

Conflict between African Secularism and West Ministered Secularism: Implications for the Educational System in Cameroon

Kizitor Mbuwir^{1*} & Michael Niba²

¹ Researcher and consultant in Conflict and Peace studies, University Institute of the Tropics (IUGET) Douala - Cameroon & Department of Philosophy Catholic University of Cameroon, CATUC Bamenda.

² (PhD), Department of Philosophy, Catholic University of Cameroon, CATUC Bamenda.

*Corresponding Author

Kizitor Mbuwir

Article History

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 22.05.2026

Published: 15.06.2026

Abstract: The reality of secularism in Africa and its impact on the lives and values of Africans has continued to generate some debate among scholars. On the one hand, there is a school of thought that considers secularism in Africa as a Western export/import. On the other hand are scholars who are of the opinion that there had existed in Africa, prior to the colonial encounter, informal secular approaches to governance within kingdoms and chiefdoms despite the lack of codification. Using the critical literature review and philosophical methods of conceptual and logical analyses with Cameroon's educational system as case study, we reassess the two versions of secularism in Africa and argue that there is some conflict between the two trends. While the African version was characterized by a strong simultaneous distinction between and confluence of the spiritual and the secular, thereby upholding African cultural and moral values, Western secularism amplifies their separation causing more problems than it purports to address. X-raying the educational system in Cameroon we argue that Western ministered secularism in Africa is like the Biblical Saul's armour imposed on David, which did not fit well on him. We note that Cameroon's educational system in the epoque when it normalized the interplay between the secular and the sacred enjoyed high standards and values. In fact it was founded on religious values. The separation of religion from the state, and the trivialization of religion in post independent Cameroon have contributed in impoverishing standards of education in Cameroon. We espouse the view that a religious democracy can maintain her identity by actively deploying religious values to positively influence her political and educational systems, yet providing space for pluralism and the exercise of individual freedoms.

Keywords: Conflict, African secularism, Western Secularism, Cameroon's educational system.

Cite this article:

Mbuwir, K., & Niba, M., (2026). Conflict between African Secularism and West Ministered Secularism: Implications for the Educational System in Cameroon. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(6), 12-20.

INTRODUCTION

The secularization of human thoughts, actions, education and entire existence has come with a host of intended and unintended consequences, which should all not be taken for granted. On one part, it has been argued that secularism is intended to uphold and sustain the respect for the moral equality of individuals, to guarantee the protection of freedom of conscience and to separate religion from the state. On these premises, a secular state rejects the imposition of one set of beliefs in the public space, while simultaneously upholding the right to think, to believe and to act freely. This is done with the intention of managing what Maclure

& Taylor (2011: 10) have described as "moral pluralism", a phenomenon of individuals "adopting different and sometimes contradictory value systems and conceptions of the good and the bad, truth and falsity." Viewed through this prism of respect-for-the-other's moral code, thoughts and beliefs, secularism is intended to mitigate the rise of religious violence and extremism which threaten peace and human rights around the globe (Catholic for Choice 2017). The rise of radical, fundamentalist and extreme theocratic Islam – Isis, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram – are some harrowing examples, which have raised the stakes on the issue for political scientist and analyst, for

international relations expert and ordinary person on the street alike. It brought to the fore the issue of religious diversity and tolerance and the challenges of dealing with it. No wonder religion dominates lives and the news today than in any other era. Oliver Mbamara (2004, 66) captures something of this existential phenomenon in his poem *The Standard of Good and Evil*. He reflects that:

If character is personal to every person
And unique culture strives in a people,
If perspectives differ from one another
And opinions vary by individuals,
Who's 'wrong' shall indeed be a sin?
And who's 'right' shall then be a virtue,
Accepted and taken by all and sundry,
To be the standard of good and evil?

While governments wage war on militant religiosity, academics continue to reflect the type of secularism that mandates everyone to avoid imposing one's wrong as the standard of evil, and one's right as the standard of good for all and sundry. Secularism thus aims at establishing the principle of "reasonable accommodation" (Maclure & Taylor 2011). A critical ingredient of a secular state, among other things then, is the promotion of tolerance as the absolute imperative for all, as people seek to co-exist peacefully, even as they have the right to express views that others might find objectionable and wrong, without government interference or censorship (Igwe 2017).

While the above is the wished for and intended outcome of secularism, there are unintended side effects, which need to be assessed and addressed too. It has been argued that secularism has enthroned moral and epistemological relativism and skepticism (DeMarco 2008). In addition, it has continuously blurred the line between right and wrong, good and evil, and is considered as partly responsible for the moral decadence and corrosion of values and the quality of education in contemporary society (Buma 2023; Fisher 2021).

While some of the above intended and unintended consequences of secularism on a human being, on his actions and modes of existence, can be generalized, there are a lot of divergent perspectives and nuances to be considered. For one thing, the history and culture of a given country are all important factors in determining whether that country subscribes to secularism or not. Consequently, Donadio (2023) holds that secularism cropped up for different purposes, in different contexts and with different outcomes in the different contexts.

