Letters

LETTERS

How Uganda turned faith into an exam and lost the point

Uganda's national motto proclaims, "For God and My Country." In our schools, however, it has quietly been revised to "For God, My Country, and Uneb."

Religious Education (RE) remains one of the most protected subjects in the curriculum. It is compulsory, examinable, and treated with a reverence usually reserved for national symbols

Question it, and you risk being accused of questioning God Himself. Yet after decades of compulsory RE, Uganda must confront an uncomfortable truth: religion is being taught, but morality remains stubbornly absent.

The promise of RE is simple and reassuring, teach religion and society will behave. If that were true, Uganda would now be a moral superpower. Instead, we have achieved a different miracle— students who can quote Scripture fluently while cheating with biblical confidence.

RE has become an academic exercise, not a moral one. Students study it the same way they study Geography: memorise, reproduce, forget.

Faith is reduced to notes, ethics to bullet points, and conscience to "discuss in five points." Holiness, it turns out, does not survive marking schemes.

Uganda's religious landscape has changed, but the RE syllabus has not. According to the 2024 UBOS Census, millions of Ugandans belong to traditional faiths, minority religions, or none at all. Yet in our classrooms, the choice remains stubbornly binary—Christian or Muslim.

Everyone else is treated as an administrative inconvenience—present in the country, absent from the syllabus.

This is not inclusion; it is polite erasure. A national curriculum should reflect the nation as it is, not as it once was.

There is also a practical question we avoid: why are public schools doing theological work better handled by homes and faith institutions? Uganda already struggles to deliver quality science, literacy, and digital skills. Adding compulsory spiritual formation to this list stretches schools beyond their mandate.

Those called to religious study have seminaries, madrasas, and theological colleges designed for that purpose. For everyone else, compulsory RE is an unnecessary burden that delivers grades— but little guidance.

To be clear, this argument is not an attack on faith, nor a dismissal of religion's vital role in Ugandan society. Churches, mosques, and traditional belief systems remain among the strongest moral institutions we have produced.

The question is not whether religion matters, but whether the state is equipped to examine belief without emptying it of meaning.

Defending faith does not require defending a syllabus, and questioning compulsory Religious Education is not the same as questioning God. If anything, it is an appeal to take both faith and education seriously—by placing each where it can do its best work.

If RE must remain, it should be radically reimagined. Teach about religion, not into religion. Let students learn how belief systems have shaped society without being examined on personal faith. That would be education.

If such reform is impossible, then perhaps RE should step aside from the examinable curriculum altogether. Faith survived for centuries without Uneb. It may yet recover once freed from it.

Perhaps the most honest reform would be to admit what we already know but fear to say: schools do not manufacture morals, and examinations do not produce virtue. A nation that still cheats, lies, and steals after decades of compulsory Religious Education is not suffering from a lack of religion, but from a surplus of pretence.

Until we separate faith from fear of failure, and morality from marks, we will continue to worship at the altar of Uneb while pretending it is God we are serving. That conversation may be uncomfortable, but it is long overdue.

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