



The Impact of Religious Diversity on Socio-Ethical Behaviour: Case Study of the Kotei Community in Ghana

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This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The influence of religious diversity on the socio-ethical behaviour of the Ghanaian society is the subject of the research. The study aims at exploring how Ghana's religious variety has impacted the socio-ethical behaviour of the people in Ghana with a particular reference to the people in the Kotei community in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study highlights the fact that the Ghanaian people's way of life is defined and informed by their respect and tolerance of the religious other. Thus, recognition and tolerance for different religions is be found in nearly every area of the people's lives. There are three main religious groups situated in the Kotei Community: African Indigenous adherents, Muslims and Christians. These religious groups are pluralistic with several divisions and denominations. This study therefore explores how the prevalence of several religions have affected the people's way of life. It also discusses how religious tolerance and cooperation among the various religious groups in the area has gotten positive and negative effects on the people. The study does so using primary data derived from fieldwork in the said community and secondary data from the intern, published and unpublished literature in the form of books, newspapers and journal

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articles. The researchers adopted the qualitative method of research for the study. It is the expectation of the researchers that, after reading this material, readers will get to have an overview of the nature of religious diversity evidenced in Ghana and its effects on the socio-ethical behaviour of Ghanaians. The study will serve as precedence for future research on the nature of Interfaith relations and encounters in Africa especially in Ghana and the resourceful means of ensuring interreligious peace and harmonization in Ghana.

Keywords: Religion; religious diversity; religious pluralism; interfaith relations; ethics; socio-ethical behaviour.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the impact of religious diversity on the socio-ethical behaviour of the people in Ghana with a particular reference to the Kotei community in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study pays special attention to how religious diversity has impacted the people of Ghana. It is recognized that the lifestyle of individuals in Ghana is defined by the "religious other" [1]. In almost all aspects of the lives of Ghanaians, acceptance and tolerance of religious multiplicity and diversity are found to be evident. The influence of the people's tolerance for the religious systems and openness has been negative and positive. This reiterates what Konadu termed as religious diversity being a mixed blessing to the Ghanaian society [2].

Religion permeates all aspects of life in such a way that it is impossible to isolate it. Thus, the Ghanaian heritage is passionately religious. There are three main religions recognized in Ghana. They include African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. All these religions too are pluralistic in nature and 'pregnant' with several denominations.

According to the Cambridge English dictionary, diversity can be defined in the social context as 'a mixture of races and religions that make up a group of people' [3]. Religious diversity is the co-existence between multiple religions with mutual regard and tolerance [4]. In other words religious diversity is a social phenomenon whereby people of many and variant religious beliefs co-exist. In effect, if different religious groups are found in a given society with a sense of tolerance and respect for each other, religious diversity is manifesting [5]. All these mean that, religious diversity is a social phenomenon in whereby multiple clearly defined religions exist alongside within an area or society.

Ethics is defined as a moral principle that governs people or the conducting of an activity according to the Oxford Dictionary [6].

Etymologically, the word ethics is derived from the Greek word "ethos", which implies judgement on correctness or mistakes, virtue or sin, desirability or undesirability, and approval or disapproval of acts [7]. Ozumba posits that, ethics is a branch of philosophy known as moral philosophy; thus ethics is a philosophical thinking about morality [8]. In general, ethics is characterized as the study of moral life that deals with right and wrong or what ought or ought not to be done. Social ethics is a collection of guidelines focused on ethical decisions and principles to which society adheres. Thus, social ethics is a moral concept which reflects one way or another, the mutual experience of people and culture. It typically operates on the code of conduct that governs what is right or wrong and provides a framework for ensuring that all members of the society are taken care of.

