

## **Rethinking the Issues of Religious Education in Haiti from a Post-Colonial Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Religious education in Haiti serves as a case study of how the religions of the colonial powers and the natives evolved into educational, cultural, and social differentiators in the post-colonial period. This paper explores the religious history of Haiti in the pre- to post-colonial periods, as well as the implications of religion for Haitian history. Roman Catholic and Protestant practices are further delineated in terms of educational focus, with voodoo practice intertwined as an outlier to mainstream Haitian culture. They are, nevertheless, an important factor in differentiating Haitian religious beliefs from the national culture of other nations. The paper concludes with propositions about the future impact of religious education on Haitian culture.

**Keywords:** Religious Education, Post-colonial Perspective, Haitian Culture, Religious Conflicts

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Haitian culture contains a mix of religions — some incompatible or even intolerant of the other. These religions include Vodou, Catholicism, and Protestant Christian denominations. Haiti can be used as a case study to demonstrate how religions have contributed to the fueling of conflicts and division of a post-colonial country. I will outline how each of these religions were introduced to Haitian culture. I will then outline how these three belief systems fail to coexist in a way that benefits Haiti, and the various ways these failures feed into the end result of division and conflict.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF VODOU IN HAITI

In 1511, when African slaves were first sent to the New World, the Vodou religion entered Haiti too. Thus, it has been developed among the rural and urban poor. Haitian Vodou has maintained many West African religious traditions such as in Benin (formerly Dahomey), Congo, Nigeria, and Guinea. In addition, Haitian Vodou has also adopted some elements of Catholicism and the beliefs of Tainos. It was despised by the other classes, until intellectuals began to defend it in the 1930s as the Haitian national religion (Asante & Mazama, 2008; Bowker, 1997). In spite of Vodou's contribution to Haiti's independence, it has never been accorded official recognition and freedom of observance by its adherents. In fact, the first three post-colonial Haitian leaders placed restrictions on Vodou practices. It could be described as a victim of the clash of civilization (Huntington, 2002).

In 2003, under the presidency of Jean Bertrand Aristide, a former Haitian priest who became the first democratically elected president in December 16, 1990, Haitian Vodou was granted the status of an official religion, thus, soon will be authorizing Vodou Priests to perform any civil service a Roman Catholic priest can, such as officiating at births, marriages, and funerals (Williams, 2003).

The overriding psychological idea imparted by colonialism in Haiti is that — violence and elitism are the most effective methods to achieve one's goals (Luzincourt & Gulbradson, 2010). For example, the Spanish colonial dominance over the island of Quisqueya was by brute force, to the point of extermination of the

natives from the island. Afterwards, in the early 1500s, it brought in African slaves working for its colonial hegemony with brutal and savage force.

Apart from outlawing the Vodou culture and beliefs through legislative mechanisms, it also proscribed education for black slaves by virtue of the Code of 1685 (Luzincourt & Gulbradson, 2010). The French colonialism that occupied the western part of the island between 1697 and 1803 was no different. They segregated the population of their colony into classes on the basis of their skin color and racial affinities and accorded each class economic, social, and legal rights to suit their colonial agenda. Even at the behest of independence and official proscription of slavery and slave-trade, the malaise of French colonial class segregation in cultural, social, and economic standards as well as the linguistic systems of exclusion persisted (Luzincourt & Gulbradson, 2010).

Vodou has always been the scapegoat to explain the myriad of problems faced by Haiti such as political and social issues, and even natural disasters. This has been the trend since its colonial era, and it had a point to contest the legitimacy of the religion. It has been observed that *The Spirit and the Law* examines that vexed history, asking why, from 1935 to 1987, Haiti had banned many popular ritual practices. In 1935, a Haitian law had effectively outlawed the practice of Vodou as being superstitious (Ramsey, 2011). Successive Haitian governments, as well as popular organizations and leadership seeking to counter the image of Haiti as being primitive, outlawed “spells,” and later, “superstitious practices.” While not often strictly enforced, these laws were, at times, the basis for attacks on Vodou by the Haitian state, the Catholics, and occupying U.S. forces (Ramsey, 2011).

### **3. BRIEF HISTORY OF CATHOLICISM IN HAITI**

Catholicism was brought to Haiti by the Spanish and French, who colonized the country from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century–into 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thomas, 2014). It was implanted in the French western part of Haiti in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Louis, 2007), along with Vodou brought by the Africans who were forced into slavery and sent to the French colony. The colonial regimes recognized Roman Catholicism as the sole religion, and heavily targeted traditional religion as they believed it to be the breeding ground of the rebellion.

However, the Catholic religion experienced a significant deterioration under Haitian leaders. As Nicholls (1970) expressed, “the struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and Haitian government was the consequence of an effort by the government to restrict the political power of a very influential group in the society, one which has usually sided with the elite class of the country” (Nicholls, 1970: 400).

