Ghana's peaceful co-existence despite religious diversity is due to the emphasis on family and national bonds and relationships. This phenomenon should be strengthened and transcend into stronger solidarity among Ghanaians. Thus, Ghanaians should uphold the principle of "I am because we are," recognizing that individual lives are incomplete without community. People should honour their social nature as human beings who rely on the presence of others for existence and well-being. This mindset is pivotal for fostering positive, cohesive and resilient interfaith relations and cooperation among the people.
- Ghanaians demonstrate obedience and respect for the leaders of their religious communities and are willing to follow their guidance. It is therefore crucial for religious leaders to communicate the beliefs and practices of other religions and incorporate sermons and activities aimed at promoting positive relationships with people of different faiths into their programmes, activities and practices.
- Christians, Muslims and traditional adherents in Ghana should consider themselves first as Africans and then as Ghanaians of a common identity or belonging to the same nation. Thus, interfaith relations

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<sup>65</sup> Nana Obour is a traditional priest of the 'Black and White Shrine' at Oyoko, a suburb of Kumawu in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

<sup>66</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious diversity in West Africa", 68.

<sup>67</sup> Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo*, 151-152

<sup>68</sup> Konadu, *The Impact of Religious Pluralism on the Ghanaian society: Case study of the Sekyere Kumawu District in Ghana*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious diversity in West Africa", 63.

<sup>70</sup> Osemeka, "The Management of Religious diversity in West Africa", 63.

in Ghana should be a national affair, and no individual should be singled out in Ghana, be it a Muslim, Christian or traditional religionist. Adherents to the various religions must learn to live in peace in their clans, ethnic groups, or communities.

- The study of 'Interfaith Relations and Dialogue' should be included in the curriculum for Religion and Moral Education at all levels of education, starting from basic school through tertiary education. This inclusion would provide students with valuable insights into interfaith relations, helping them learn how to interact with individuals of different faiths.

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