With the emergence of revitalized forms of Christianity, Islam and indigenous religions, religious diversity has been increasing in Ghana. Rising religious diversity has also drawn significant scholarly interest and discussion around the world. In Ghana, religious diversity is discussed comprehensively in many respects. It can be discussed from psychological, theological, anthropological or historical perspective. This current discussion seeks to address the core concerns on religious diversity that scholars of religion are most concerned with in contemporary times. This discussion will particularly concentrate on the following issues: how religious diversity has affected the value of life of an individual, whether several religions have affected the conduct of people in the community, whether the multiplicity of religious denominations has overthrown the African cultural values of the society, and what have been the effects religious multiplicity on the social lives of the people. This study further explores a major gap in previous research and presents a new perspective on the relationship between religious diversity and the effects it has had on the Ghanaian society.

2. THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Religious diversity is a way of life for all of us in the modern world, since we live in multi-religious communities in almost every part of the globe. Religious diversity can be defined as the state of being where every individual in a society has the right, freedom and safety to practice his or her religious systems.

According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the existence of major variations in religious belief and practice is known as religious diversity [9]. It has been viewed as a mixed blessing. Religious diversity as analyzed by Cornell and Hartmann suggests that nothing in human history has caused more carnage than the diversity of religion. Religious values seem to repeatedly unite people, frequently across racial lines, in long-term disputes with other people who are equally unified [10].

As analyzed by King, the religious diversity is actually not a contemporary phenomenon. The plurality of world religions is thousands of years long, as any traditional history of world religions would demonstrate [11]. He further argued that the public's awareness of such diversity has fluctuated over time, but it is now on the rise. With the rise of Western democracy and the resulting division of the church and the state in the historic and contemporary world, people with various religious traditions have always co-existed in relative harmony and safety in the state [12]. He further asserted that members of various faith traditions have been able to delve extensively and passionately into alternative systems of religious belief and practices as a result of these circumstances. Comparative faith seminars and inter-faith prayer services, as well as available translations of related scriptures, have also aided inter-religious discourse [13]. He went on to say that in today's world, religion constantly conflicts violently, as shown by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the regular conflicts between Western culture and extremist versions of Islam. This situation possesses a variety of philosophical questions, the most important of which is: What is the best reason for the existence of religious diversity? Do all religions have the same level of success when it comes to the truth? Is it morally acceptable to assume that only one's religious doctrines are correct? [14]. As a result, this research will look at some of the most well-known approaches taken by philosophers to such issues.

3. APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Religious diversity is actually a real and familiar thing in our contemporary societies. Increased awareness from travel, publication and emigration has prompted reflective individuals to think critically about religious differences since the early modern period [15]. This section focuses on the three main approaches to the study of religious diversity namely; Religious pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism.

3.1 Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is a term used by some authors to describe the concept of religious diversity. Nonetheless, the concept is often generally used to refer to one of the most popular contrasting theoretical explanations for this phenomenon according to King [16]. To avoid confusion, King defines religious diversity as the wide variety of religious views and traditions that exist [17]. He further defined religious pluralism as the belief that all faiths are equal in terms of their claims of reality or their ability to save mankind [18]. Wrenn also affirms that pluralistic attitudes to religious diversity roughly state that, under such limits, every faith is as good as any other [19]. As argued by Legenhausen, certain religions can be superior in other ways, but philosophers who use this label keep in mind that all religions are relatively equal in terms of the fundamental value(s) of faith [20].

3.2 Religious Exclusivism

The word "exclusivist" was coined as a combative term with religious emotions. Some people suggest using the term "particularism" instead [21]. Religious exclusivism as an approach to the study of religious diversity rejects any kind of pluralism. It does not accept that all faiths, especially the major ones are the same in any significant way. Scholars such as Wrenn argue with the explanation that if a religion appears to have a diagnosis of humanity's basic dilemma and a remedy, that is, a sustainable way to successfully solve this problem, it would conclude that, other conflicting diagnoses and remedies are wrong. As a result, exclusivists may regard pluralism as the default position in religious traditions [22]. Wrenn further asserts that the argument that there is "only one real religion" is a common indicator of exclusivism [23]. As a result, other faiths are labeled as "fake." A naive individual might

conclude that no assertion, or core claim of any other religion is valid, but that they are all false.

