

Challenges facing the Church in dealing with Moral Issues in Ghana: the way forward

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine challenges facing the Church in dealing with Moral Issues and the way forward in Ghana. Qualitatively, the study sought to examine the Church's challenges in coping with Moral Issues and the way forward in Ghana. The study adopted a case study research design. The population of the study comprised leaders of Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka and Shiashe. These include the Vice President of the Ghana Baptist Convention and departmental heads at the Ghana Baptist Convention headquarters. Others included the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka with its satellite mission at Shiashe as well as a cross-section of pastors of these churches; the church administrator; the past and present directors of Baptist Relief and Development Agency (BREDA). The purposive sampling technique was specifically used to locate respondents for the study. The churches and participants were chosen because of their efforts in dealing with the causes of immorality confronting Ghanaian society. The main tool for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. The data gathered was organised and analysed manually using emerging themes. The study revealed that the challenges which the Baptist Church encounters in its effort to deal with moral issues are the politicisation of statements made by the clergy, and inadequate trained personnel who are willing and ready to champion the agenda of the church in that respect. Financial difficulties were also mentioned. In this regard, specific reference was made to the effort made by the Ghana Baptist Convention to free the Trokosi girls. It was indicated that it takes a lot of financial resources to train and settle the freed girls. Regarding the way forward as far as these challenges were concerned, it was suggested that the church ought to speak more and do what it is mandated by Christ to do to bring about transformation. It is recommended that Churches should seriously intensify education on what constitutes human rights and freedom so that there would be a clear understanding of the concept that enables people to think through and adopt the good aspects to enhance their circumstances. Human rights defenders should exercise restraints when it comes to practices which are alien to Ghanaian values, laws and religious faith.

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1. Introduction

The exercise of freedom has been a bit of a problem. It has had a serious consequence on the moral fibre of every society including Ghana. Simply put, morality has gone down and societies are fractured to the core. Morality is a set of social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in a society [1]. Morality could also be said to be a value system. As a value system, they are those forms or patterns of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and thus cherished by society. However, because of cultural differences, there are some variations in what one considers moral from one society to the other. However, notwithstanding these variations, morality has a universal appeal since as Plato pointed out, “being moral, was inherently valuable, apart from any additional benefits it

produced or harm that it enabled a person to avoid.” [2]. In other words, morality is *sine qua non* in all human existence.

In addition to the above, there is one thing that as human beings we cannot forget. That is, God is holy and morally perfect (Is. 6:3). The ultimate foundation of morality is His revealed will which is found in the scriptures. No wonder a fourteenth-century thinker, William of Ockham argued that “all moral principles are traceable to God’s will” [3]. Human beings reflect the very nature of God. Given this, humanity is expected to live according to His divine will/plan. He consequently programmed in humans a conscience which Paul referred to in Romans 2:14-15.

The African and for that matter Ghanaians consider God as the foundation of all creation and existence. For, without Him, nothing would exist. For this reason, the creator is sought for practical reasons. Ghanaians are always ready to respond to their creator in an appropriate practical devotion demonstrated by living in ways prescribed by Him. It is only when human beings can demonstrate this that they are considered to be following the moral path of life. God is the ultimate source of morality [4]. It is He who inscribes or implants in him a sense of what is right or wrong. But humanity has perverted the course of nature. Ghanaians may not be an exception. Despite all these things God has always looked for ways to save man from destruction. This nature of God has therefore been demonstrated throughout human history.

A careful study of the Biblical view of the functions of the prophets reveals that the institution of the prophets was established to perform certain key functions. Among such functions indicated by a writer was that “they were divinely appointed as moral and ethical preachers and teachers of true religion revealed to Israel” [5]. The prophets were also supposed to be watchmen standing on the walls of Zion to sound the trumpet against the dangers of religious apostasy in Ezekiel. 3:17, 33:7. In the New Testament, we are told that God has appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to prepare the people of God for Christian maturity and service.

Implied in Christian maturity is the idea of moral, spiritual, and intellectual discernment. This is to be achieved through proper discipleship in the Scriptures as the inspired word of God in 2 Tim. 3: 16. Stated in simple terms, the purpose of the Church could be understood in terms of ministry to God, ministry to believers and ministry to the world. If these are the core mandates of the Church, then to a large extent, it is evident that the Ghanaian Church has much to do in its effort to deal with issues of morality in our society. It must however be indicated that the Church can only perform its mandate of reforming society when it is faithful to its calling which is the great mission and the cultural commission.