During the period of 1904-1960, the so-called “Separation Era,” was marked by a great setback of the clergy’s predominance in the affairs of the country. However, Catholic preeminence over other established religions in Haiti was reaffirmed by the Constitution of 1950 (Louis, 2007). Thus, in post-colonial Haiti, Catholic orders determined the official religious practices of most Haitians.

There are two types of Catholics in Haiti: Roman Catholic and the Anglican Orthodox Episcopal Church of Haiti. Smucker (1984) differentiates these two types by labeling them (1) those who do not serve the spirits and (2) those who serve the spirits of the Lwas. In addition, more recently, in 1973, Canadian missionary introduced the Charismatic renewal movement in Haiti, thus, giving rise to a third type of Catholicism: Haitian Charismatic Catholicism (Rey, 2010).

#### **4. BRIEF HISTORY OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY**

Protestantism was completely excluded from the French colony of Saint Domingue (Louis, 2007). In fact, although there were Protestants in the colony, they were not able to win religious liberty to evangelize, because the general concordat signed between the Roman Catholic Church and the European colonizers had been reinforced by the monarchical decree of Louis XIV.

Notably, the “Code Noir” clearly stipulates “All slaves that shall be in our islands shall be baptized and instructed in the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Faith,” (Code Noir, Art. II), and “We forbid any religion other than the Roman Catholic Apostolic Faith from being practiced in public,” (Code Noir, Art. III.). Consequently, the Protestant faith was not reinstated until after the independence of Haiti, particularly under the presidency of Alexandre Pétion in 1816, with the visit of Stephen de Grellet and John Hancock, two Quaker evangelists. In contrast, religious groups were more independent from state control in British colonies than in Historically-Catholic colonies (i.e., the colonies of France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal,

and Italy); thus, in 1813, Evangelical Protestants forced the British to allow religious liberty (Woodberry, 2004).

The first group of missionaries to come to Haiti was from England, the English Wesleyan Mission in 1807 (Edmonds & Gonzales, 2010). According to the English Wesleyan Society “there was a great need for the Gospel of the grace of God” in Haiti (Findlay & Holdsworth, 1921, p. 262). They believed that the precious souls of the Haitians must be saved from the Catholicism of the pope as well as from their own heathen practices. In 1816, they made the first attempt; it was not until eighteen years later that the Methodist Missionary came to stay in Haiti.

These Protestants were well-received by Haitian officials like Pétion, Christophe, and Boyer. Pétion and Christophe were so accepting of this religion, because the two had been protectors of religious liberty, and were concerned about the need for Haitian education. However, Boyer’s administration was pro-Catholic. So, after Pétion’s death in March 1818, later that year in November, the sudden fury of persecution burst forth against the Methodists Christians (they were persecuted by the population and the Catholic Church), and President Boyer encouraged the departure of the Mission. As quoted by Findlay & Holdsworth (1921):

The immediate occasion of the outbreak was the act of a young man, who, in a fit of madness, cut his mother’s throat, and who was known to have attended Methodist public services. The unhappy youth had no connection with the society or intimacy with the preachers; for many weeks before his crime he had not been seen in the congregation. A strain of insanity in his family record sufficiently accounted for what had happened. Nevertheless, the cry was raised by enemies of the Mission, and taken up by a populace already suspicious of the white visitors and their propaganda, that the Methodists had driven the young man mad! Absurd and inflammatory reports of their preaching passed from mouth to mouth. The Missionaries waked up to the fact that unawares they had become an object of violent antipathy to the majority of the citizens at Port-Au-Prince. They could not pass through the streets without a military escort. The meeting-house had its

doors and windows smashed; the congregation was dispersed; insult and outrage were showed in members of the little Church who ventured abroad (Findlay & Holdsworth,1921: n. p.)

It was very slow work and few converts were made, but the intention of the English Wesleyan Mission and the faithful remained steadfast. Today, the Mission and Church that exist, grew around four geographical focal points or mission stations which now serve as district centers, located in Anse-à-Galets, Petit Goâve, Baintet, and Port-Margot. There are presently 106 active churches with a membership of over 6, 000 with over 130 active pastors. The Wesleyan Church has also contributed greatly toward educating Haitian citizens (Wesleyan Mission Haiti/Caribe Atlantic Area, 2015).

Today, Protestants are not constituted of English Wesleyan Mission. Titus, et. al (2013) presents the different forms of Protestantism in Haiti, grouping them into four categories, according to the theological and organizational feature of the various churches and missions: (1) the first category belongs to the historical or traditional Protestantism such as Methodist Church, Episcopal Church (Anglican Church), African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Wesleyan Church; (2) the second category forms the Protestantism of sanctification like Baptist and Adventist Churches; (3) the third category calls for the Protestantism of the Third Reform such as Pentecostalism; (4) and the last category is mixed Protestantism (Titus, et. al, 2013: 720). This table below provides a brief religious history of Haiti: stages of colonial & post-colonial period.