Some scholars consider secularism as a Western export/import or introduction in Africa. Many African countries were colonized by secular European powers and this colonial influence has been carried over into the post-colonial era (Mvogo 2019; Shang 2016; Mahon, 1967). Elaborating further, Tangwa (1996) observes that the Western world by virtue of its technological advancement is the dominant culture of the world. Western cultural hegemony has been greatly assisted by the imposition, through imperialism, colonization and neo-colonization of Western values on non-western worlds. As Falola, (2003) has pointed out, modern Africa cannot be understood without considering the impact of the West, in terms of what is adopted or adapted and what is discarded or

retained. The evidence on the ground points to an Africa which has, in fact, adopted, adapted and retained most of what the West has imposed on her.

Some scholars, disagreeing with the above school thought, hold that there had been practices of secularism in Africa before the colonial encounter and in tandem conquest. Igwe (2017) has pointed out that prior to the colonization of Africa, various empires, kingdoms and chieftaincies existed in Africa which were administered based on models of indigenous governance that provided for the interface of the secular and the sacred: "different relationships existed between the shrine and the state, the religious order and the governmental order, the sacred and the secular. There were informal secular approaches to governance within these kingdoms and chiefdoms despite a lack of codification." These contrary views and schools of thought between western and African secularism need further attention. In Igwe's observation Western secularism sought to formally restrict religion to the private sphere and left the individual free to adopt their own moral code, the latter actively interfaced the sacred and the secular. The individual was left with little freedom when it came to the moral preferences consequent on a communally recognized, affirmed and lived religiosity. Practically all secular values were anchored on those dictated by traditional religion. In this way, African secularism was guaranteed by a very huge moral code of conduct and content.

In this present paper and using the educational system in Cameroon we reassess the two versions of secularism and argue that there is some conflict between what Igwe (2017) describes as a secular approach in pre-colonial Africa, on the one hand, and Western secularism in post-colonial Africa, on the other hand. While the former was characterized by a strong mix between the spiritual and the secular, taking into consideration African exigencies, the latter rather amplifies their separation causing more problems than it purports to address. X-raying the educational system in Cameroon we argue that Western conceived and administered secularism in Africa is like the Biblical Saul's armour imposed on David, which did not fit well on him. Commenting on the text of I Samuel 17:38-51, Niccolo Machiavelli notes that:

David offered Saul to go and fight Goliath, the Philistine Champion, and Saul, to inspire him with courage, gave him his own weapons and armour. Having tried these on, David rejected them, saying that he would be unable to fight well with them and therefore he wanted to face the enemy with his sling and his knife. In short, the armour belonging to someone else either drops off you or weighs you down or is too tight.

WESTERN AND AFRICAN INCEPTIONS OF SECULARISM

Etymologically, secularism is derived from the Latin word *saeculum* which means of this temporal age in the world, as opposed to the divine, eternal realm of God. The secular has to do with earthly/mundane rather than heavenly/spiritual realities. Conceptually the secular stands in contrast to the sacred. Practically, it canonizes an approach to public life divorced from the influence of religion and thus determined by temporal or worldly concerns and considerations (Reese 1980).

Two terms come into play when we talk about secularism: secular and sacred. The huge difference between Western and African secularism lie in what stands between the two terms. For the African the two are conjunctival as in “the secular *and* the sacred”. In the West it is “the secular *without/against/divorced from* the sacred”. In the West there is no unanimity in the elaboration of the how the two terms are mutually shielded. In the United States, for instance, secularism is constitutionally theorized and practiced as the prohibition of government from enacting any law either “respecting the establishment of religion” or obstructing its free exercise. For the French, it means the exclusion of religion from the public sphere as captured in the philosophy of laïcité. Hence, the US in guaranteeing freedom of religion sought to shield religion from state encroachment/interference. Given her experience especially with the Catholic Church before the French revolution as being part of the “ancient regime”, France seeks to curb the intrusion of religion in the political arena. Consequently, secularism seeks to shield the state from religious infringement.

The above conflicting views project secularism as an umbrella term which embraces divergent conceptions, interpretations and outcomes, which range from ideology, through philosophy, to constitutional right and practice. As a distinct philosophy it owes its origin in the mid-19th century to George Jacob Holyoake who invented the term ‘secularism.’ To him, secularism carried no anti-Christian or anti-religion nuance or connotation. It is the viewpoint that promotes a social order that is separate from the religious, without dismissing or negating the religious order. Holyoake, *inter alia*, postulated the principles of natural morality not referenced to any form of revelation or supernatural reference, derivation or orientation. He also advocated for absolute freedom of opinion on all matters, including morality and above all for the absolute separation of Church and State (Holyoake 1859).