Unfortunately, we find so much immorality in our society today. This manifests itself in the form of general indiscipline, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, abortion and a lot more. Surprisingly, all these things are defended as expressions of the individual’s freedom of choice. This has affected the moral fibre of societies. Societies are fractured to the core in the name of human rights. Ghanaian societies may not be an exception. It is against this background that the study sought to examine challenges facing the Church in dealing with Moral Issues and the way forward in Ghana.

The study was guided by these research questions - What are the challenges encountered by the Church in her effort to curb immorality in Ghana? What is the way forward?

1.1. Indiscipline in our Schools and Societies

Generally, indiscipline was traced from our schools and irresponsible media programmes. The Bible in Prov. 29: 15; 10: 3 was critical to societal discipline. The place of the cane in the inculcation of good moral behaviour was appealed to. Indiscipline is often laid at the doorsteps of teachers. But teachers cannot be blamed much on such issues in our schools because the issues of child rights coupled with low monetary incentives for

teachers among other factors have led to our schools becoming breeding grounds for drug abuse, 'free sex' and homosexuality.

1.1.1. Media Reportage

In speaking about moral issues, the media could be mentioned because we cannot talk about morality without reference to it. Another moral issue which has become so problematic is what goes in the media. These days everything is thrown into the airwaves by the media without regard to time-tested cultural values in the name of democracy and freedom of speech. Understanding of democracy which is translated in the local language as "ka bi ma menka bi" meaning "you say and I say" has a worrying trend in our media landscape. Media ethics demand that before issues are presented as facts, there is the need for one to check the source and cross-check to authenticate the validity [6]. It is however unfortunate that the above media principle has been relegated to the background. What is more worrying is the fact that the media is always flooded with insults. It has become a place where scores are settled among people and institutions. A study lamented over this emerging trend on our media landscape that the church needs to condemn some of the things. He warned that if care is not taken this country may sink [7].

1.1.2. Sexual Immorality

Today sexual issues are assuming an unenviable place in Ghanaian moral discourse. There are some factors accounting for the sexual moral degeneration in the country. These include media projections, inordinate discussions in public spaces, the culture of indifference and others. Tim Stafford rightly identified the above factors in an article. "Great Sex: Reclaiming a Christian Sexual Ethic", *Christianity Today* 31 [8]. According to Stafford,

Sexuality, like everything else created, has fallen into trouble. We are more vulnerable than ever, living in a society that crowds sexual innuendoes into every available space, whether billboards or office conversations. Sexuality has been mechanised. It has become just anything. Unquestioned acceptance of both premarital and extramarital sex has become a part of the culture's values, reinforced by television, practised by millions, and criticised by almost no one. For example, sex no longer is something that may be right or wrong; it is a little more than a pleasurable way for two people to interact with each other [8].

Sex has been merchandised. It has become just anything. Sex which was created by God for our enjoyment and intimacy has become so perverted. "Sexual perversion has become the major example of the sin and moral sickness that characterise modern human beings." One sometimes wonders why such a craving for sexual issues in this modern world [9]. Sexuality becomes even more problematic if practised between people of the same sex (Homosexuality). Among the moral values raised by the respondents, homosexuality was among those which attract intense debate when a mention is made of it in Ghana. It is common knowledge worldwide that the activities of lesbian and gay liberation groups have become more intensified and that these practices have also become more accepted. But these practices date back as far as human history is concerned. At least it has been recorded in the Old Testament. The infamous Sodom and Gomorrah story is a classic example of homosexuality. The word which is popularly used or preferred is "Gay". It is only synonymous with the broader lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) social movements. [10].

The movement is very powerful. They succeeded in influencing the US courts to legislate on these practices on June 26, 2015. Among such practices which the law allows is the recognition and registration of same-sex marriage. Several countries have already passed laws to recognise same-sex marriages but that of the US caused a stir worldwide.

Same-sex marriage is the biggest pollution to the world which is stronger than any chemical pollution the world can think of. It could simply be described as an abomination to the human race. But these practices are criminal on Ghana's legal statutes. The only agenda these people (the homosexuals) are seeking in Ghana is to have the practice decriminalised but they have not succeeded in Ghana [11]. The reason why they have not succeeded is simple. Ghanaians have values which they hold onto. Homosexuality is alien to the Ghanaian value system. Accordingly, it will be difficult for any society or community in Ghana to sanction such a thing. It must also be stressed that even though the constitution of Ghana is a living organism capable of growth like any other constitution elsewhere, nobody in Ghana would want to advise a child to marry his or her colleague of the same sex. Our current law defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman and our criminal code criminalizes same-sex marriage. It is simply a no-go zone area as far as our traditions and religious principles are concerned. All the interviewees stressed that it is evil and that it should be rejected. Running through all the responses of all those interviewed was that the issue of human rights is being taken beyond limits.