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Brief Religious History of Haiti

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1492	Columbus lands in Haiti with Catholicism
1511	Vodou religion entered Haiti with the African slaves
1685	Code Noir recognized Roman Catholic and Apostolic as unique religion of the colony
1791	Ceremony of Bois Caïman - a Vodou ceremony against slavery
1804	Haiti became Independent thank to the Vodou religion First Protestant group to enter Haiti - The English Wesleyan
1807	Mission
1816	President Pétion welcomed the two Quaker evangelists
1818	Persecution of the English Wesleyan Mission, President Broyer encouraged their departure. They came back 18 years later.
1860	Haiti and the Vatican sign a Concordat
1890	Promotion of Protestant vision for Haiti by Haitian intellectuals and nationalists
1904-1960	Separation Era (i.e. between Haitian government and Catholic)
1915-1934	US Protestant missionaries enter Haiti under the US Occupation Haitian intellectuals started to defend Vodou as a national
1930	religion
1935	Decree-law against the Vodou rituals
1959-1971	Protestant enjoyed peace and growth
1987	Decree-law for religious freedom
1997	Creation of KOSANBA - a scholarly association for the study of Vodou
2003	Haitian Vodou has been recognized as an official religion
2010	Earthquake, attack on Haitian Vodou, emergence of the Islam religion, creation of Religion for Peace
2014	Chibly Langlois nominated Cardinal of Haiti by Pope Francis

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## 5. ERASURE OF HAITIAN VODOU BY CATHOLICISM

Vodou has been checkmated by powerful forces of Catholic and political regimes so much so that its survival and adherents had to borrow symbols from the officially recognized religion, Catholicism. Colonial leaders felt threatened by its practices and, therefore, during the colonial period, it was banned by legislative enactments (Rigaud, 1969).

Historical predominance of the Roman Catholic Church in Haitian society had caused Vodou to go through five anti-superstition campaigns after French colonialism; some were more severe than others. The salient periods were: 1) after the signing of the Concordat with the Vatican (in 1860s and 1890s); 2) during the U.S. Occupation (1915-1934); 3) in the resulting Catholic Church's anti-superstition campaign (1935-45); and after the fall of the Duvalier's' regime in 1986 (Anderson, 2015; Hron, 2009; Michel, 1996).

Recent attacks from Roman Catholics occurred after the nomination of Chibly Langlois as the first Cardinal of Haiti by Pope Francis in February 22, 2014. According to an article in *The Guardian* on July 13, 2014, Cardinal Langlois created a scapegoat for Haiti's social problems by describing "Vodou as a big social problem," and adding "it's a big problem for the Church." The Cardinal's statements raised religious tensions, and have been criticized by many sectors in the society, particularly by "Religion pour la Paix (Religion for Peace)," a Haitian association of different beliefs, including Roman Catholic, laments, confusing the declaration of the Cardinal against Vodou. Fortunately, Cardinal Langlois rectified the situation in a note published in *Le Nouvelliste Haiti* on July 17, 2014, that the fragments of his interview published in *The Guardian* did not accurately reflect his vision of Vodou. Besides that, he showed an awareness of the Vatican II's new method, in regard to non-Christian religions. On the interaction with non-Christian religions, Pope Paul VI urged the Catholic believers through the following:

..... Indeed she (the Church) proclaims and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. The

Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men. (Nostra Aetate, 2)

Although the Vatican II's Nostra Aetate document does not mention any African religions, the Catholic Church modeled itself after Vodou to become authentic within Haitian culture. In Haiti, almost all Vodou adherents would call themselves Catholics, and most Catholics practice Vodou (Thomas, 2014). However, Protestantism was considered by a great majority to be distant from Vodou.

Max Beauvoir (1936-2015) was an intellectual and well-known Vodou priest, who devoted himself to ancestral ideals. He contributed greatly to the recognition of the national religion — both in Haiti and abroad — through his ceaseless work on Vodou. Beauvoir was among the thirteen Haitian academic founding members of the Congress of Santa Barbara (KOSANBA) on April 25, 1997, a scholarly association for the study of Haitian Vodou (KOSANBA, 2015). Today, these devotees, including Beauvoir's daughter, Professor Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, are continuing to defend the Haitian folk religion.

## **6. ERASURE OF HAITIAN VODOU BY PROTESTANTS**

Haitian Vodou has been challenged by the variety of Protestant denominations that the 1915-1934 US Occupation had welcomed to Haiti. For both the US Occupation and US Protestant missionaries, Haiti was in urgent need of salvation, especially from the practice of Vodou (Durban-Albrecht, 2017). So, these Protestants jumpstarted their missions through evangelization, prayer meetings, religious teachings, and education of the mass to name a few. The motive behind all these, was to obliterate the Vodou religion (i.e. the religion of the mass) in Haiti by converting the masses into Protestantism. Since Protestants have become important providers of social services like schools, hospitals, and foods for the masses, these have attracted many to convert to Protestantism. Additionally, pupils of the masses that attend protestant schools have not been spared from the call to conversion. Upon

conversion, the faithful (including the pupils) are told to reject Vodou, which is believed by Protestants to be the religion of the Devil (Richman, 2008; McAlister, 2012). As a result, many families are torn apart because of difference in religious practice and belief.