The rudimentary presuppositions underlying Holyoake’s conception of secularism include as Maclure and Taylor (2011) have observed: “separation of Church and state,” and “neutrality of the state,” distinction between “public sphere” and “private sphere,” with religion being relegated to the latter. We regard these in this paper as the doctrinal anchorage of Western secularism, which is at the foundation of the secularism of the state before being translated into practice.

INCEPTIONS OF SECULARISM IN THE WEST

Before the invention of the term secularism by Holyoake in the 19th century there were already early indications of secularism in the western worldview, which are traceable to the 14th century with the emergence of the merchant class. This group of business people resolved to defend their personal liberty to do business according to the dictates of their own self-interest and not according to the existing religious prescriptions which denounced the profit motive. Mahon (1967) notes that the break away from religious prescription in the world of commerce served as a precursor of the 18th and 19th-century individualism and unbridled freedom particularly when it comes to matters of morality, religion and God, which are building blocks of the concept of secularism.

Succeeding the 14th century was the renaissance in the 15th century, which was essentially anthropocentric, glorifying the natural and amplifying human capabilities to the detriment of the supernatural and the divine. The 15th century fortified and developed further the *homo mensura* doctrine first propounded by Protagoras in setting man as the measure and standard of everything. The denunciation

and abandonment of an objective or absolute truth became an essential component of western secularism. The consequences of this will be evaluated later.

The 16th century saw the Reformation characterized by the great religious upheavals that came with it. The fracturing of religion into warring theological, philosophical and political shrapnel contributed to the long term decline of religion on the one hand and to the rise of secularism in the West on the other hand. The reality of religious divisions catalyzed the issue of ‘religious pluralism’, which in turn led to questions and debates on how to cope with it particularly in the public life (Hitchcock 1982). The continually multiplying number of religious groups claiming to have the truth, and the conflict ensuing from this pluralism led to the proposition of the doctrine of “reasonable accommodation” as a mechanism to accommodate and make sense of the phenomenon (Maclure & Taylor 2011). The mechanism however, also came with a host of side effects. For instance the open-door approach to issues of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, would absolutize tolerance, relativize the truth and so undermine it (DeMarco 2008), as it would become increasingly difficult to draw a line between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil. The bloody violence and hatred that accompanied these religious divisions directed by Christians at other Christians contributed to the continuous development of secularism. Afterall, if we quarrel and fight about what the content of the concept of God is, one plausible take on the scenario is that these are all gods of human construction and that they just may not exist.

Besides these intrinsically religious factors, other forces that propelled secularism forward in the West included the growth of science which seriously undermined and challenged the credibility of religious authority (Hitchcock 1982). The success of science stimulated a sense of self-confidence in many people, who started to assume that the scientific method would in time unravel all mysteries and solve all problems. This scientific progress anticipated the development of scientism in the 19th Century - the view that science possesses the sole key to truth and whatever is not scientifically evidenced is false. Hitchcock (1982) has observed that to many people, due to the scientific progress of the 17th century, “religion was increasingly felt as something unnecessary even if true, to be shunted into a side room of one’s life.” This trivialization of religion lies at the foundation of Mahon’s (1967) take on secularism as a view of life that limits itself not to the material in exclusion of the spiritual, but to the human here and now in exclusion of man’s relation to God here and here after.

The increasing importance of science occurred against the backdrop of the Enlightenment. The word ‘enlightenment’ presupposes the existence of prior darkness. This encompassing darkness was blamed on the cultural, political and intellectual dominance of Christianity since the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment aimed to free society from Christian superstition and ignorance. Reacting to this dominance, the Enlightenment postulated reason as the light of the world and the source of morality.

Thus this intellectual movement gave reason pride of place. After first questioning the absolute authority of the church, it proceeded to dethrone the church, and its dogma (Mahon 1967). The Enlightenment espoused the value of liberty, progress, scientific thinking, tolerance, constitutional government and separation of Church and state. If the prior periods had contributed towards the

development of secularism, the Enlightenment dealt a heavy blow on religious totalitarianism and theocratic control. Its crusade against the “anciennes regimes” of church and state added fuel to the fires of the French Revolution between 1789-1799. The Enlightenment won as the church was eventually brought under the control of the state. This culminated in the 1905 law in France, which institutionalized the separation of Church and state and became a landmark in European secularism by promulgating state neutrality on religious matters and underscoring the recognition of individual rights on religious matters.

The 19th century witnessed three revolutions identified with Karl Marx, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud. What all the three shared in common from their divergent disciplinary areas was a basic materialism. Human existence was described, respectively by economic necessities, biological evolution and sexual urges. These postulations were pro-secularist because they disregarded despised and mocked religious belief. Hence, by the dawn of the 20th century, secularism had become a fully grown and radical philosophy in the West. It was understood as a political and legal system whose function was to establish a certain distance between the state and religion (Maclure & Taylor 2011).

