RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR NATION BUILDING IN POST-COLONIAL GHANA

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Abstract: *When confronted with the problem of development, most critical thinkers opt for either scientific technology with business innovations or political expediency. This article expounds on religion as a moral force in national development. As a result of the analysis, it is possible to conclude that religion as a phenomenon does not hamper development, rather, it is the use, and the misuse of religion to push an agenda that projects religion as a tool of aggression, violence and destruction. In a positive tone, the article argues for the use of religious and moral education in political discourse and holistic nation building in post-colonial Ghana. The article hinges on Ron Rhodes' theory of the impossibility of distinguishing evil from good unless one has an infinite reference point which is absolutely good. The rational of the study is therefore to critically examine the impact of religion on the developmental agenda of Ghana, a country in West Africa that is furiously religious and pluralistic. Thus, the study intends to defend religion as the most powerful actor in civil society within the Ghanaian context.*

Key Words: Post-Colonialism, Education, Morality, Religion, Socio-Economic Development

Introduction

Religion is of great importance in social transformation. However, despite the role religion plays in the socio-economic development of nations, some notable scholars of religion including Joshua Kudadjie and Peter Berger argued that religion is a tool of social destruction, violence and retrogression.[1] Berger contended that religion cannot be a tool for development since the acquiescent role of women in Islam

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[1] Joshua Kudadjie, "Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies?," *Religion in a Pluralistic Society,* ed. J. S. Pobee (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 60-70.; See also Peter L. Berger "Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today," *Sociology of Religion*, 62,4 (2001): 443-454.

for example is a catalyst for economic drag.[2] He argued that the isolation of part of a population from certain productive activities is detrimental to development.[3] As a result, Berger affirmed the theory that secularisation is the direct result of development and modernisation.[4] This underscores Jeffrey Haynes' critical and substantiated claim that "after World War II, most Western governments and development agencies saw religion as part of the development problem".[5]

Nevertheless, in spite of the tag on religion as injurious to the socio-economic wellbeing and political health of nations, the study argues that religion is a vital tool for development rather than an obstacle to development. This is because, of late, many faith-based organisations (FBOs) such as the World Vision and Compassion International have adopted the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for fighting the menace of poverty around the world. They are also working towards achieving the key principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" in order to enhance social justice, peace and reconciliation, human dignity and stewardship of creation.

Indigenous Worldview of Morality and Development

The view that Africans are naturally religious is well-known and despite Okot P' Bitek's criticism of John Mbiti's popularly known pronouncement that Africans are notoriously religious,[6] Mbiti's philosophy of religion which has been intensified by Magesa is still absolutely authentic for the overall quest for meaning of life in Africa today.[7] This is because, largely, the impact of religion on development in Africa is overwhelmingly tenable. As such, the study is of no doubt

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[2] Berger, "Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today," 443-454.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

[6] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Book Ltd, 1969). See also Okot P. Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Literature Bureau, 1971).

[7] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

that Mbiti's claim that Africans are incurably religious is beyond reasonable objection in any serious academic discourse or debate on 'religionism' of Africans. In fact, in my view, Mbiti's pronouncement remains the most profound declaration on religion in post-colonial Africa by any African sociologist or anthropologist of religion.

In the light of the above, the study takes the *homo religiosus* stance that Africans are by nature religious, and that their morality is utterly depended on their religious ethos and disposition, which translates to development. Though this view has been rejected by Kudadjie, who argued that it is "invalid", "unacceptable", "erroneous", "unsound", "illogical" as well as "uncritical" and "partial" analysis of the facts, and a "theological misrepresentation" to suggest that Africans are "notoriously" and "incurably" religious,[8] I argue that religion is the bedrock of good morals in Ghanaian societies generally. This sharply objects to Kudadjie's pronouncements despite Jan Platvoet and Rinsum Van Henk's defense that "Kudadjie made this argument only in relation to the claim that the morality of African societies was exclusively, totally and necessarily based on their indigenous religions and therefore completely religiously inspired".[9]

According to Kent Kille, the United Nations (UN) Resolution 217 upholds peace, freedom, social progress, equal right and human dignity as universal human values.[10] This UN resolution considers the aforementioned human values as basic moral principles that are acceptable to different cultures. It also maintains that these human values are not necessarily induced by religion. This philosophical viewpoint that bills values to reason and denies their relation to religion is not new. A secular claim for the rationality of moral values goes far back in history and persists. Baeta recalls how Epicurean Lucretius, a fierce

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[8] Joshua Kudadjie, "Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies?: A Viewpoint," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 4-5 (1973): 30-49. See also Kudadjie "Aspects of Religion and Morality in Ghanaian Traditional Society with particular reference to Ga Adangme," *The Conch: A Sociological Journal of African Cultures and Literatures* 7, 1 & 2 (1975): 26-53.