The fact that Haitian Vodou is unable to socially and economically satisfy the mass has caused Haitian Vodou to lose its practitioners and has portrayed it as being spiritually and materially poor. Protestant missions, in contrast, have been portrayed as being able to grant spiritual and material comfort. As a matter of fact, they have contributed greatly to the development of the faithful, by introducing certain values such as personal ethics, respect for human rights, and so forth. Protestantism has particularly influenced the promotion of the vernacular language, Haitian Creole (Titus, et. al, 2013). In their article, "Protestantism," Titus, et. al, (2013) mentions that "Protestantism is credited with the first literacy campaign (1940), the first written form of Haitian Creole and its popularization through the newspaper: Boukan, and the publication of the Bible in the vernacular in Bib la in association with the American Bible Society of 1999" (Titus, et. Al: 720).

Today, both foreign and Haitian Protestants are continuing in their efforts to erase Haitian Vodou within the ten regions of Haiti by educating and ministering to the poor. Subsequently, the significant inroads of evangelical Protestants among the poor have fueled religious intolerance in the Haitian society: an issue that I believe the Haitian people have to resolve together through religious education. I also believe that Haiti needs a new independence, a spiritual independence, in which Haitian Vodou will not be left behind and religious education in administered in an unbiased manner.

## **7. ERASURE OF PROTESTANTS BY CATHOLICS**

The Protestants faced a battle against a Catholic majority that, for the most part, did not want Protestants at all. Almost all the categories (the four categories of Protestantism) mentioned in this paper have been subject to persecution within Haitian society. Louis (2007) states that "The Haitian Protestant Church throughout her existence has endured and is still enduring some times of both open and disguised

persecution from the Catholic Church, the Haitian government and Vodou” (Louis, 2007: 95).

In 1890, Haitian intellectual and nationalist, Louis Joseph Janvier, promoted a Protestant vision for Haiti. However, it was under the François Duvalier’s regime (1957-1971) that Protestants enjoyed peace and growth, which lasted until Jean Claude Duvalier’s Decree of June 24, 1971 (Louis, 2007; Trouillot & Trouillot, 1978). The Constitution of March 29, 1987 restored the peace and guaranteed religious freedom to all its citizens. Article 30 of this Constitution stated that:

All religions and faiths shall be freely exercised. Everyone is entitled to profess his religion and practice his faith, provided the exercise of that right does not disturb law and order. (Haiti, 1987)

## **8. BRIEF DELINEATION OF CURRENT SITUATIONS**

Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism) and Vodou, therefore, are no longer post-colonial Haiti’s only religions. These two principal religions and other religious minorities enjoy freedom within the society. In fact, the 1987 Constitution proclaims religious tolerance; Roman Catholic is no longer Haiti’s official religion. Former President Aristide consolidated this proclamation by receiving representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Vodou faiths officially at the Haitian National Palace.

Today, the majority of Post-colonial Haiti is made of Haitian natives. They have made significant progress by creating a religious platform (Religion for Peace). “Religion for Peace” has played a key role in the maintenance of peace between religious groups (Catholicism, Protestantism, Haitian Vodou, Islam, and so forth) and between political parties/politicians and the society.

## **9. CURRENT RELIGIONS IN HAITI**

Currently, the population of Haiti is estimated to be 10, 788, 440 (July 2018 est.) people and the religious affiliations of Haitians was estimated in 2015 to be as follows: 54.7% of the population are Roman Catholic; 28.5% are Protestants (Baptist 15.4%, Pentecostal 7.9%, Adventist 3%, Methodist 1.5%, other 7%); Vodou (official) 2.1%; other 4.6% (Baha’i Faith, Islam, Judaism, Buddhist, Hindus); and unaffiliated

10.2% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Additionally, the Muslim population is estimated to be between 4,000 and 5,000, according to the officials with the major Islamic groups (Arab News, 18 January 2013). Meanwhile, Islam is not recognized as an official religion by the Haitian government.

There is a small growing community of Muslims in Haiti, namely the Sunni, Ahmadi, and Shia Muslims. Today, the Islamic religion claims its contribution to Haiti's independence — meaning that Islam has always been a religion in Haiti. Based on “new theories about the Haitian history, including a revisionist about Boukman Duty (a slave from Jamaica who instigated the Haitian Revolution),” an Islamic worshiper in Haiti proclaimed that “Boukman was never a Vodou priest, like they say; he was a Muslim” (Arab News, 2013, n. p.). It seems that the history of many religions competing to win the hearts of Haitian people (against the Vodou religion) is repeating itself. In fact, Muslims are very active in Haiti — building schools and masjids and providing food to the people (especially after the 2010 earthquake) (Fox News World, 2012; US Today, 2012).

