The contradictions of church-state partnership in education and the future of religious education in Lesotho

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Contradictions of church-state partnership in education has been a historical concern for local intellectuals and international agencies. However, the focus has been exclusively the schools management while religious education was marginally explored. The current review analyzes these contradictions with reference to religious education. It is more than a century since religious education has been introduced in Lesotho by the missionaries. However, it has not changed its chief aim of evangelistic perspective. This type of religious education has been accepted as having a statutory position in the curriculum. At the same time such religious education is not taught in government schools as it is believed that it does not comply with what can be referred to as civic education. The problem is that the professional religious education teachers who teach religious education are not evangelists. It is also not by choice that students attend church schools where they are provided with proselytism religious education or the government schools where they do not receive it. The paper theoretically analyzes these contradictions and finally recommends pluralistic approach to the teaching of religious education as a means to counteract these contradictions.

Key words: Religious Education, church-state partnership, conflict of interest, autonomy-based liberalism, pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Attempts to examine the contradictions of partnership between government and church in education in Lesotho have been made by many, for example, Matalasi (2000), Motaba (1998), Khalanyane (1995), Leretholi (2001), The World Bank (2005) and UNESCO (2007). However, the main focus was always on the schools management. This paper takes a differing route from the common trend of focusing more on school management and administration, to analyze church-state partnership with special reference to Religious Education. The word “church” is used here to mean all Christian denominations that own schools in Lesotho.

The Western formal education in Lesotho was introduced by the missionaries in the 1830s who had a clear aim on the teaching of religion in schools which was basically evangelism. The struggle for power in education on who should control the education system in Lesotho between the church and the government began during colonial period up until after independence in the 1980s when the education system began to be legalized as a “three-legged-pot” meaning a tripartite partnership between the Christian churches, the government and the parents. However, the tripartite partnership in education that was sealed did not define the roles and responsibilities of each partner, which left the power struggle over control on education intact. In this struggle, the teaching of religious education has been at the center. The churches maintained their uncompromising stance on the original evangelistic aim of the teaching of religion in schools.
After the government pressed for the amalgamation of the then denominational teacher training institutions in the 1970s, the churches pushed for their denominations to be represented in the teaching of religion in the newly formed national teacher training college (NTTC), now Lesotho College of Education (LCE). The main idea being that the teaching of religion should maintain each denominational purpose of evangelism. After the national body for curriculum development, review and reform, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) was established in the 1980s, it had to work in consultation with the National Curriculum Council (NCC) in which the churches are represented and their specific role is to ensure the traditional aim for the teaching of religious education. Even though Religious Education is a statutory school subject in Lesotho it still resembles and serves the purpose of the church (Ministry of Education, 1982; UNESCO, 2010; Mosisili, 1981).

**Definition of partnership in education**

The term ‘partnership’ covers a broad range of different usage and practice in explaining different types of relationships in diverse circumstances and locations. In this context, the relevant partnership that needs to be explained is Public Private Partnership (PPP) where there is a partnership between private and public sectors. ‘Private sector’ refers to all non-state actors including corporate entities, NGOs and faith based organizations (Education International, 2009). ‘Public sector’ on the other hand are government units, including ministries, departments and all state-owned enterprises (Asian Development Bank, 2010). The PPP has acquired different definitions in which most of them are objective specific. However, broad definitions have been proposed in which PPP is defined as:

A long-term contract between a private party and a government agency, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility (The World Bank, 2012). Or

A generic term for the relationships formed between the private sector and public bodies often with the aim of introducing private sector resources and/or expertise in order to help provide and deliver public sector assets and services (Education International, 2009).

These two definitions cover a range of relationships between public and private entities in relation to provision of infrastructure and other services. They include PPPs in which the private sector may be entirely paid by service users, or those in which the government may be responsible for some or all of the payments. Both international and local private actors are included.

There are different forms of partnership in education between the public sector (government ministries, departments and agencies) and the private sector (Corporate entities, NGOs and Faith-Based Organizations). PPPs in education are established on but not limited to the following premises:

A government may contract:

a) with the private sector to provide some of the services including teacher training, management, or curriculum design.

b) with a private organization to manage and operate a public school, as is the case with charter and concession schools.

c) with private organizations to provide education to a specific group of students by means of a subsidy, a contract, or a voucher.

d) provides subsidies to existing private schools or to fund student places.

e) One type of PPP is Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) in which a private sector is contracted to finance, build and operate a public school for a defined period. In effect, the government leases the facility from the private sector for that specified period, after which the facility is transferred to the government ownership.

f) provides grants to mission or religious schools (The World Bank, 2009).