3.3 Religious Inclusivism

On the other hand, it is impossible to tell the difference between inclusivism and exclusivism. Inclusivism basically means a friendlier, conducive and more open-minded inclusivism. As a result, according to Wren, many scholars usually term their philosophy as “pluralism,” which has a fun and open-minded ring to it, even though they strongly believe that one faith is particularly important [24]. One may also see inclusivism is a religious viewpoint on the interreligious connection. This worldview is defined by the assumption that while certain ideas are true, others are at least partially true [25].

3.3.1 Views concerning salvation

A difference between the views on salvation and opinions on doctrines aids in the explanation of these such perspectives. Concerning salvation, scholars like King articulate that soteriological exclusivism is the belief that salvation is solely attainable to followers of one’s faith [26]. Wright also gave instances that in Jewish and Christian traditions and history, there has been a strong propensity to designate religious actions outside of the home religion as idolatrous since salvation is only possible via involvement in the home religion [27].

Some notable researches on historically exclusivist religion have recently modified their position to one or two alternatives to exclusivism. First of all soteriological pluralism is the belief that salvation is open to all religions. Pluralists often add that: (a) in terms of salvific effectiveness and transforming potential, all faiths are equal. (b) All religions are equal in terms of alethic and epistemic standards [28]. As a result, while soteriology is basically a thesis about the salvation of things, pluralism affects religious doctrines in several ways.

Secondly, soteriological inclusivism is the belief that salvation can be found outside of one’s own faith, through personal, intrinsic awareness of ultimate reality, general revelation or even the mediation of another religion. The native religion on the other hand, includes the fullest manifestation of divine revelation and the surest path of salvation, according to the inclusivist [29].

Nathan further asserts that, inclusivist views towards salvation come in several views and differs from one another along two dimensions. Firstly, there is the issue of low confidence level of inclusivist regarding salvation outside the home religion. The individual who does not deny the potential of salvation outside of his or her own faith, but does not state that this possibility is necessary, is a limited instance of inclusivism [30]. The inclusivist, on the other hand, is positive that some people outside of their home faith are saved; or even that, given certain facts about God’s nature, some people outside of their home religion are saved. Secondly, there is the question of how divine activity might manifest itself outside of one’s native faith. Alien faiths, according to one inclusivist viewpoint, do not mediate salvation in and of themselves. Adherents of such religions, on the other hand, can find salvation and learn about God through broad revelation [31].

4. SOCIO-ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

Etymologically, the term ethics is derived from the Greek word ‘ethos’ which basically means custom or behaviour. Ethics can be termed as a science of custom or habit of men since it evaluates people’s voluntary and habitual actions and considers whether they are right or wrong and virtuous or vicious [32]. Udoh also asserted that ethics deals with making decisions about right and wrong, virtue and vice, desirability and undesirability, and approval and disapproval actions [33]. According to Edet, ethics is both a scientific and an art discipline. It is a systematic study of the principles that govern man’s behaviour, with the goal of explaining what man should and should not do using human reason [34]. Narbor-Nery espouses that ethics is largely concerned with two types of questions namely: normative and theoretical. Normative questions entail critically studying actions that can be judged as morally good or bad, while the theoretical questions deal with studying the process that makes an action a moral action [35].

Moreover, social ethics are a set of norms that society follows based on ethical decisions and ideals. It served as a foundational guide for what society considered being acceptable, rather than a set of regulations [36]. In other words, the welfare of society takes precedence over individual interests, allowing everyone to be accountable to one another. Elsbernd also espouses that resources from economics, the environment, politics, social sciences, and

theology are gradually integrated into social ethics. A rule of conduct for a society's proper operation is referred to as social ethics [37]. As a result, some behaviours or moral concepts are universally appealing, and individuals are expected to exhibit them while engaging with one another.