SECULARISM IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

There is very little literature on the existence of secularism in Africa before the colonial era. However, Leo Igwe (2017) in his article *Whence Secularism in Africa* has traced secular inceptions in pre-colonial Africa to Africa’s traditional system of governance. This is against the conventional thought held by some scholars that secularism owed its origin in Western civilization and was introduced into Africa in the colonial period (Shang 2016). On the contrary, Igwe argues from the premise of organized political systems and government found in empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms prior to the colonization of Africa. In these political organizations different relationships existed between “the shrine and the state, the religious order and the governmental order, the sacred and the secular” which are all core co-terms, concepts and practices in secularism. His basic argument is that there had existed in Africa prior to the colonial encounter “informal secular approaches to governance within these kingdoms and chiefdoms despite lack of codification” (Igwe 2017).

To back up his assumptions, Igwe recurses to two ethnic groups: the Igbo in Southeast Nigeria and the Dagomba in the North of Ghana. Among the Igbos, he postulates, “the offices of the “king” (*Eze*) were distinct from those of the priest (*dibia afa* or *dibiša mmuo*). Hence there was an uncomplicated separation of powers and structures, as the temporal was detached from the divine and the spiritual. The Igbo people, as he further notes, consider the *Eze* as political head who oversaw the day to day administration of the community, while the priests were dispensers of spiritual commodities. Their function was worldly but spiritual. He underscores that the priest had as function “to perform sacrifices, poured libations and consulted the gods. The priests operated under the chiefs who consulted them whenever the need arose” (Igwe 2017).

Reasoning from the Dagomba worldview he unravels secular approaches to policies and administration. The Dagomba was governed by chiefs. The chiefs among the Dagomba were addressed as “owners of the land,” while the priests were considered as *Bouiglana* or *Tindana*, which roughly mean the

“owners of the gods.” Making his case further Igwe (2017) concludes:

Thus among the Dagomba, there is a distinction between the “owners of the land” and the “owners of the gods.” Although exceptional cases do exist in which the powers of the chief and the priests were invested in one person. And in such cases, political and religious orders mix and merge. In the case of the Igbo, the owners of the gods are in charge of the religious order and operate under the political heads, the owners of the land.

The distinctions made between “the owners of the land” and “the owners of the gods” has wider implications and applications to other areas in Africa. Among the Nso’ people in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, whose political system predates colonialism and which has not changed for centuries, there is a subtle distinction between *Ta Nte*, the head of the community, or the community head literally translated and *Ta cu*, a priest. The former carries functions which have to do with the governance of the community, and the latter addresses the religious and the sacred. This separation emphasizes the initial presupposition of Igwe (2017) about secular approaches in pre-colonial Africa. What this suggests is that in pre-colonial Africa, traditional African communities had introduced and institutionalized the separation of the secular from the sacred and the temporal from the spiritual. The reasons, dynamics and results of this separation were not the same as those in the West. In other words African and Western secularism differ in even if it was not with the same intention as the separation of state and Church in the West. However, we argue with Igwe (2017) that while it is pertinent to situate secular inceptions in pre-colonial Africa, there is however a conflict that exists between the African and Western versions of secularism in their conception, application and ends. While it could be argued that differences do not necessarily mean a conflict, it is tenable to reason with LeBaron and Pillay (2006) who are of the opinion that differences that are perceived to be challenging to something one believes in or needs or to some aspects of one’s individual and shared identities necessarily become conflicts. In this understanding, the secular conceptions in pre-colonial Africa conflicts with secularism as understood in the West in its conception, application and end as seen in what follows.

PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN APPROACHES TO SECULARISM VS. WESTERN SECULARISM

Western secularism, with its strong roots in the Enlightenment as Maclure and Taylor (2011) have pointed out, has two operative modes: separation of Church (or mosque or temple) and state: and state neutrality vis-à-vis religions. Shang (2016) has emphasized that secularism, considered as the separation of organized religion from organized political power is inspired by a specific set of values. Some of these values include the accommodation of differences, when it comes to moral and religious matters, liberty and individual freedom. The Enlightenment which is the foundation stone of secularism bequeathed individuals with the absolute rights to choose. This right to make individual choices was captured by Voltaire in the statement “I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” So understood, an individual could choose and even choose against his community. Shang (2016) is of the opinion that according to the

doctrine of secularism the world is immanently explanatory, without any need, reference or recourse to God, who by the same token becomes superfluous. So understood, Western secularism is an ideology that has been enthroned with the express intention to dominate and ultimately replace the sacred.

Therefore, the content of secularism and values of secularism as understood above cannot be taken to mean the same thing as secularism in pre-colonial Africa as Igwe (2017) maintains. We take issues with Igwe by observing that Western secularism is a loose concept, and as such it says more than it means, justifying the reason why it is not easily definable. Secular approaches in Africa before colonialism, even when they entertained the principles of separation of the secular from the sacred, the temporal from the spiritual, were nevertheless in opposition to the idea of secularism as understood in the West.