The church-state partnership in Lesotho is the one in which the government provides grants to mission schools and the one in which the government provides subsidies or funds the total education expenses for students to existing church schools.

**Contradictions in partnership**

The concept "partnership" provides a framework to analyze church-state partnership in Lesotho. “Partnership” has a positive meaning in relationships as it connotes partners in collaboration, coalition, ‘accompaniment’ and ‘alliances’ in the service of the people. Public-private partnership is a collaborative relationship between public and private entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of responsibilities for provision of services (CCF, 2010. “Partnership” is characterized by the following:

a) Mutual trust, complementary strengths, reciprocal accountability, joint decision making and a two-way exchange of information.

b) Clearly articulated goals, equitable distribution of costs and benefits, performance indicators and mechanisms to measure and monitor performance, clear delineation of responsibilities and a process for adjudicating disputes.

c) Shared perceptions and a notion of mutuality with give-and-take.

d) Mutual support and constructive advocacy.

e) Transparency with regard to financial matters and long-term commitment to working together (Lister, 1997).
However, it has been argued that an analysis of PPPs far from constituting partnerships in any meaningful sense. PPPs proved to be the coming and working together of contracting partners, each party pursuing its separate, diverse and potentially conflicting public or private interests. It has been argued that private enterprises are founded and operate on a different approach from the governments. Private and public sectors have different aims, areas and ways of working. The primary responsibility of the government is to work towards the public good and has the obligation to guarantee education as a human right – that is ensuring universality, equity and quality education. The private sector on the other hand has legal and moral reasons to take into account the public good in many circumstances, but its primary interest is basically on its own foundational requirements for its self-identity (Education International, 2009; Lister, 1997).

These private-public partnership contradictions are eminent in church-state partnership in education in Lesotho. Positively, the partnership is founded on the mutual objectives on the provision of education services in which the church is responsible for infrastructure while the government pays teachers and responsible for other expenses such as feeding, book supply and other school facilities. Statistics indicates that about 90% of schools in Lesotho are church schools, while the government pays salaries of more than 95% teachers (UNESCO, 2007). The main Christian denominations that own a considerable number of schools are the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) and the Anglican Church of Lesotho (ACL). Following the agreements on staffing, the government pays for teachers in all church-owned schools. Apart from the teaching staff, the government is responsible for all education personnel. Teachers are recruited through the Teaching Service and are obliged to follow the government’s rules and regulations. The government is also responsible for paying school fees for the day to day running of primary schools through Free Primary Education (FPE) initiatives. The teaching and learning materials are as well provided for by the government. As a result, both the government and the churches have generally assumed that all schools are public schools (The World Bank, 2005).

However, there are some contradictions in this church-state partnership. The first is in the area of administration. The church is a private entity, but its schools are under direct administration of the government. Jopo, Maema and Ramokoena (2010) state that the Ministry of Education and Training designs and develops the curriculum to be taught in all schools including the church-owned schools. It is also the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to develop education policy, set education standards, train, appoints, dismisses, and deploys teachers. The ministry further administer examinations, inspects schools, and regulates the opening and closing of schools. At local level, schools are managed by school boards with only two representatives from the church while the rest are community members, political and traditional leaders, and the teachers (Jopo, Maema and Ramokoena, 2010). Secondly, the church schools yet owned privately by Faith-Based Organizations are legally defined as public schools. According to the 2010 Education Act, public schools are classified as those:

a) Whose admission requirements comply with such public policy as determined by the Minister and are bound by Government rules and regulations;
b) Which are funded by the Government and charge such fees as approved by the Ministry; and
c) Whose teachers are in the Teaching Service. Public schools are differentiated from the independent schools which are:

a) Those whose admission policy is determined by their governing bodies;
b) Which are managed in terms of their own constitution approved by the Ministry upon registration of the school or upon application to change the classification of such schools;
c) Which are free to charge fees determined by their school boards; and
d) May receive such conditional subvention or grants as the Minister may decide in consultation with Ministry responsible for finance (Lesotho Government Gazette: Extraordinary, 2010).