5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND ETHICS

The link between religion and ethics in society, according to Uduigwomen, may be described by two schools of thought: "Separability" and "inseparability" [38]. Religion and ethics (morality) are distinct, according to the separability school of thought. He further argued with specific reasons that: While morality is the immediate object of ethics, God, worship, and prayers are the direct objects of religion. Secondly, ethics is concerned with the physical world, whereas religion is concerned with the supernatural realm. He further argued that there are many self-described atheists who have a strong sense of morality and live decently but do not subscribe to any religion. Hence, it is possible to be religious while being immoral. Therefore morality can thrive in the absence of religion. Inseparability, he noted is concerned with the morality of human behaviour. Secondly, they both advocate for human freedom and accountability. Finally, religion is a morality perspective. It outlines methods for complying with the law and suggests penalties for breaking it. Therefore, religion is adjudicated by morality [39].

There are different opinions about the relationship between morality and religion. According to the Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics, ethics (morality) and religion are inextricably linked. For many religious people, morality is either a component of religion or their religion is their morality. Morality and religion are different and separate for others. Particularly for non-religious individuals, religion can be immoral, and morality may or should be non-religious. The many points of view on this subject may be divided into three categories namely: the position that religion is harmful to morality, the position that religion has barely little to do with morality and the position that religion and morality are complimentary to each other. Now, let us take time to discuss the three viewpoints.

5.1 The Position that Religion is Harmful to Ethics (Morality)

This claim that religion is harmful to morality is based on the idea that many religious doctrines and behaviours are fundamentally at odds with healthy ethical thought and practice, and that some aspects of particular faiths are morally reprehensible [40]. Some theological ideas, according to this school of thought, are incompatible with ethical standards. It is suggested, for example, that Christian beliefs such as "the fall" and "original sin" may indicate that man is incapable of doing good due to his corrupt and sinful nature. This school also claims that some religious doctrines have encouraged morally reprehensible actions. Iwuagwu further asserted that religious teachings have pushed followers to perpetrate crimes such as genocides, terrorism, jihads, inquisitions and suicide bombings, all of which are morally repugnant.

5.2 The Position that Religion has Little to Do with Morality

Those who advocate for the concept that religion is ethically neutral say that religion has little substance and has played a little role in history on its own. This viewpoint rejects the notion that religion is identical with morality, as well as the notion that morality is dependent on religion. According to Iwuagwu, scholars championing this view argue that the two have no definitional relationship and that their value systems and action guides are theoretically and practically distinct [41]. As a result, this position concludes that moral behaviour is not based on religious belief even though religious teachings and practices differ from social norms.

5.3 The Position that Religion and Morality are Complementary

This appears to be the most frequently held viewpoint in the debate between religion and morality. It is an irrefutable fact that all faiths have well-structured value frameworks, and dos and don'ts, that are intended to guide the socio-ethical conduct of their followers. These value frameworks, which define what is right and wrong, are found in oral traditions and holy texts, and religious leaders interpret and teach them. There might be academicians who may claim that ethics does not need God. However, Dostoevsky maintains that if God does not exist,

anything is permissible [42]. The proponents of the complementarities of religion and morality believe, among other things, that religion is nothing more than ethics, and that ethics is an integral element of religion, based on the foregoing arguments. They maintain that religion is the basis for ethical behaviour.

They further articulate that what is ethically correct is simply what God commands. As a result, nothing can be justified except what God has commanded, and religion is the vehicle through which moral ideals and practices are promoted. Therefore carrying out the demands of morality will be impossible without religion. Finally, a more balanced position in this complementary view holds that religion and morality aid each other in promoting their values, and that they are both working toward the same goal of positive character formation in individuals and achieving a peaceful and harmonious co-existence of people in a just and progressive society. As a result of this stance, both are inextricably linked [43].

6. THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ON SOCIO-ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

Both religion and ethics are inseparable since both are concerned with the morality of human behaviour and advocate for human freedom and accountability.