We are of the opinion that the understanding of the hierarchy and distribution of powers between “the owners of the land,” and “the owners of the gods” as observed in Igwe’s (2017) attempt to situate secularism in pre-colonial Africa, could be misleading when taken in isolation from the understanding of the African vision of the world. Mbiti (1979) describes this worldview as follows:

God is the creator and hence the parent of mankind, and holds the highest position so that he is the final point of reference and appeal. Beneath Him are divinities and spirits, which are more powerful than man, and some of which are founders and forefathers of different societies. Next, comes the living-dead, the most important ones being those who are fully human beings by virtue of getting through initiation rites, getting married and raising children. Among human beings, the hierarchy includes kings, rulers, rainmakers, priests, diviners, medicine-men, elders in each household, parents, elder brothers and sisters and finally the youngest members of the community.

From this understanding, the African notion of the world is dualistic. On the one hand there is the immaterial, spiritual, invisible or the world of ‘the living-dead.’ This world as Mofor (2008) enunciates is blameless and is characterized by harmonious coexistence of the divinities and communion of ‘the living dead.’ In the words of Mofor (2008. p. 187), this is “the true and the perfect fatherland” signifying order, perfection and wholeness. On the other hand is the visible world, which is in sharp contrast to the invisible world. The visible world (*nsay*) as described in the Nso’ outlook is characterized by chaos, conflict and evil. It is plausible to hold from this basic reasoning that the separation of the secular from the sacred; the temporal from the spiritual, described as secular approaches in pre-colonial Africa is embedded in the African conception of the world and should be understood as such. It is in this sense that we disagree with Igwe (2017) who interprets this separation as the attempt to bracket religion and the sacred from the secular sphere.

Although these two worlds described above are separate they are interrelated. African traditional priests *a ta cu*, were responsible for the affairs of the world of ‘living dead’, while in the case of Nso’ *ta nsay* (the ngwerong) handled the affairs of land. This separation notwithstanding the visible world depended on the spiritual as

situated in the hierarchy described by Mbiti (1979). That is why in the above hierarchy of being, there is a fundamental relation between ‘God the creator’ and all created realities in the world. In this world view, ‘God the creator’ is seen as the principal explanation of all realities. Following from this, there is absolute dependence on all created realities on ‘God the creator’ (Mofor 2008). The application of this hierarchy in the strict sense presupposes a transcendental moral order, which has God as the source and center. Human beings are required to live in conformity with this moral order, even as they are required to live too in accord with human nature and in harmony with the natural world.

The substance of this analysis is our claim that the African separation of the sacred from the secular, which suggests on the one hand, secular practices in Africa, is quite different from the content of secularism as understood in the West. While in the West the separation between the secular and the sacred devalues and impoverishes the sacred, in pre-colonial Africa the separation sets the sacred as the standard on which the secular must strive after. Although the two worlds are distinct and are separated there exists some cause-effect relationship between them. Given its superiority and perfection, the world of ‘the living-dead’ is the source of order and harmony in the visible world. Mofor (2008) underscores this when he describes God as the source and ultimate explanation of order in the world. Hence, the relationship that exists between the two worlds explains the reason behind the constructive use of supernatural powers attributed to spiritual leaders (*a ta cu*) in the visible world. According to Mofor (2006) by virtue of their hierarchical position these spiritual leaders are construed as mediators between the community of the living and that of ‘the living dead’ as well as other beings in the world hereafter.

Hence, while it could be argued that the separation of ‘the temporal’ and ‘the spiritual’ underlies the two worldviews, which constitutes a core principle of secularism, the reasons for, and implications from the separation, are however not the same as Igwe (2017) seems to believe. While the so-called pre-colonial African approaches to secularism was characterized by a strong mix between the spiritual and the secular, taking into consideration African exigencies as seen in the above thought, the Western amplifies the absolute separation between state and religion, subduing and relegating the former from the public sphere. Using the Cameroon educational system in what follows; we argue that unlike the former, this absolute separation causes more problems than it purports to address, particularly when applied in the Cameroonian/African context.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN CAMEROON ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF SECULARISM

Mvogo (2019) has noted that secularism as a whole has a certain doctrinal harbor before being put into practice by modern states. This doctrinal anchor, among other things, includes the separation of religion and the state, which is the foundation of the secularism of the state. This separation has implications on other areas of the state like education. Cameroon is a Central African state surrounded by Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and a 402-kilometer coastline on the Atlantic Ocean (Delancey et al 2010). Geographically Cameroon comprises very different regions: it includes an amazing number of ethnic groups living within a fairly small area. It brings together major strands: Christian, animist, and Islamic religions; English- and French-speaking populations; and

parts of the former French and British colonial empires, most of which were initially held by Germany. Because of this, Cameroon has been described as one of the most heterogeneous states on the African continent, a real cultural mosaic due to its geography and history.