The third contradiction is in the area of Religious Education which is of the concern for this paper. The church has uncompromising evangelistic approach to the teaching of religious education in church owned schools. Evangelistic approach refers to the teaching about the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with the aim of encouraging people to believe in him and live according to his teachings so that they could be reconciled to God. Thus, evangelism is the spread, the coverage and the propagation of the Good News through proclamation activities (Watson, 1976). Evangelistic approach is criticized by many as contradicting the school setting where:

The setting is:

a) compulsory – so any proclamation needs to be done in way that respects the integrity of the individual.
b) pluralistic – so all that is said needs to be done in a way that demonstrates a respect for the multiplicity of beliefs present in the group.
c) formal – so appropriate responses need to be developed that take account of these limitations (Watson, 1976).

The government on the other hand is bound to offer appropriate education that addresses students’ needs
and that allow for the expression and discussion of a wide range of viewpoints so that students are able to make decisions for themselves.

The other contradiction related to Religious Education is that the government has accepted evangelistic curriculum of Religious Education and has assigned it a statutory status while at the same time it is not taught in the government owned schools and excluded from book rental system where all subjects’ textbooks are provided for except the Bibles. There are problems related to this inconsistency. First, Religious Education is recommended to be taught in all schools as it has a special contribution for a holistic or comprehensive education that considers all aspects of human nature – body, soul and mind. Second, it is questionable whether it is the choice of the students and the parents to send their children to the government schools where they do not receive Religious Education. It is as well doubtful whether it is the choice of the parents and the students to attend church schools where they are being persuaded in to Christianity. Third, it is by no means the choice of professional Religious Education teachers to be evangelists in the church schools where it is the only place they can be employed. Furthermore, they are employed as civil servants not church officials. It is worthwhile at this juncture to theoretically analyze these contradictions in order to theorize contributing factors that would provide a basis for conceiving possible solutions.

Theoretical Analysis of church-state contradictions in Religious Education

The theory used to analyze church-state partnership is conflict of interest (COI) (OECD, 2003). Conflict of interest arise “between the private interests and official responsibilities of an individual or an institution in a position of trust, which may compromise impartiality or integrity or lead to unfair competitive advantage” (Omobowale, Kuziw, Naylor, Daar and Singer, 2010). The church’s evangelistic approach to Religious Education is a reflection of conflict of interest in which church schools entrusted to provide public education pursue private interest of evangelism which aims at spreading the Gospel. Education is a reflection of conflict of interest since evangelistic education is self-identification of the church and its purpose of existence. Since their inception, the church schools had that evangelist mandate. The government is therefore justified to continue to recognize and accept church Religious Education if COI can be used as the justifying factor.

Another theory that helps to analyze church-state contradictions in Religious Education in Lesotho is the theory of autonomy-based liberalism. Autonomy-based liberalism holds that individual freedom is a distinct value and each individual has the “capacity to form a conception of the good, to evaluate one’s values and ends with the genuine possibility of revising them should they be found wanting, and then to realize one’s revised ends” (Hagen, 2007). Autonomy-based liberalism emphasizes self-knowledge, independence of thought, self-sufficiency, being responsible for one’s own actions, individual freedom and valuing one’s own choices as an individual being (Ameen and Hassan, 2013). Autonomy-based liberalism recognizes the individual as a self-determining agent and that capacity for self-determination has to be respected, protected and promoted by a liberal state. Freedom of autonomy is asserted as a fundamental value that every liberal or democratic state can and should actively promote. Individual freedom entails non-interference or no coercion or manipulation as well as the development of mental abilities and capacities, and the accessibility to different possibilities of ‘valuable’ options. The development of the required mental abilities and capacities requires accessibility to the schooling education system (Hagen, 2007).

The church autonomy emanates from the individual freedom of religious choice which guarantees liberty of churches to self-governance in relation to the worldview of its members. In line with autonomy-based theory, the constitution of Lesotho states that: “Every person shall be entitled to, and (except with his own consent) shall not be hindered in his enjoyment of, freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance” (Government of Lesotho, 2001).

The freedom of the church to teach Religious Education in its schools is supported from autonomy-based liberalism and enshrined in the constitution of the country. The constitution further stipulates that: “Every religious community shall be entitled, at its own expense, to establish and maintain places of education and to manage any place of education which it wholly maintains; and no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community in the course of any education provided at any places of education which it wholly maintains or in the course of any education which it otherwise provides” (Government of Lesotho, 2001).
Thereby affirming the freedom of the church for evangelistic approach to the teaching of Religious Education in its schools and the responsibility of the government to protect such church liberty.