[9] Jan Platvoet and Rinsum Van Henk, "Is Africans Incurably Religious? Confessing and Contesting an Invention," *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* (2003): 1.

[10] Kent Kille (ed.), *The UN Secretary-General and Moral Authority: Ethics and Religion in International Leadership* (Washington DC: George Town University Press, 1994). See also United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights.

opponent of religion as a factor in human life, is reported to have taught that

> the ever-widening knowledge and understanding of Nature, that is to say, science, would eventually do away with religion and all other superstition and vain speculation, and would thereby gradually make men good or at least increase the good in them.[11]

What Baeta reports about Lucretius in the foregoing excerpt shows the ancient philosophical roots of the idea that knowledge and understanding of nature make people morally good. However, Edward Kessler's opposing persuasion against this view intensifies the argument for the need to improve religious literacy, not only among citizens, but also among policy makers and politicians in general so that they would be better informed and equipped to be able to sustain the development of communities, and to more effectively manage societal tension and conflict for peaceful co-existence.[12]

Data Analysis

A careful analysis of the data collected from the fieldwork suggests that every human moral act of goodness is rooted deeply in a religious worldview consciously or unconsciously. I have personally interviewed a total of 41 Ghanaians residing in Ghana and the United Kingdom respectively. The face to face interview demography comprises of Christians, Muslims, Indigenous African Religion practitioners and atheists purposively (approximately 30 minutes each) and the result I got from this field research as highlighted in the abstract was that nearly, every moral goodness is derived from religious persuasions. Also, the evidence from the field work suggests that every human value, be it universal or homogenous, has antecedence in some religious belief systems. The study therefore argues that there is no atheist or agnostic when it comes to moral choice, particularly with regards to Africans, who are the focus of this research.

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[11] Christian Baeta, "Progress and Human Values: Education, Human Values and Nation Building," *Proceedings of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences* XXV (1986): 40.
[12] Edward Kessler, "The Changing Religious Landscape: Implications for Civil Society and Foreign Affairs," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies*, 14 (2017): 20.

The findings of my field work summarised in the foregoing relates harmoniously with Aquinas' logical argument from Gradation of Being for the proof of the existence of God in his *Summa Theologica* even though criticisms against his moral argument for the proof of the existence of God abound in contemporary discourse regarding the relation among religion, reason, and morality in diverse and local religious contexts. John Clayton for example, argues that the local uses of theistic argument is imperative to the use of religious and cultural differences at the public sphere and calls for the engagement of historically grounded philosophical arguments in public debate on religious claims.[13] This viewpoint provides room for the perception that the world is becoming more and more religious than ever with the call for its "desecularisation."[14]

In the light of this, the study underscores the point that atheists are the most direct opponents of Rhodes' theory of the impossibility of distinguishing evil from good unless one has an infinite reference point which is absolutely good. According to Rhodes, atheists are essentially anti-religion and deny the existence of God with the claim that ethical guidelines emerge in human societies by trial and error as traffic laws emerged after the invention of car.[15] Thus for Rhodes, atheists consider right actions as those that bring the greatest good in the long run with the firm conviction that situations bring about the need for new or adjusted ethical guidelines in societies.[16] The strongest of this argument originated from the atheist evolutionist biologist and geneticist Richard Dawkings. Dawkings forcefully argues that religion is no moral compass for society and that it is a horrible idea to suggest that we get moral direction from religion.[17] The philosopher Richard Harries endorses Dawking's views and stresses the point that

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[13] John Clayton, *Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[14] Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1999).

[15] Ron Rhodes, "Strategies for Dialoguing with Atheists," *Christian Research Journal*, Winter/Spring (1989): 7.

[16] Rhodes, "Strategies for Dialoguing with Atheists," 7.

