

Returning Mission Schools to Religious Bodies in Ghana

- My Candid Opinion

By

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The recent announcement by the Minister of Education that government is considering handing over mission schools to the religious bodies in the country has been received with mixed feelings. While some religious groups are hailing the idea, others, including some educational experts, have not been very much enthused about the whole concept of relegating fully the critical pre-tertiary educational management and supervision to the religious bodies. There is no point belabouring the fact that our religious bodies, especially the churches have played and still play a significant role in the enhancement of holistic education in the country. They have established schools, helped in moulding the character of Ghanaians with moral training in schools and partnered the government to provide quality education for Ghanaian children over the years. Today, most of the best schools in the country, especially at the second-cycle level, were first established by the religious missions and later taken over by the government.

Indeed, since these mission schools became government-assisted, there has been a partnership between the government and the religious bodies in the area of management, supervision and moral training. This productive relationship between the government and the mission schools brought about the establishment of the religious educational units which were expected to operate within the ambit of the Ghana Education Service (GES) which is statutorily mandated with pre-tertiary education management and supervision in the country. There was a good relationship between the GES and the educational units in the area of management and supervision until the past decade when the relationship started deteriorating. The GES has clashed with the educational units in the area of control, especially the posting and transfer of teachers. Sometimes teachers are transferred from one mission school to another without the consent of the regional manager of the particular unit. This has created some tension between the GES and the educational units.

Moreover, the religious bodies have complained for a very long time that the dose of religious education in our pre-tertiary education curriculum is inadequate and that there is the need to do more of the pastoral contents on the curriculum. For instance, during the 1987 educational reforms, the National Catholic Secretariat, in a letter to the GES/Ministry of Education, complained that the content of basic education did not have enough religious studies in it and that that deficiency would adversely affect the moral and spiritual training of the pupils. Educationists have always appreciated moral training as a necessary complement for acquiring excellence in education but have also insisted that teaching morals through extra-curricular activities is more effective than making moral education an academic activity.

In all these, I am of the candid opinion that there is the need to strengthen the already existing partnership between the GES and the religious bodies in the areas of management, supervision and moral training in our pre-tertiary schools as the 2016 election manifesto of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) suggests. The manifesto states: “We will build an effective partnership with religious bodies, civic organisations and the private sector in the delivery of quality education. This partnership will also include the areas of management, supervision and the training of teachers in their units”. Additionally, it states: “The NPP will strengthen the participation of Missions in the Mission-founded schools. We believe this will ensure the return of discipline and moral upbringing to our schools”. I like the way the manifesto places emphasis on partnership and the strengthening of that relationship between the government and the missions regarding the provision of holistic education.

However, what is stated in the NPP 2016 election manifesto does not imply a wholesale return of mission schools to the religious bodies. I will go for strengthened and well-outlined complementary roles between the government through the GES and the religious bodies in the area of the provision of holistic education for Ghanaian children without tilting the absolute control of schools to the religious bodies. Article 25(1) of the 1992 Constitution makes it imperative for the government to provide education for all Ghanaians and that responsibility cannot be delegated to civic society groups. Public mandated agencies in education such as the GES must be at the forefront of our educational pursuit as a country, while civic organizations such as the religious bodies come on board in supporting roles, not the other way round.

I am hundred percent in favour of the government giving the religious bodies adequate space in our educational system to inculcate moral training, discipline and more importantly, the fear of God into our children, but I hold the strong conviction that this can be done without surrendering that constitutional responsibility to a third party. We should guard against any arrangement that will threaten our national cohesion, limit the already limited educational access to the under-privileged in our society and render the mandated institutions such as the GES ineffective. This will be a great disaster for our country.

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