## **10. BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HAITI**

After the colonial rule, which ended in 1803, the urban mulatto elite continued to enjoy prestige and power, as well as higher quality schooling than the peasant mass. This educational gap can be explained by the fact that Roman Catholic schools, especially the clerical teachers, concentrated on developing the urban elite, while only a few priests ventured to the rural areas to educate the peasants. Even today, the most prestigious schools are Catholic, and are located in the urban areas of Haiti. Because the Roman Catholic schools were jointly funded by the Haitian government and the Vatican, they became non-secular public schools. The secularization of these schools broadened the influence of the Roman Catholic Church among the educated class.

By contrast, the protestant schools are located everywhere in the country, especially in the rural areas, where they actively educate the peasant mass. Thus, educated Haitians have been influenced by these two main sources of faith and intellect. Haitians from all social sectors seem to agree that “Protestant Christian

schools do a better job of developing their students' spiritual formation, while Catholic Christian schools do a better job of developing their students' intellect" (Napp Nazworth, Christian Post Reporter, 2011)

Haiti [early post-colonial leaders] never developed a well-functioning system of public schools. (Salmi,2000; Bulder,2007). As a result, religious communities and private operators gradually became the main providers of education in Haiti. [Though, education is currently regulated by the Haitian Ministry of National Education and Professional Training, the educational inequality will persist until education in Haiti is provided by the Haitian government itself.] Additionally, educational funding in Haiti is extremely weak, with only up to 10% the GDP appropriated for education. Consequently, over 80% of the education provided is private, and most schools are run by religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, or run as commercial for-profit enterprises. (Axmann, 2012)

Historically, religious education in Haitian schools has been synonymous to Christian education, which is more likely to be confessional. The concept of Christian education is defined by some scholars as a type of education which is essentially concentrated on the life and the teachings of Jesus Christ and/or a biblical worldview (James D. Steward; Joseph A. Grassi; Robert W. Pazmiño). Thus, religious education, in Christian schools, conveys to the students the commands of Jesus to His disciples before His ascension to heaven: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nationalities, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of age". (Matthew 28: 18-20) Pazmiño (1987) explains what should be the content (especially the means and the ends) of Christian education:

a deliberate systematic and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith. It fosters the change, renewal, and reformation of persons, groups, and structures by the power of the Holy Spirit to the revealed will of God as expressed in the

scriptures and preeminently in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as any outcomes of that effort. (Pazmiño,1987: 87)

Thus, religious education in Haiti engendered contradiction and controversy around issues such as faith, life after death, and the moral value of Catholicism (Europe) and Protestantism (USA). One of the great contributions of Christian education is that it encourages children and adults to take an active part in public life, and to contribute toward the attainment of the common good of the entire human family and to their own country (O'Brien & Shannon, 2005). So, Christian education has enormously contributed to the character of Haitian people.

Although Vodou has been largely the religion of the Haitian masses (Diouf & Nwankwo,2010), it has gained greater acceptance as a source of Haitian pride and identity, and is a driving force behind Haiti's rich artistic culture (Melton & Baumann, 2010). Vodou has always been excluded from Haiti's educational system.

Unlike the Wesleyan Church of Haiti, which provided educational opportunities with 61 community elementary schools and 7 secondary schools serving approximately 20,000 students (Wesleyan Mission Haiti Caribe Atlantic Area, 2015), Vodou adherents lack the financial and logistical capacity to offer such formal educational opportunities. However, as part of post-colonial development, Vodou has been gradually receiving worldwide attention, especially through its art and culture. With Haiti's Vodou devotees mobilizing media and technology to promote its tenets (Stolow, 2013), there has been some conjuncture about Haiti including Vodou in its educational system.

## **11. HOW RELIGIOUS CONFLICT DAMAGES HAITIAN CULTURE**

In Haiti, the local religion (Vodou), and the religion of the colonial powers (Catholicism) did not blend well together during the colonization period. Additionally, new religions introduced after the country's independence, i.e., post-colonial period, did not successfully integrate with the established religions. Consequently, there is a lack of tolerance among people of different beliefs, hence, religious conflicts are a common occurrence in Haitian society. Such situations project the Haitian culture in an unfavorable (false) light to the rest of the world. In

the following paragraphs, I will provide examples of how the Haitian culture has been damaged by religious conflict.

Vodou religion was oppressed during the colonial period by the Catholic colonial powers, which ran the colony. The country was divided into two populations by religion: Catholicism and Vodou. Later, in 1804, when the country became independent, Protestants entered the country and were rejected by the Catholic establishment. Since Catholicism has always had a strong influence in the country's politics and economy, Haiti is further divided into three major religious populations, each one strongly against the other.