In upholding the rights of people, granted that this is done; can the same sex procreate?" Writers' analysis of the implications of the issue of sexual preference to its logical conclusion indicated that "based on sexual preference, people now practice bestiality (sex with animals). Their analysis was if a human being marries a chimpanzee and eventually gives birth to a monster, what then happens to the human race?" In light of this human beings should not think that our Human rights should be limitless. What human beings have forgotten is that nature has laws. The society also has laws and these laws limit our rights [12]. Another equally bad act which deviates from the normal sexual practice which human beings ought not to practice was mentioned by the interviewees. It was pornography. Surprisingly, it is sometimes justified in the name of the rights of the person. What makes it more problematic is the fact that pornographic materials are readily available via the internet which could easily be accessed. There has simply been too much external exposition. This sounded no different from what another writer said.

Have we become abscessed with sex? It is a central issue in much of television, magazines, advertising, music, literature, and conversations. It often appears in business, education, politics and the church. One would have to be a hermit to avoid the sexually arousing stimuli of contemporary culture [6].

The social media has made it so. As a result, people are exposed to things which do not guide them. A writer indicated that we are always sinning on the street because of indecent exposure among the youth. He further indicated that, for some of these deviations to be dealt with to maintain a certain kind of moral standards among the youth, there is the need for proper upbringing by parents and the adult population [13]. This implies that in the end, when people do not have the proper upbringing at home to enable them to set out perimeters to guide their lives, it brings problems. In the end, it is the society that suffers.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitatively, the study sought to examine the Church's challenges in dealing with Moral Issues and the way forward in Ghana. The study adopted a case study research design. The population of the study comprised leaders of Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka and Shiashe. These include the Vice President of the Ghana Baptist Convention and departmental heads at the Ghana Baptist Convention headquarters. Others included the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka with its satellite mission at Shiashe as well as a cross-section of pastors of these churches; the church administrator; the past and present directors of Baptist Relief and Development Agency (BRED). The

purposive sampling technique was specifically used to locate respondents for the study. The churches and participants were chosen because of their efforts in dealing with the causes of immorality confronting Ghanaian society. The main tool for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. The data gathered was organised and analysed manually using emerging themes.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Challenges facing the Church in dealing with Moral Issues

The church has a mission. In Matthew 28, basically to prepare for Jesus' return must be through prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, and witness". These things may form the core mandate of the church, yet there is more that the church should do. These things have been aptly captured by Colson and Pearcey.

But if we focus exclusively on these disciplines and if in the process we ignore our responsibility to redeem the surrounding culture – our Christianity will remain privatised and marginalised ... Turning our backs on the culture is a betrayal of our biblical mandate and our heritage because it denies God's sovereignty over all of life. Nothing could be deadlier for the church or more ill-timed. To abandon the battlefield now is to desert the cause [14].

The point then is that it is not enough that the church concentrates only on what it does as its core mission. It must also extend its missions to embrace "non-traditional" spheres like moral advocacy. The fact is Christianity is more than a private belief and more than personal salvation. It is the truth about all reality. Given this, it is the responsibility of the church to show that it is a comprehensive lifestyle that answers all age-old questions which have to do primarily with our origins, purpose and destination. Non-believers, far and near must be reached with the gospel. This can only be achieved if Christians break out from their "comfort zones" to penetrate their environments to carry out their mandate. There is no doubt that the vision and mission of the Ghana Baptist Convention is in line with what Colson and Pearcey have indicated above as the mission of the universal church. Article 3 clauses 1 and 2 (p. 10) of the GBC constitution spell out the vision and mission of the church. The vision reads; "to fulfil the Great Commission of Jesus Christ." The mission also reads; "to lead Ghana Baptist Convention churches to evangelise the lost, disciple believers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, plant churches, train leaders and ministers to the spiritual and socio-economic needs of the believers."