However, there are some contradictions. The church schools are considered public schools, which means they are not wholly managed by the church in which evangelistic approach can be justified. Secondly, they are not maintained at church’s expenses, but by public funds. Thirdly, not only are the Christian students attending church schools but from other religious traditions as well in which the autonomy of others is violated. Fourthly, the church does not prepare and use its own professional teachers but those who have been trained as educators rather than evangelists and this violate their professional ethics and autonomy. Fifthly and more importantly, evangelistic approach to the teaching of Religious Education violates the very principle of autonomy-based liberalism in education since it constitutes indoctrination in which students are provided with Christian doctrine and worldview.

Indoctrination has its etymology from the Latin word ‘doctrina’ which means education, science and doctrine. However, with time the concepts lost the pedagogical meaning and attained a political ideology in which ‘doctrina’ came to mean a set of principles posited as facts that are aimed at guiding or governing people’s thoughts and actions. To indoctrinate came to refer to a strategy employed when intending to make somebody adhere to a doctrine, an opinion and a point of view (Momanu, 2012). Indoctrination came to be explained in different terms such as educational method, where student are restricted to one way of understanding a belief. It also refers to a selective learning content and teaching process aimed at inculcating certain behavior predetermined for a certain goal known to indoctrinator. Indoctrination is generally believed to be antithesis to educational principles of liberalism, democracy, autonomy and rationality (Parker, 2006; Merry, 2005).

Autonomy-based liberal education aims at fostering of personal autonomy, intellectual, emotional and social maturity and well-being. In order to foster autonomy in students, autonomy-based liberal education maintains that they must be given opportunities to grapple with competing ideas and views on given issues. People come to understand themselves if they are able to recognize what they want and value as individuals which are distinct from what those around them including parents, friends and colleagues would want and value. Therefore education can enable students to understand themselves by facilitating the development of autonomy and the critical assessment of social and cultural circumstances (Kroeker and Norris, 2007). Autonomy-based liberal education challenges the churches’ education strategy in Religious Education as well the support of the government for the teaching of Religious Education in an evangelistic approach. At the same time it challenges government to deprive students of learning Religious Education in public schools. It as well contests both the government and the church to consider autonomy and professional ethics of Religious Education educators who are not trained as evangelists but teachers. Autonomy-based liberalism theory sheds light to the cause of contradictions and thereby, providing a groundwork on how these contradictions could be addressed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the current review was to analyze contradictions of church-state partnership in education in Lesotho with the aim of theoretically unpacking their influence on the present approach to the teaching and learning of religious education. The main purpose of the analysis is to propose a new approach to religious education that has a potential to cut across these contradictions. From the analysis it can therefore be concluded that contradictions in church-state partnership lends Religious Education a brink future in Lesotho. From theoretical analysis of church-state contradictions in the teaching and learning of Religious Education, it can be curtailed that the tension arise from autonomy-based liberalism as an ideology. According to Hicks (2004), ideology refers to the general interconnected set of ideas and beliefs about the world held by a group of people. These systems of belief are usually upheld as the way in which things should be. In a situation where an ideology becomes prevalent that it dominates group relations, social institutions such as politics, religion, gender, economics and education, ideology is regarded as the ‘dominant ideology’ in which it actualize itself as hegemony. Ideology thus defines the meaning of all social interactions and saturates society to the extent that it is described as a reality in itself. It becomes so powerfully that it shapes people’s perceptions of what is best and necessary for society in such a way that its dictation is always considered correct (Hicks, 2004).

Such ideology can only be counteracted by radical ideology that aims at questioning the fundamental premises of the dominant beliefs. Radical ideology comes into existence when the contradictions caused by dominant beliefs begin to raise questions. Radical ideology does not just come in to play, but only when it is against the dominant ideology which raises questions and seems to no longer serving the good of the people. Radical ideology is not only against the dominant ideology, but provides alternative for the betterment of social condition (Hicks, 2004). Radical ideology recommended for repositioning of Religious Education in
both church owned and government owned schools is “pluralism”.

According to Kantzara (2013) pluralism refers to the existence of diverse and competing interests in which such diverse and competing interests are accepted and regarded as the basis for a democratic equilibrium where individuals and groups are provided with opportunities to achieve their desired goals in life. Pluralism is commonly understood and employed as a political concept which recognizes and accepts that society is composed by multiple or diverse social groups with different cultural beliefs, interests and social expectations. Pluralist perspective maintains that even though different social groups have different ideas, ways of life and culture, such difference instead of causing tensions, conflicts and contradictions should be accepted as an ideal for a democratic state. Pluralism has always been understood to be related to liberal democracy since it supports individual freedom and will that are of fundamental basis for public life and as such ought to be safeguarded by a democratic state. Pluralism advocates for equal distribution of valuable social resources among members of society so that even though society is comprised by groups that are different but have to enjoy coexistence for the common or collective good. Democratic social context ought to facilitate the existence of multiple groups by ensuring equity, justice and fairness to all different groups. However, having or being of equal value does not mean that the groups are or should be the same, hence, ‘different but equal’ is the motto of a pluralistic democracy (Kantzara, 2013).