Historical accounts show that there was no longstanding confrontation between Protestant and Vodou per se. Vodou, in general, was not an open threat to the evolution of Protestantism for a very long time (Louis, 2007). Conflicts between Vodou and Protestants mostly occurred when the latter invaded Vodou's comfort zone i.e., when Protestants wanted to establish a church near a Hounfo (Vodou temple). Other Causes of conflict were from accusations. For instance, Vodouists accused Protestants of being the cause of the uprooting of their fellow priests and priestesses after the fall of Jean Claude Duvalier in 1986 (Louis, 2007).

And just recently, after the earthquake in January 2010, some Protestant Evangelicals attacked a Vodou ceremony which was organized to honor the victims, by throwing stones at them. It is said that a pastor urged his followers to attack the Cité Soleil ceremony. The incidence angered Haiti's former supreme Vodou leader, Max Beauvoir, as he vowed to wage war against the aggressors (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2010). Many religious Haitians (as well as foreigners) believe that Vodou is the principal cause of the disaster and Haiti's sufferings. These religious people associated Vodou with witchcraft. They believe that the one true God warns the nations of the danger of using witchcraft. Thus, they relate Haiti's underdevelopment to the practice of Vodou witchcraft. According to Max Beauvoir, Haitian Vodou is not responsible for the disaster and Haiti's sufferings. He stated: "the government had brought the earthquake onto itself by denying the country's roots in favor of the beliefs and habits of settlers; referring to Haiti's colonial past" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2010: n. p.).

## 12. ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

An important issue is that of teaching religious education in multi-faiths society. Faith-based schools such as Catholic schools and Protestant schools are inspired by converting the students. The purpose of religious education should be more than just religious conversion. It should prepare students to live in a multi-faith society. In this section, I will review the purposes of religious education according to Catholics and Protestants.

### 12.1. Christian Education from Catholicism

On October 25, 1965, the second Vatican Council issued a document on Christian Education, the “Declaration on Christian Education” or “Gravissimum Educationis” of 1965. This document touched different dimensions of Christian Education, including its goals, the authors of education, the catholic schools, and so forth. The council saw the concept of education as a human right. This right is twofold: firstly, intellectual and secondly, spiritual. The synod declares education a universal right, meaning that all men and women have “an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other people in fostering of true unity and peace on earth” (Vatican II, 1965: n. p.). The purpose of this education includes the following:

- Harmonious development of the students’ physical, moral, and intellectual endowments, leading to mature responsibility, including a “positive and prudent” sexual education;
- Instruction in the knowledge and skills necessary to discourse with others and promote the common good; and
- Motivation to appraise moral values with a right conscience and to embrace them with personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God.

In regard to Christian education, the Council states that all Christians have a right to a Christian education, which encompasses the following purposes:

- That the baptized become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, learn how to worship God in spirit and truth, and be conformed “to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth”;
- That they develop ever more perfectly into “the mature of the fullness of Christ” and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; and
- That they learn to bear witness to the hope that is in them and to assist in the Christian formation of the world, contributing to the good of society through natural powers redeemed by Christ. (Mirus,2010).

Catholic schools consider themselves to be one of the educational instruments capable of imparting Christian education to students and acknowledge parents as the authors of education, meaning that “since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and *therefore* must be recognized as the primary and principal educators” [Cf. Pius XI’s encyclical letter *Divini Illius Magistri*, 1, p. 59 ff] (Pope Paul VI, 1965). Other educational instruments that aid parents in their missions are catechetical instruction, youth association, the community, and the Church. So, Catholic schools put more emphasis on the development of intellectual faculties, good reasoning, professional life, and so on.

In post-colonial Haiti, many students have parents who are from different religious beliefs; most of the time, these parents are not literate. Some are literate but fail in their missions as educator, thus, schools are the only places where these students receive religious education. Schools should try to fill this gap by providing a multi-faith approach to religious education.

## **12.2. Christian Education from Protestant Perspective**

On the other hand, protestant schools have always emphasized the importance of the Bible (as the only reliable source of instruction) in school and at home. The reason for such emphasis was to keep a balance or consistency of what is

being taught in the Church to continue to be taught both at school and at home (Professor. Russel Dykstra's speech on the zeal of Protestant reformers). Like Catholics, Protestants believe that parents have the responsibility to educate their offspring in faith. Prothero (2007) reports that "In early American households, children learned to read and write on the laps of their parents" (Prothero, 2007: 65).