The vision and mission have guided the Ghana Baptist Convention in designing and executing its duties as prescribed by the Scriptures. But in the churches' operations to fulfil such mandates, especially those concerning morality, the church faces several challenges which came up during the researcher's interaction with a cross-section of both the clergy and the laity of the church. Among some of the challenges discussed below are: the problem of human nature, the politicised environment, wrath from human rights advocates, and resources (both human and financial).

3.1.1. The Problem of Human Nature

One of the challenges revealed by Enoch Thompson during an interview with him was that "the hub of the problems of immorality is the problem of the human heart." It is indicative of the fact that, until the human heart is transformed through the transforming grace of God, the human person will continue to be evil. In other words, until people's minds have been directed to a higher being (who is divine) the human person would always want his/her way. The sociologist will however have a different view from appealing to the Divine when it comes to behavioural issues. He/She will attribute character deviations to dysfunctions in both the family and society and call for proper

alignment of these institutions as a means of dealing with immorality. Others will also appeal to sanctions to serve as a deterrent to check immoral behaviour. But sanctions have been applied in many situations involving behaviour patterns exhibited in our societies yet one would realise that things have not changed much. The bottom line is that human beings are overwhelmingly corrupt and that the policing of morality should come from within the individual.

Surprisingly, sometimes even pastors and church leaders show signs which are contrary to standards as prescribed in scripture. The fact is that people do not want to be corrected. It is a natural tendency for people to resist when they are corrected. Based on this natural tendency, there is the need for a concerted and persistent effort to be made if there would be any headway in the process of reformation of human behaviour.

3.1.2. Politicised Environment

In addition to the above, another key problem which was revealed was “the fact that Ghana’s environment is so much politicised”. There has been a growing tendency for the clergy and those who matter to be criticised when it comes to speaking against moral issues. When issues of corruption for example come up in high places and voices are raised against them by the clergy, the attacks which are directed towards them are sometimes bad. In such a situation, one gets worried including the person's family members. Unfortunately, this politicized environment is fueled by the media. What makes the issue more disturbing is that sometimes there is a misrepresentation of things said by the clergy and for that matter the church by the media. The media presents cases out of context which creates tension. But one thing must be made clear. In as much as the clergy would be misquoted and misrepresented by the media if only the church is speaking the truth, the church should stand by it.

3.1.3. Wrath of Human Rights Advocates

The church encounters the wrath of people who claim they are human rights advocates in her attempt to deal with human rights issues and freedom which imparts morality negatively. This is usually the case because human rights issues are in many respects treated in connection with morality in several forms of discourse. Most of these advocates are informed by secular perspectives on morality. This brings about uncompromising attacks from these human rights advocates against the church on such matters. This understanding was shared by Mallet during an interview with him. According to him,

Stakeholders who are benefiting from such situations pose a problem. This understanding put in its proper perspectives would suggest that if the advocates of human rights and freedom are benefiting from certain chaotic situations, they are likely to rise against the clergy when they speak against them. It must also be understood that there are also people who may not be benefiting but may not see any reason to fight for a behaviour change.

Frimpong, (director of BREDE noted that,

“There are, for instance, counter organisations and individuals regarding the liberation of the trokosi girls which is very dear to the Convention. They hold the view that it is their right to practice their religion and that who is the church to tell them that the practice is immoral and against human rights? The contention of such an organisation in which Africana Mission has played a critical role is that the church also has ladies whom they call sisters (nuns) who serve in the churches. If that is the case, what is wrong if the shrines also take up girls and make them serve at the shrines”?

But one needs to appreciate the critical difference between the sisters and trokosi girls. The difference is that the sisters who serve at the church are not abused. They are trained for them to realise their full potential unlike in the case of the trokosi girls.

3.1.4. Resources

A critical challenge which was expressed by almost all the people interviewed was resources. The resources mentioned included both human and capital resources. In terms of human resources, there is a need for the church to have certain expertise in particular fields that would offer their skills to provide certain services like counselling. However, the church has a limited resource base. Interviewees unanimously noted for example that *“there are limited numbers of trained personnel within the church who may be willing to take up such challenges to deal with”*. For such a human resource base to be developed, a lot of training has to go on in the church to equip people for such a task. However, the financial resources to train such personnel are lacking. Frimpong made mention of the cost involved in liberating the Trokosi girls by the Convention in the Volta Region. He indicated that, generally, *“the cost of liberating slaves sometimes is prohibitive, an average of \$5000 per shrine.”*

In addition to the above, the Baptist Relief and Development Agency (BREDa) posit that *“to ensure a smooth integration of the released slaves back into their communities, the Ghana Baptist Convention has set up the Baptist Vocational Training Centre at Frankadua, in the Eastern Region, where some of the released slaves are given three-year vocational skills training”*. Brochure on Trokosi project). This step is taken after these girls are released to provide them girls with commercial skills and thus the capacity to be economically independent. Such a venture calls for financial resources. This the Baptist Church cannot solely handle. Given this, the project is carried out by the Baptist church in collaboration with their development partners.