Cameroon's colonial experience witnessed the introduction of Western secular ideas, which have influenced her institutions despite the existence of what Igwe (2017) has described as "a secular tradition that predates colonialism in Africa." Following the religious plurality of the state of Cameroon and following at the footsteps of her colonial master, France, Law No. 96-6 of January 1996 to amend the constitution of June, 1972 maintains that the State of Cameroon shall be a secular state. By implication, this law emphasizes the neutrality and independence of the state in respect of all religions. It is on these premises that we consider the impact and implications of secularism on Cameroon's educational system. First, we argue that under the colonial era, despite the supposed secular nature of the colonial state there was a strong mix of colonial politics and colonial religion because colonial government officials relied heavily on missionary churches to bring the local populations under their rule in order to implement their colonial culture. This suggests that within the colonial period there was some interplay between religion and administration, as had existed in the pre-colonial Africa, notwithstanding the fact that this interplay of the two orders during the colonial era was undertaken for and informed by a different reason as expressed already.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CAMEROON'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

As mentioned above the history of Cameroon is very complex owing to her colonial experience and encounters with the different colonial masters at different periods. It has been argued that from the arrival of the first missionaries till the post-independence period, various domains in the life of the state of Cameroon have witnessed a number of consequences and complications due to colonial influence. For instance it is observed that Cameroon's form of the state and other political institutions, and the educational system itself are modeled largely after that of the colonial masters.

The introduction of what can be described as Western formal education in Cameroon came with the opening of the country's first school in Bimbia by English Baptist missionaries in 1844. This laid the ground work for missionary education in Cameroon that has remained until today (Buma 2023). At the core of their education was the cultivation of religious values. Weber is of the opinion that education in Cameroon was highly contextualized in the spirit of evangelism. As a consequence, it affected greatly the structural realities of the Cameroonian setup (Weber 1993). His argument is that this colonial educational influence did not take into consideration the people's cultural values, irrespective of the fact that it had religion at the base. The result was the gradual replacement of the traditional educational settings in Cameroon that had the worldview of the people at the center with western ideals.

CAMEROON'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Cameroon had three different colonial masters. She was initially colonized by the Germans in 1884 and later partitioned between Britain and France following the defeat of the Germans during the

First World War. The focus here is that these colonial masters each orientated education for their own interest, which was to institute and spread their colonial culture (Buma 2023). The Germans, for instance, promulgated the first educational law in Cameroon in 1910, which among other things recognized the German language as the only official language of instruction in schools in Cameroon. This was to the detriment of the development of the local languages, thereby continuing to alienate Cameroonians from their local realities which political, cultural, economic and religious estrangement had initiated (Ngome 2012). The British on their part adopted the policy of indirect rule, which at first sight appeared to valorize the values and customs of the indigenous people, but which was nothing but a wolf dressed in sheep clothing. This is because the British did not take into consideration the realities of the people as their curriculum was structured in a way that reflected the British educational system back in Britain. In this regard, Buma (2023) has argued that the British indirect rule in the domain of education was not totally for the good of indigenous Cameroonians as it was made to appear, but rather a strategy to neutralize and forestall any pressure of Cameroonians and their leaders in the event of any desire or aspiration to break away from their colonial hegemony. The French on their part introduced the policy of assimilation, intended to transform and make Cameroonians in their image and likeness.

The above account points to the conception of the catalogue of problems facing the educational system in Cameroon. That notwithstanding, Cameroon's educational system during the colonial era encountered the mix between secular and the sacred. We have stated that education during the colonial era was largely in the hands of the missionaries, even though the colonial administration was the one designing the policies. The similarity between this era and the pre-colonial era is that the missionaries made religion and religious values primordial in education in Cameroon. Other problems this may have caused notwithstanding, education in Cameroon experienced certain standards (BAPEC 1993).

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN POST INDEPENDENT CAMEROON

Cameroon after independence carried along the inherited education system which continued to distance itself from Cameroonian realities. Cameroon's educational system during the colonial and post-colonial era borrowing from Buma (2023) "did not find its 'feet' on Cameroonian realities." First, education in the colonial age was religionized as a means to establish colonial culture. Although this was done for the wrong reason, this however had some close rapport with what existed in pre-colonial Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. Mbiti (1975) has observed that in pre-colonial Africa "religion is found in all aspects of life...and influences all aspects of life." He emphasizes this when he says that "to be an African in the traditional setting is to be truly religious." Though education was largely informal in pre-colonial Africa, it was permeated by religious values. The missionaries exploited this as well – the obvious yet subtle, genocidal asphyxiation of the Africans identity in the name of God, notwithstanding.