Historically, the reformed church was committed to education, and to an educated faith. The reformers especially emphasized that reading skill was a prerequisite for growing in faith, since it helps "to free oneself from the tyranny of priestly medication and papal bulls" (Prothero, 2007, p. 65). In their paper, "Protestantism and Education," Timo Boppart, Josef Falkinger, and Volker Grossmann state that "during industrialization, Protestants were more literate than Catholics" (Boppart, Falkinger, & Grossman, 2010, n. p.). The reason for the higher literacy rate among Protestants at the time of industrialization, quoting Becker and Woessmann (2009), "... reflected their motivation to read the Bible, particularly the New Testament" (Boppart, Falkinger, & Grossmann, 2010, p. 24). The theology for reading, however, was mostly applied among white people rather than African American and Indians. Literate slaves were a threat to slaveholders because educated slaves would demand freedom.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, Protestants did not prolong this legacy (literate their adherents); in fact, they are not more literate than Catholics, especially in Haiti, where many Protestants cannot read the Bible and the majority of Protestant schools are among those that provide the lowest quality of education. This situation is alarming for post-colonial Haiti because such Protestant schools continue to outnumber prestigious Catholic schools. However, hope is not totally lost. Unless Haitian Protestants want to continue embracing this legacy, religious education should take an educational rather than a sole confessional approach.

### **13. SIMILAR SITUATIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND CULTURES, AND RELATED WORKS**

While social division and conflicts among people in any country is not uncommon, their implication is far more critical in some post-colonial countries, such as Uganda, Nigeria, and Haiti, where religion plays an important role in their

education systems, cultures, and economic development. In this section, I will demonstrate similar situations in other countries and cultures i.e. Uganda and Nigeria; and some related works done in England and the United States. Despite the latter 2 countries not being equitable comparisons to Haiti, lessons can still be learnt from them as they deal with multi-faith societies.

### **13.1. Uganda**

A good example of post-colonial society on the issues of multiple faiths within its education system is Uganda. Mwesigwa (2012) describes issues of teaching a confessional religious education curriculum in a multi-religious context of Uganda's religiously founded public schools. The study proposes a re-design of religious education in order to address the multi-faith context. In fact, this proposition challenges the Ugandan government's idea to exclude religious education from the curriculum. Uganda's case about the issues of religious education provides inspiration for a Haitian model of education. At a 3-day Teachers' Training in Kampala, Uganda, a 19-year old made the following contribution: "multi-faith religious education must comprise how to make peace reign among different religions, how to handle criticisms, healing one's self esteem, knowing oneself and developing respect for all regions" (Teachers' Training, 2017).

### **13.2. Nigeria**

In 1999, Hackett published a study themed on "Conflict in the classroom: Educational Institutions as Sites of Religious Tolerance/ Intolerance," which examined the history of religious education in Nigeria. Hackett's study was seminal to the extent that it sought to go beyond mere criticism of the religious issues in the Nigerian education sector by advancing that the parallel religious education scenario has partly contributed to religious intolerance and conflict. Hackett (1999) observed that the Nigerian educational system is an example of the relations within the whole country being influenced by the persistent fears of domination and manipulation by Christianity and Islam — which is viewed as a majority and a minority, depending on the historical or geographical spectrum. He argued that the confessional approach to religious instruction in Nigerian schools has contributed to further division of the

Nigerian society along the religious system. Hackett proposed the abolishment of confessional religious instructions from schools and that a non-confessional religious education be embraced, so that both Christians and Muslims can be taught about their faiths.

### **13.3. England**

Gillard (1991) chooses to view the presence of a variety of religions in a modern society as an opportunity rather than a challenge for religious education. Indeed, for Gillard, “the ultimate opportunity for religious education in a [multi-faith] society...is its potential for helping people to live together” (Gillard, 1991, n. p.). In societies as these, religious education is usually mistaken for Christian education; religious education teachers for pastors; and religious education pupils for Christians.

### **13.4. United States**

Thorn (2010) discusses why religious education matters in the United States of America, where there is a scandalous degree of ignorance about religions and religious topics. Thorn argues that such a knowledge gap puts people at an increased risk of possessing “a hindered ability to evaluate religious claims from political candidates or religious groups, a shallow view of world events, and a weakened capacity to critique the claims of those preaching religious intolerance and hate” (Thorn, 2010: n. p.), and adds that “closing the religious knowledge gap is an important step in lessening [the] problems” (Thorn, 2010: n. p.). Thorn’s conclusion that “Islam is the current target of religious intolerance... [Islam] is not the first religion—and will probably not be the last—to face public opposition based on ignorance” hits at the core of current events in the USA.

## **14. A PROPOSED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM**

To address this division issue, I propose that Haitians be educated with the understanding and tolerance of different beliefs, by requiring part of the Haiti school curriculum to include the teaching of a religious course that includes all religions. The course will provide the following advantages (contributions) to reduce/eliminate the division/conflicts:

- It balances the education opportunities among different religious populations.
- It promotes debates on controversial issues and facilitates communication.
- It helps people understand different religions, hence, respects others with opposing beliefs and values.
- It encourages tolerance among people with different beliefs.
- It promotes peace and trust among religious communities.
- It teaches the knowledge of the country's history and culture to its own people.