The debate over whether religion has a positive or negative impact on social behaviour is as heated as the debate over religion and morality. The way one responds to this issue is determined by which side of the religious or atheistic split one is on. Religious believers will list a lot of advantages. Religion has brought many benefits to human civilization. This viewpoint contends that a decent religious follower who honestly pursues his faith cannot help but be morally upright. They believe that religious ideas and practices are responsible for the moral and other underpinnings that are required for a secure, healthy and just society. They argue that religion is important in the creation of a decent conscience, which fosters social justice, moral probity and integrity.

According to Myers, regular worship attendance predicted relatively lower scores on a dishonesty scale and that cities with a high number of religious people have low crime rates. He further found that religious individuals are the most

philanthropic when it comes to charitable causes; they also have the greatest rate of volunteers, and the most delinquent acts are perpetrated by young people who have a low degree of religious devotion [44].

In a survey by Iwuagwu, people identify that religion has a beneficial impact on decision-making because it instills morality in individuals. Every religion has its own set of values. Values are principles that govern conduct, such as portraying good ethical behaviour and avoiding wrongdoing. As a result, religious believers in a community are influenced by their religion to make good moral decisions. This shows that religion is necessary for character formation. It could be identified that through the teaching of religion in the community, social vices such as armed robbery, pick pocketing, prostitution, murder, sexual abuse, rape, drug addiction, thuggery and other criminal tendencies, have reduced.

Some said in Iwuagwu's survey that, it has been a long time since they heard that, someone had been robbed in the community and that is attributed to the impact of religion since it teaches and instills morality in individuals. This opinion from respondents is in accordance with the position that religion and morality are complementary in chapter two according to Iwuagwu. Following Iwuagwu's article, ethics (morality) is an integral element of religion and maintains that religion is the basis for ethical behaviour. He further articulated that nothing can be justified apart from what God has commanded and religion is the vehicle through which moral ideals and practices are promoted [45].

On the other hand, non-religious people claim that there is no observable difference between religious and non-religious societies, based on empirical evidence. Regarding the prevalence of unethical and illegal activities, they claim that religion has had little good influence on social behaviour as a result of its implications in religious nations. Hume corroborated with this and espoused that the biggest crimes have been discovered to be consistent with superstitious piety and devotion in many instances. As a result, it is rightly recognized as dangerous to conclude anything positive about a person's morals from the passion with which he practices religion, even if he believes them truly [46]. This section has given insight into the scholarly views with regard to religious diversity, socio-ethical behaviour, relationship between religion and

ethics, and the impact of religion on socio-ethical behaviour of the people.

7. THE EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ON THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

Religious diversity is capable of affecting the social lives of Ghanaians including people in the Kotei community. This has been as a result of the inevitable encounters between people of diverse religious beliefs and affiliations in the area.

7.1 Positive Effects

7.1.1 Communalism

Socio-cultural values and elements such as traditional festivals, ceremonies like funerals, and naming ceremonies are still cherished, pursued and embraced. It was identified in the research that during traditional festivals like *Akwasidae* which is understood to be one of the Asante's biggest festivals, almost everyone in the community participates in it regardless of their religious beliefs and affiliations. This festival is celebrated to acknowledge past kings and nobles who ever lived within the Asante Empire. It was identified that during traditional ceremonies like outdoorings, engagements and funerals, libation is poured to venerate and offer prayers through the ancestors to intercede on their behalf. The Christians or Muslims also pray for protection against misfortune and evil forces.

7.1.2 Love

The respondents on the effects of religious multiplicity on the social life of the people identified love as one of the effects. It was established that people in the community embrace the obligation to treat others with politeness and honour, irrespective of their diverse religious backgrounds. The study among other things found out that, religious multiplicity, as evidenced in the Kotei community, has ensured interfaith communication and encouraged faithfulness in their human connections. Interfaith conversation, as a feature of religious multiplicity, is about sitting down together, regardless of religious differences, to address common concerns and promote justice and peace. Olagunju agrees that the traditional Africans, and for that matter Ghanaians, are tolerant and accommodative in their orientations and worldviews. This makes them acknowledge the fact that the God, which Islam and

Christianity profess, is the same God which the traditional religious practitioners worship. So they did not find it difficult dialoguing with and tolerating them [47].