Furthermore, there have been debates and discussions on pluralism in different disciplines and perspectives. In education, UNESCO (1999) highlights that the task of pluralism is to change peoples’ way of thinking and to promote understanding and accepting otherness and difference. Such venture cannot be achieved through political initiatives of creating coercive social inter-difference relations through legal measures. Instead, it is conceivable through “psychosocial” approach that takes into account psychological traits including distrust, dislike, illusions and mental stereotypes that contribute to misunderstandings between communities, institutions and individuals. That mental strategy presupposes education action which is capable of getting at deep-rooted causes of conflicts and distrust between different social groups. Educational action allows people to discover the difference of the other for themselves rather than being urged to devote themselves to the cause of peace or to love their neighbors as themselves. Constructed knowledge of others contributes to deconstruction of false representations, prejudices and stereotypes associated with groups towards others and such venture is likely to be more successful if it can be shared by both the NGO’s and governments in education partnership. Education for pluralism therefore aims at changing the way other people are perceived and more importantly, it ushers in another way of behaving which is less focused on the defense of cultural individuality but focused to the unity of all human beings (UNESCO, 1999).

Pluralism in religious education is likely to obliterate the contradictions in church-state partnership in the teaching of Religious Education in which the following are apparent, first, there is a clear distinction between the church’s task and that of the school which is expressed in the difference between ‘evangelism’ and ‘education. The church’s approach to Religious Education is to encourage and invite students’ allegiance to Christian faith and worship which is not appropriate to school setting. Secondly, Teacher’s professional role is to present all faiths to students without preference to allow students to wrestle with the meaning of religion in order to discover their religious identity within multi-religious claims. Thirdly, it cannot be assumed that Religious Education teachers are confessional Christians whose teaching professional conscience supports evangelistic approach. Lesotho has now become the home for different religions including Hindu, Basotho Traditional Religion, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Fourthly, it cannot be presumed that it is by choice that some students are at the church schools where they receive Religious Education and others at government schools where they do not. There may be other factors and more particularly accessibility. Fifthly, and more importantly, education philosophers have voiced their censure against secularization of public schools where Religious Education is thought to be incompatible with secular education while students are indoctrinated into secular views as having the all truth and being capable of saving people from all socio-cultural, economic and political ailments of society. Pluralist Religious Education addresses these contradictions and even goes beyond to engage current debates in education. Fabretti (2013) positions the role of pluralistic Religious Education in post-secular paradigm. Post-secular model which has come to dominate current discourse on religions in philosophical, political and sociological sciences is just not a mere reaction against secularization of public schools and mono-confessional Religious Education in church schools but is an ideal of realization and acknowledgement of co-existence of secular views and plurality of religious worldviews which have their interaction in the ‘common place’ which is the public.

Lastly, it can be argued that Lesotho is a fertile ground for pluralist Religious Education within post-secular model since all schools are considered public. Even though there are contradictions in which some of public schools are secularized while others are evangelical there is a common understanding that all schools provide education
for public good. Church owned schools are legally and administratively considered public. It can be contended therefore that the contradictions only highlights the dialectics of difference in co-existence for a common good not just merely oppositional relationship between ‘evangelism’ and ‘secular.’ As Fabretti (2013) argues, dialectic relationships rather than being understood as a hindrance to pluralism should be accepted as the possibility for a configuration of both secular and different religious worldviews.

It can therefore be recommended that pluralistic teaching of religious education provides a platform where all religious and secular ideas are exploited for the contributions they could all make in matters relating to the public needs. ‘Learning from religion’ (pluralistic religious education) as opposed to ‘learning religion’ (evangelistic religious education) has a decisive meaning and purpose of learning the contribution of religion in the public education which goes beyond student’s personal and spiritual development to include cooperative and liberal democratic participation in the public sphere. In this sense, multi-religious education is intended to set a stage for a dialogue between different religious views and secular ideas. Post-secular model can sustain the idea of church schools as being public schools because it suggests that there is the possibility for schools and religious organizations to learn from each other from the ‘common place’ where they come together which is in the public domain where they both have to take part in shared responsibilities.

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