However, in post independent Cameroon the religious order has been greatly suppressed owing to the Cameroon state's secular nature, which as we have argued is after the Western, precisely French, model. Thus the influence of religion on education in-post

independent Cameroon has continued to be on a decline. This is reflected in the 1993 letter of the Bishops of Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province to the Prime Minister of Cameroon, in which the Bishops pleaded for “the retention of Religious Knowledge as a subject in the Cameroon GCE Examination.” The Bishops underscored the fact that downgrading religious studies would suppress and eliminate the educational heritage that went back more than sixty years and, which was considered as priceless and inalienable by most Cameroonians (BAPEC 1993). Although the government of Cameroon later included Religious studies as a subject in the Cameroon GCE Examination, religious studies has continued to be treated as an unnecessary appendix by the government and is mocked as a requirement for admissions into the civil service. Hence, almost every competitive examination in Cameroon does not require religious studies as a requirement. The government always underscore that potential candidates must have had “at least four papers in the GCE, excluding Religious studies.” Hence, Religion does not form an essential part of the official school curriculum in Cameroon and is relegated to a private sphere. (Lavngwa 2013). Religion is completely missing from nursery/primary school curricula and only introduced in secondary school in Form four for those who are interested, offered in high school again for those interested, and completely absent from universities, particularly state universities as compared with other disciplines.

IMPLICATIONS OF CAMEROON'S EDUCATION ON SECULAR FOUNDATIONS

Our analysis above indicates the intricacies that belie the understanding and practices of secularism. First it is a view that religion must be kept out of the public square as practiced in France (Donadio 2021). In other places religion dictates terms to government and society, as was the case in pre-colonial Africa, whereas in some other countries like the US, there is the mix of both extremes. Our analysis shows that Cameroon's secularism is modeled after the example of France. This has the following effects on Cameroon's education:

EDUCATION OUT OF CONTEXT

One of the grave consequences of the colonial encounter was that colonialism made Africans not only to abandon prior developmental trends undertaken before the colonial encounter, but it caused Africans to despise these and to become caricatures of the colonial masters, attempting to develop in the image and likeness of the West (Nkrumah 1964; Kishani 2001). In *The Mis-Education of the Negro* Woodson (2005) has pointed out this attitude. He mentions that the educated Negroes have contempt towards their own values because they have been brainwashed into admiring Hebrew, Greek, Latin and other foreign values. Consequently policies and principles of governance adopted in most African states by governments do not reflect the African context and realities, which Nkrumah (1964) described as “the uprootedness of being.”

Following from the above Education in Cameroon has come under serious criticisms for not reflecting Cameroonian contextual realities and for failing to deliver in accordance with its promises as stipulated in the law guiding education. Accordingly, this law on *The Orientation of Education in Cameroon* emphasizes: “...training on the universal ethical values of dignity, honor, honesty and integrity as well as a sense of discipline.” Placing the

school system of Cameroon on secular foundations from our observation gives to the lie to these ideals. Even when and these universal human and social values make their way into the classroom curriculum, there is little evidence that they impact pupils and students in the school milieu itself and let alone in the society at large. This has created antagonism between intellectual knowledge acquisition in school and moral values in schools and society.

In pre-colonial Cameroon in particular and Africa in general religion played a central role in every aspect of life including education. The disregard of contextual and cultural realities like the value of religion in every sphere of life is problematic. Bame has observed that “no people entirely dislodged from their ancestral roots have ever made real collective progress with integral development.” Cameroon's educational system on secular foundations and its ability to transmit the values of dignity, honor, honesty and integrity as well as a sense of discipline is highly questionable given that it undermines and devalues the religious context of the people.

Immediately after independence and reasoning from the African worldview, Fonlon (1971) had identified the centrality of religion as a source of social ethics, and argued that this ought to be made relevant and further developed to be applicable in every facet of life in Cameroon. According to him, ‘money, schools, good governance and above all religion, are needed for Cameroon's development. He made his argument as follows:

The thing is clear: without money, you cannot run a school; you cannot run a government, you cannot run a Church. Without education, neither commerce nor government, nor religion can thrive. Without a strong government, every man will do just what he likes; and no man will be safe. Without religion, man being what he is (a creature with a high potential for doing bad things) moneymaking, government and education are bound to go wrong, are bound to frustrate the very things that they were intended to foster: traders will become thieves, statesmen will become wolves, and teachers will poison the souls of the youngsters entrusted to their care.

The relegation and trivialization of religion in education in secular Cameroon is more a deprogramming of people from their original belief systems, and then reprogramming them with a new belief system. This new belief system as we mentioned earlier is Like Saul's amour on David, which did not fit well on him. This as Nkrumah (1963) has described has made Africans “to be inferior copies of Englishmen, caricatures to be laughed at with our pretensions to British bourgeois gentility, our grammatical faultiness and distorted standards betraying us at every turn.” Hence, as Bame (2011) has pointed out, education in Cameroon has largely been unproductive as it should be because it enlightens by distancing and estranging Cameroonians from their life circumstances.