[17] Richard Dawkings, *The God Delusion: 10th Anniversary Edition* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2016).

it is possible to be morally good without reference to God or any object of absolute goodness.[18]

Nevertheless, the essential question arising from Dawkings and Harries regarding the relationship between morality and existence of a deity is, can there be any genuine atheist according to the classical definition of atheism as disbelief in the existence of God or an ultimate reality? In response to this question, it is important to highlight the findings of a research conducted by the Pew Survey Centre which established that most people who describe themselves as atheists say that they believe in a universal spirit.[19] Similarly, a survey by Let Us Reason Together pointed out that "No one is born an atheist, they learn NOT to believe, just as one learns to believe".[20] This line of argument suggests that atheists, agnostics and sceptics fundamentally perform acts of moral goodness based on some philosophical presuppositions premised on some belief systems as a result of previous encounter with religion through observation, research and participation or by birth. This viewpoint concurs largely with the essential argument of the study that acts of moral goodness are necessarily triggered by religious persuasions, a position strongly supported by the data from the field research.

Religious and Moral Education in Ghanaian Schools

The argument for and against the teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) as a subject in the curriculum of Ghanaian schools is a relentless one. As such, as much as we need to reflect on RME as a panacea for national development, we also need to understand the implications of the use of religion in advancing national course. This is because, even though religion has been upheld as sacrosanct, with the upsurge of religious fundamentalism and extremism today, many people, especially the non-religious are wondering if the teaching of RME in schools can really have a positive impact on the behaviour and character of people. This therefore created a situation for the

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[18] Richard Harries, "Is Reason Always Right?," *The Guardian*, May 29, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/uk.
[19] "10 Facts about Atheists," *The PewResearch*, June 1, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org.
[20] "No one is born an atheist, they learn NOT to believe, just as one learns to believe," *Let Us Reason Together*, July 4, 2016, http://www.letusreason.org.

deemphasising and rejecting of the religious option of moral upbringing precisely because it has been perceived to be providing opportunity for violence and terror.

Similarly, Kudadjie attests to laps in religious fervour and how those laps have affected the morality of the nation. He thus questions the assumptions that underpinned religion as a determining factor of morality in African societies. He also advances a kind of new atheistic argument that even though Africans exhibit good morals, this does not emanate necessarily from religion. This is because, for him, logically, religious fervour is a contributing factor to bad working ethics and undesirable cultural practices such as human sacrifice and ritual servitude practised in indigenous religions of Africa for example, which visibly affect the development of the nation. He nonetheless admits the fact that aside secular organisations and institutions, religion also provides effective moral sanctions or compass for life.[21] In this regard, Philip Nel underscores Kudadjie's assertion when he argued that African morality is not necessarily based on religious persuasions.[22] Nevertheless, after a careful evaluation of the assertions by Kudadjie and Nel, I came to the conclusion that family and community values also greatly impact the moral well-being of the individual Ghanaian.

In contrast to the foregoing, the Anamuah-Mensah Educational Reform Review Committee Report of 2002 recommended the teaching of RME at the primary and junior high schools in Ghana. The justification for this was that the moral and religious upbringing of children will propel them to become responsible citizens for peaceful co-existence and nation building. This proposal presupposes that the introduction of RME into the curricula of schools was to redeem the falling standards of morality. It is on the basis of this and the earlier arguments adduced that the study argues that good religious and moral education cannot be to the detriment of society because it has the potency of igniting the spirit of patriotism for peaceful co-existence, adequate human security and higher life expectancy. "This calls for an introspection of the definition of quality education in Ghana, in order

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[21] J.N. Kudadjie, "Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies?: A Viewpoint," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 4-5 (1973): 30-49.

[22] Philip Nel, "Morality and Religion in African Thought," *Acta Theologica* 28, no. 2 (2008), 1.

not to develop a generation of formidable technocrats with very weak morals."[23]

According to Wilberforce Dzisa,

> quality education is not simply how efficient we teach children to read, write and solve simple arithmetic or how children reproduce what has been taught in the classroom. Rather, quality education should encompass preparing children to develop the critical mindset to think independently; the ability to be creative and innovative in the way they do things; develop high moral fibre by placing God first and prayer at the centre of their lives.[24]

There is no doubt that the foregoing vividly captures the nuance and the central argument of the study. The study contends that when people understand public service as working for God and not merely for human beings, they would eschew greed and corruption; uphold human dignity; promote human freedom; defend social justice; uphold self-integrity; and stimulate social harmony and cohesion. This, the study insists will enhance transparency, truthfulness and accountability among citizens with strong sense of decorous in their professional and political engagements. The point being made here is that religion has profound implications for the professional world and that is why of recent, there have been the formation of fellowships and associations of professionals such the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (LCF) and the Association of Muslim Lawyers (AML) to bring religiosity and spirituality to bear on their professional engagements and practices in order to serve society better and in the spirit of religious virtues and morality.