3.2. The way forward

Having discussed the challenges which the Baptist church of Ghana faces in its attempt to deal with morality, we will now focus on the way forward. This section will specifically deal with how the challenges could be overcome so that the Church could advance in its quest for morality. Because the rights and freedom of every individual ought to honour God first and also be consistent with societal values. Human rights is like a tool with double edges which when used properly could help advance the nation to the highest but if not properly used could cause problems. Implicit in this submission is the fact that *“good elements”* in human rights must be harnessed for the good of society while the *“bad elements”* should be discarded.

During the researcher's interview sessions, all the interviewees unanimously indicated that the way forward for the church to succeed in her quest for morality in Ghana is to intensify education so that people can have a balance on what these things mean, that is, human rights, freedom and morality. The interesting thing is that the majority of Ghanaians attend church. Because of this the church can win the battle if it names and shames its members and also shows disapproval to practices that are considered to be unethical. Caution must however be exercised in resorting to this approach so as not to incur the displeasure of the society. The church should stick to the unadulterated word of God. Implying the church should not be seen as shifting positions.

Other varying responses were given on the way forward which are also worth noting. Threaded in these responses in addition to the above was the understanding that the church would have to wake up. Rev. Ofori (Director, of Evangelism and Missions-GBC) suggested that *“the church must wake up”*. The Church must go back to scripture and make disciples of all nations. He emphasized one of the core mandates of the church – evangelism. According to him, more people should be disciples so that they would come to know Christ. For him when this happens, he believes immorality would be reduced.

There is truth in what was advocated by Rev. Ofori because people only behave according to their beliefs and it is only the bible that can impact their lives. The Bible must be made to shape culture. We must all go back to where human rights started– the Garden of Eden.

This Church by its teaching imposes certain limitations on a person which is good for nation-building and societal development. He concluded by saying “Let us evangelize.” The Church is also the light of the world. No wonder Jesus Christ commanded the church to occupy till he comes. Given this, the church should continue to persist in the things it is doing and do them better. Implicit in the above is an enormous task that the Church has if the church can reform society to the best of standards as prescribed by scripture. What Ametorwobla indicated during an interview with him shed some light on the task that the Church has. He indicated that the “church must rediscover its voice for the people.” There must be the understanding that there are a lot of people who would not get justice unless the Church speaks for them. As discussed earlier on, but for the Voice of the Church, the Trokosi girls might not have been liberated. It is indicative of the fact that the church has been placed in the world to bring transformation in our social, moral, spiritual and economic life.

Additionally, the interviewees indicated that “Human rights, freedom, and morality are needs. Based on this, they should all be treated together and all should be given their proper places in our scheme of things. They further called for effective education by the Church on these critical values so that people can clearly understand them and exercise them responsibly”.

The battle could be won if all who matter in our society rise against these ills which are destroying our societies, for where there is a will, there is a way. It is more of determination which is needed to carry out the task of reforming the society to make it a better place for all. According to Prof. Somuah, *“The church needs a master plan and prayer to be able to overcome the problem of immorality in Ghana”*.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that the challenges which the Baptist Church encounters in its effort to deal with moral issues are the politicisation of statements made by the clergy, and inadequate trained personnel who are willing and ready to champion the agenda of the church in that respect. Financial difficulties were also mentioned. In this regard, specific reference was made to the effort made by the Ghana Baptist Convention to free the Trokosi girls. It was indicated that it takes a lot of financial resources to train and settle the freed girls. Regarding the way forward as far as these challenges were concerned, it was suggested that the church ought to speak more and do what it is mandated by Christ to do to bring about transformation. It is recommended that Churches should seriously intensify education on what constitutes human rights and freedom so that there would be a clear understanding of the concept that enables people to think through and adopt the good aspects to enhance their circumstances. Human rights defenders should exercise restraints when it comes to practices which are alien to Ghanaian values, laws and religious faith. The church should intensify its missionary work to be able to win more souls for the Lord since when people become “authentic Christians” there are certain practices they would not involve themselves in.

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