7.1.3 Peace and Tolerance

Religious diversity is capable of promoting peace through meaningful interfaith discussion because the religions Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion are formidable agents of reconciliation for peace and also instill important virtues such as tolerance and forgiveness. The existence of religious multiplicity in Kotei community has safeguarded and encouraged tolerance among its indigenes. Adding to this, other respondents held an opinion that religious multiplicity promotes and nurtures an atmosphere of tolerance and friendship, where individuals share resources to strive for the greater benefit of humanity while retaining the integrity of sustaining the faith in which everyone is engaged.

In an interview, it was established that when people live together in the same neighbourhood, they usually exchange greetings and pleasantries, assist in domestic or household chores, eat and drink together, and sometimes help each other in economic activities. The people board buses together without discrimination on the basis of one's religious affiliation or background. When religious festivals such as Easter and Christmas for Christians, and *Id-ul-Fitr* and *Id-ul-Adha* for Muslims are held, there are planned visits, exchange of gifts or tokens, and expression of greetings.

7.1.4 Reduction of discrimination

Some of the respondents held the view that in Kotei, there are some families or households where members of different religions live together. Such individuals, on the other hand, have refused to allow religious discrimination because they believe that blood ties are more powerful than religious inclinations. This confirms Samwini's claim that "what keeps Ghanaians united is their blood ties, because they value blood relations more than religious inclinations" [48]. As a result, it is unlikely that one person will discriminate against another because of their religious affiliation, particularly if they are related.

7.1.5 Increase in productivity

The respondents opined that, because people of different religious origins come together to

engage in similar economic pursuits, religious diversity has boosted workplace productivity. Economic operations are carried out regardless of the seller or buyer's religious affiliation. During local market days, individuals of all religions join together to conduct commercial transactions to increase income. Adherents of various religions gather in the workplace to engage in constructive tasks.

7.2 Negative Effects

On the contrary, some of the respondents also held the view that religious multiplicity has also affected the social lives of the people negatively. The respondents held the view that some Muslims and Traditionalists in the Kotei Community are enraged by the noise generated by Christian churches close to their homes. In the same way, the sound of the *Adhan* disturbs some Christians nearby.

Some of the respondents posited that interreligious marriages have occurred. Some Muslims marry in Christian homes, while others marry in Muslim homes. Although Islam allows a Muslim man to marry a Traditionalist or a Christian woman, religious multiplicity has resulted in some Muslim women breaking vows to marry non-Muslims or Christian men. In effect, this practice is a breach of Islam's marital concept.

8. CONCLUSION

The values that are part of the Ghanaian culture must still be cherished, embraced and continue to be practiced. Among such values are brotherly love, tolerance and peaceful co-existence among members in the community. Thus, in the real pluralistic society in which Ghanaians find themselves, they should learn to accept, respect and tolerate each other without necessarily compromising their faith or religious convictions. It should be noted that human life matters most and it is somewhat impossible for a community or nation to progress without the contribution of diverse groups. Therefore, Ghanaians should give much priority to their blood ties than their religious associations and inclinations.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has confirmed that it is an undisputable fact that religious diversity is a reality in the Ghanaian milieu. Looking into the future of religiosity in Ghana, it could not be out of place to posit that the prevalence of religious

diversity will still be existent in the country. Based on the study, the researchers would like to give the following recommendations.

1. All the religious teachings of the major religions champion the sanctity and love of human life and property. Therefore, all religious adherents should be motivated to follow and promote the basic teachings of their religions which are love, brotherhood and salvation. This will help prevent conflicts and thus ensure respect for human life.
2. Unnecessary and unhealthy suspicion of religious adherents against one another should be discouraged.
3. Adherents of all religions should shun religious fanaticism and religious discrimination against one another in the country. Thus, every Ghanaian should be allowed to uphold the tenets of his or her religion without intimidation.
4. Our religious differences should not be an avenue to disregard any person. Religious diversity should rather be seen as a blessing, but not as an evil in disguise.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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