From the global perspective, secularism has impacted Cameroon's cultural context as seen from the proliferations of sexual deviations in schools today as a result of sexual license, the decline of traditional languages, which impedes the translation of cultural values to the younger generation, the breakdown of authority in the

home and the school as well and the lack of respect for elders and tradition, to mention but these are some of the more obvious defects and weaknesses that secularism is spewing. Some of the impacts of secularism within schools have been discussed in what follows.

MORAL DECADENCE IN SCHOOLS IN CAMEROON

Trivialization and downgrading of religion has contributed to unbridled moral decadence in schools and the deplorable standards of Cameroon's educational system. In 1993, the Bishops of Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BAPEC) in their open letter to the Prime Minister of Cameroon, highlighted the fact that Cameroon inherited a system of Education from the missionaries of high standards, which they patiently and painstakingly established in the course of several decades of hard and dedicated work, but this system is gradually being eroded and destroyed as they observed. To them, the high standards and moral probity inherited from the missionaries is gradually being replaced, by what they described as a general malaise about the lack of credibility in examinations at all levels of the Cameroon school system (BAPEC 1993).

Buma (2023) has argued that while many pedagogic seminars are organized, followed by some structural changes in the school system, and yearly advancements on pedagogic techniques the results on the other hand are rather: "chaos in our society, increasing violence in schools, increased examination malpractices and many other social ills." He underscores that:

the increasing level of indiscipline in schools is a major issue of concern and an indicator of the collapse of moral values. This vice of indiscipline manifests itself through acts of disobedience, drug abuse, violence, normalized cheating in exams, sexual abuse, threatening of teachers with weapons and staging of riots in schools. Reports of these flood our various news media outlets on a regular basis in the country, all indicating how deep these vices have eaten into our school system.

In line with the above and depicting how deep the problem is, *The Guardian Post Newspaper* of August, 9th 2023 reported that in the 2023 session of examinations organized by the Cameroon GCE Board, there were reports of close to Two Thousand candidates sanctioned for examination mal-practice. The students as the newspaper reports were guilty of acts of misconduct ranging from the use of pre-prepared material, collusion, use of cell phones, script substitution, personification and violence. We argue that one of the contributing factors is the continuous degrading of religion and the moral code attendant on it. While the technological apparatus could not have existed in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, the acts these gadgets are used to perpetrate, the mere thought of these and related malpractices would have been unimaginable during these epochs, because of the high standards and moral probity in schools (BAPEC 1993). Irrespective of the contents of the curriculum of informal education in pre-colonial Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, it is important to note that these were anchored on the world view of the people, which was intimately connected to the supernatural. While the content has surely changed today, the anchorage is no longer the

sacred but the secular, which comes with a host of implications as we have maintained.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have reassessed secular inceptions in pre-colonial Africa and secularism in post independent Africa. Using the educational system in Cameroon we have identified conflict between the former idea of secularism, as understood and defended by Igwe (2018) and the later, which we have described as West administered secularism. We hold that while the two versions could have some uniting base, which is the separation of the temporal from the sacred, the two trends have different aims, applications and ends. In pre-colonial Africa and reasoning from the African vision of the world, the separation between the 'owners of the land' and the 'owners of the gods' was not intended to take the gods out of the public sphere, but rather the separation sets the sacred as the standard on which the secular must strive after. This is against the Western understanding of secularism, where the separation between state and religion has as core objective the relegation of religion from the public sphere.

With Cameroon's education system as the focal point of this paper, we observed on the one hand, that although Cameroon, like the rest of Africa, can no longer avoid the Western impact since it is almost impossible to return to the pre-contact period, Cameroon's school system can flourish without turning into a caricature of the West and impersonating West ministered secularism. To our understanding secularism in Cameroon in the Western sense is therefore preposterous. DeMarco (2008) has analyzed the word preposterous using the Latin words *prae* (before), and *posterius* (after). In this understanding secularism would relate to the absurd or preposterous practice of placing "before" that which should come "after," like putting the cart before the horse. On the other hand, Cameroon does not need to be a theocracy like the Islamic states in order to safeguard religious values and her educational heritage, given that religion has always been a source of social ethics in traditional Africa. We hold that while secularism and a theocracy are often seen as opposite ends of the spectrum there are mechanisms of managing religious diversity which are appropriate to Cameroon's exigencies.

Hence, rather than mimicking the Western principles and educational policies, or taking the mean between the extreme of religiosity and of secularism as some scholars have suggested (Shang, 2016), we recommend that Cameroon can rekindle her educational system which is currently witnessing some challenges partly because of its western secular foundations and develop as a religious democracy. In this sense her educational system can be informed by values that are transcendently anchored on the Supernatural. This is to say that following her history and culture her religious values can influence her political and educational system. The separation between the sacred and the secular will remain relevant as it sets the sacred as the standard on which the secular must flourish and blossom.

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