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THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM TO EVANGELICAL (RE)
THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Religious pluralism is one of the major challenges facing Christianity today. In relation to evangelical Christian education Religious pluralism challenges its theological foundations by raising questions in respect to objectives and purposes, context and content, methodology and curriculum theory. It is the contention of this thesis that the encounter between Evangelical Christian education and religious pluralism not only raises challenges but also offers opportunities for enrichment and Christian witness.

The thesis critically examines the challenges religious pluralism poses for evangelical theology of Christian education as it relates to the evangelical educational enterprise, and draws various implications for Christian education in Church-founded schools which are increasingly becoming multi-faith communities. The Ugandan Church-founded schools' experience provides the context upon which the implications are drawn.

That evangelical Christian educators and theologians will, through this study, view religious pluralism as a stimulating challenge, search for a response that will enable them relate more creatively and ably with the complexities of religious pluralism, strengthen their commitment to the evangelical cause, affirm and integrate God's truth wherever it may be found, is the underlying motive for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

Religious pluralism is one of the most difficult challenges facing evangelicals today. It challenges the entire framework of evangelical theology and Christian education. Foundational to evangelical Christian education is the necessity for conversion and development of Christian character. Yet this is being challenged by the resurgence of world religions. The resurgence of world religions, effective communication leading to rapid interaction between peoples of different religions and worldviews, and the creation of a global economy have changed the religious landscape of most countries. These changes are not only demographic but also ideological, theological, and educational.

The Ugandan government's response to religious pluralism (i.e. proposing the development of moral education as against Christian education) seeks to create an institutional programme that focuses on morality and aims at promoting mutuality and peaceful coexistence between adherents of different faiths in Ugandan schools and communities. Yet Christian education demands more than moral rectitude. Christian education seeks to change lives for Christian living. It anchors on the cruciality of conversion; an element excluded from the proposed moral education programme. Can the tension between the government and Churches on the proposed curriculum changes be eased by an emphatic re-statement and re-emphasis of age-long convictions without

possible exploration and search for workable possibilities in the face of the reality of the multi-faith nature of Church-founded schools?

It has been the thesis of this study that religious pluralism calls not only Ugandan evangelical educators but all evangelicals and the entire Christendom to a more reflective response. The process of reflection involves a critical re-examination of the implications of religious pluralism for evangelical theology which is foundational to Christian education. This includes a definitive willingness to have the entire evangelical tradition, beliefs and practices subjected to intense scrutiny. Basic to this process of reflection is the acknowledgement that non-Christian religions possess some truths and revelatory insights that are agreeable by biblical standards. Consequently, this study advocates for the affirmation of these truths and this affirmation should be reflected in the entire evangelical educational enterprise.

It has been argued that evangelical theologians and educators need to make positive use of religious pluralism in ways that both enrich Christianity itself and offer opportunities for effective witness in a multi-religious context. The evangelical approach should be clothed with respect and humility, openness and acknowledgement. Evangelicals must not only proclaim the Christian faith but also discern and listen to God's voice among non-Christians. Commitment and openness are not necessarily exclusive. This principle of commitment and openness was characteristic of Jesus himself who recognised faith beyond the confines of his religious tradition (cf. Matthew 8:10; Luke 17:19).

Given that evangelical Christian education is indispensable to the Church's evangelistic enterprise, it is paramount that evangelical educators be well trained and equipped so as to respond in a more meaningful rather than agnostic manner to the challenges posed by religious pluralism. How to communicate the Christian faith without triumphalism and timidity in religiously pluralistic schools and communities where non-Christians cherish their religious traditions and seek conversion to their religious faiths is a major challenge to both evangelical theologians and educators. Therefore, new approaches to teaching Christian education are needed in order to encounter the emerging challenges.

Finally, This study can in no way claim any measure of near finitude. It is a micro-venture in a macro-sphere. It is hoped that evangelical educators and theologians will appreciate the reality of religious pluralism and together work towards a harmonisation of ideas for an appropriate theological, educational and methodological response.

B. Recommendations

Consequent upon the challenges posed by religious pluralism and their implications for evangelical Christian education in Church-founded schools, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need to re-evaluate the Christian education curriculum as used in Church-founded schools with the view of re-designing a curriculum that will take into consideration the religious truths and theological convictions of non-Christian religions. These truths and convictions should be agreeable by biblical standards.

2. The teacher training curriculum for Christian education should contain extensive theological and biblical hermeneutic content. This would further equip teachers in evangelical theology and cogent biblical exegesis.
3. It will be of great benefit if Christian education teachers in Church-founded schools undergo intensive training in non-Christian religions. This could be done through in-service training programmes and seminars that bring together professional religious educators from different religious convictions.
4. If non-Christian religions are taught in Church-founded schools, Churches should be open to the possibility of employing non-Christian teachers to teach their respective religions. If evangelicals detest the idea of non-Christian teachers teaching Christian education they should not hesitate to have non-Christian teachers teach their respective religions.
5. Evangelical theologians should corporately work towards a formulation of an evangelical theology of religions. This will shape both the theory and practice of Christian education in any multi-faith context. Besides, evangelical theologians and educators should engage in dialogue with theologians and religious educators of non-Christian religions.
6. The Church in Uganda should seek a dialogue with the relevant ministries of the government of Uganda so as to map-out an approach that retains the teaching of Christian education in schools and at the same time respects and accommodates the government concerns about the autonomy and pluralistic nature of these schools.