Being convinced that religious education should be taught differently, and be part of Haiti's school curriculum, here is some content that I propose to be included as a part of religious education: Bygone Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism, Comparative Western Religions, Comparative Eastern Religions, Christianity, and Vodou. I propose the teaching to have a phenomenological approach. This approach to religious education is explained by Singh (1986) as follows:

.....the broader phenomenological approach to religious education is the best means of enhancing the understanding of all pupils, from whatever religious backgrounds, of the plurality of faiths in society, and of bringing them to an understanding of the nature of belief and the religious dimension of human existence. This approach seems to be the best means of helping pupils to appreciate the diverse and sometimes conflicting life stances which exist and thus enabling them to determine and to justify their own religious position. (Singh, 1986, p. 233)

The foregoing extract is central to the proposal for an all-inclusive curriculum in Haiti's Religious Education Program, the basis of which is how explicit religious

notions, practices, and institutions continually lose their social significance in public life (Brennan, 2005) — through secularization.

For purposes of novelty, let us consider the post-colonial Haitian educational system. Let us then consider the postmodern world as is today; that is, the results of globalization, trans-nationalism, and of course, capitalism. It is seen that every nation, more so Haiti, requires a multi-cultural curriculum of religious education. The education in Haiti is peculiar beyond its historical trajectories. Indeed, religious education in Haiti is still confessional in schools. But more recently, only in 2010, an earthquake in Haiti led to a well televised episode of a collapsing school, church, institution, and residential buildings, where over three million people were “affected” by the disaster, of which between 220,000 to 316,000 lost their lives, according to official Haiti government figures (UN, 2010). While the earthquake is not a definer of Haiti, it is a painful source of reflecting on upon the basis of religious harmony in religious studies.

## 15. SUMMARY

This paper presents Haiti as a case study on the myriad issues caused by religion, as it is a source of conflict and resolution at many levels, including language, economics, politics, and [religious] education. One major conflict relevant to religious education is the two distinct populations in Haiti: an urban mulatto elite and a peasant mass, which resulted from the Haitian Revolution. In particular, there is a focus on and reflection upon the issues of religious education in Haiti, in order to serve as a lighthouse to Haitian education, encouraging them to implement the teaching of religious education in the school curriculum from a new perspective in order to improve the current system. Based on the literature review and document analysis, this paper not only introduces the religions in Haiti, but also critically reexamines the issues of religious education in Haiti from a post-colonial perspective.

Post-Colonialism is particularly a reference to the period after colonialism (Childs & William, 2013). Putting this in perspective it is said that:

We use the term ‘post-colonial,’ however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.

This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 2).

Hughes establishes two propositions about Haitian colonial experience, namely: 1) The African presence in the Caribbean nation, and 2) A narrative of Haitianism, whose religious story challenges the imperial authority of Catholic Christianity. It is an attempt to define black cultural identity by thought and practice, and achieves what might be called “African Haitianism.”

Hughes used Haitian narrative to construct a black internationalist vision and aspirations through the idea of 1804 (Joseph, 2013, p. xix). He maintains that the Haitian Revolution had come to depict the black religion in a positive light, presenting hope, guidance, and aspiration to African slaves in the instance of the Revolution (Joseph, 2013). The Haitian colonial experience had deep and lasting consequences on Haitian education, particularly religious education.

Political instability and popular unrest have borne a variety of negative effects on education in post-colonial Haiti. University professors, teachers, students, and opinion leaders have been the victims of persecution, and even killing, by government security agents and political elites. For example, in a 1959 strike, students who had supported secondary school teachers were imprisoned. This strike was organized to protest the embedding of Tonton Macoutes in the ranks of teachers. Students were arrested; youth clubs, including the Boy Scouts were banned; education facilities were bombed; and the university and schools were barricaded and surrounded by the police (Luzincourt & Gulbradson, 2010).

It has been observed that, aside from historical challenges facing education in Haiti, the sector, in the post-colonial era, had been saddled with inadequate financial support, outdated curricula, and, of course, economic hardship (Luzincourt & Gulbradson, 2010). Therefore, it is doubtful that Vodou culture, which had been a scapegoat all along, lacking clear educational methodology, can successfully develop and thrive in this context of uncertainty.

## 16. CLOSING STATEMENT

Religious beliefs and practices not only contribute to the formation of personal moral criteria and sound judgment, but also serve as a social cohesion, bringing people together in a community. It allows them to share a common goal and makes them feel united. And, above all, it gives meaning to people's life. This is exemplified by Vodou as a religion of Africans who were forced into slavery in the Caribbean Island. Vodou was a motivating factor that propelled these Africans to attain independence from the European and American slave traders and colonialists. But it has been a scapegoat to explain the economic, social, and educational misfortunes of this same group of Haitian people. As its practices threatened the masters, it has been portrayed as barbaric, primitive, and non-progressive, and, thus, had been consistently subjected to legislative restrictions. Ironically, even in post-colonial Haiti, despite its contributions to Haitian independence, Vodou was never accorded official recognition and its adherents' freedom of observance. Thus, its development and adoption into an education system of its adherents faces a bleak future. However, a continued effort towards blending its doctrines and practices with modern science and technology gives some rays of hope for its development.

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