Understanding Religion

Elizabeth Nottingham describes religion as the system of beliefs, doctrines, ethics and ways of life aimed at enlightenment, deliverance and salvation.[25] Emile Durkheim also gave one of the most profound definitions (or descriptions) of religion. He stated that religion is a unified

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[23] Wilberforce S. Dzisa, "Technology, Innovation and Christian Values: The Catalysts for Progressive Quality Education," *Ghanaweb*, September 2, 2017, https://www.ghanaweb.com.
[24] Dzisa, "Technology, Innovation."
[25] Elizabeth Nottingham, *Religion and Society* (New York: Random House 1963).

system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite one single moral community such as the Church and its adherents.[26]

In my view, Durkheim set out to do two things. First, he sought to establish the fact that religion is not divinely or supernaturally inspired and that religion is a product of society. He also sought to identify the common things that religion placed an emphasis upon and the effects of those religious beliefs and practices on society. Durkheim, concerned with social solidarity throughout his academic career, was primarily conscious of religion as a functional source of social cohesion.[27] As said before, religion acts to pull people together mentally and physically in the form of religious services or assemblies. By so doing, religion is able to reaffirm collective ethical morals and beliefs in the minds of all members of the community. This does not disregard the fact that some rationalists also use Durkheim to support their case for morality without religion.

Nonetheless, let us not be misled! In truth, some of the people who took part in the interview for this study as early on stated, argued that the erosion of virtues from the fabric of society cannot solely be attributed to the decline in religious values because religious education is not the only answer to the restoration of moral goodness in society. They also believe that religion can potentially unite people. This strikes a sharp chord with the central thesis of the article that without prejudice, religion is a motivating factor for desirable social and personal moral values when such values are transmitted devoid of fundamentalism, fanaticism or indoctrination for evil agenda. This is why the study strongly affirms that Alice Anti and Eric Anum are right when they vehemently argued against omitting references to religion from the classroom claiming this would lead to the neglecting of vitally essential parts of human life including culture, literature, art and history.[28]

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[26] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* trans. Kenneth Thompson (London: Tavistock Publications, 1912).

[27] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*.

[28] Alice Anti and Eric Anum, "Religious and Moral Education" (Unpublished, 2003).

Religious and moral education in post-colonial Ghana

Until the arrival of the Europeans in the Gold Coast in 1471, people were traditionally educated and trained for self and community development. This was done through apprenticeships and instructions in cultural and religious moral values of a particular tribe or homogenous group of people for the good of the entire society. However, in the course of settling in Ghana, European colonialists-built schools at the forts and castles to educate their own children born with the indigenous women. Later, children of rich and influential Ghanaians including chiefs and merchants were admitted into the castle schools which were European prototype schools. This marked the beginning of "formal" education in Ghana, with Christian religious education forming an integral part of this colonial education system. This led to the inclusion of religious and moral education in the educational curricula of Ghana over the years so as to help students recognise the spiritual dimension of life.

Morality, religion and nation building in post-colonial Ghana

The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms defines morality as "the rightness or wrongness of actions in relation to a standard or norm of conduct."[29] Religion can also be defined as a belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities or rituals that are connected with the worship of those beings or "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.[30] In intellectual history, there are 3 (three) major schools of thought on the relationship between religion and morality. The first school of thought states that morality depends on religion. This view argues that there is no morality without reference to religion and that moral actions are by all means judged against a particular religious teaching. The second school of thought maintains that morality is independent of religion. In other words, we do not need religion to be morally good. Finally, the third school of thought moots that morality is opposed to religion. This presupposes that religion corrupts morality.

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[29] Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 179.
[30] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*.

It is in the context of the first school of thought discussed above that I analyse the role of religious and moral education in nation building in post-colonial Ghana. According to the Ghana Statistical Service 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC), 71.2% of the population profess the Christian faith, followed by Islam (17.6%) and traditional religion (5.2%).[31] Only 5.3% of the Ghanaian population of 24, 658, 823, according to this census report are not affiliated to any religion.[32] Yet, it is no secret that corruption, crime, laziness, dishonesty and materialism are fast gaining grounds in Ghana in recent times. This, according to the data from the field work, can be attributed to the decline in religious moral values in the system. As such, most well-meaning people are calling for sanity in the practice of religion in general, be it African Indigenous Religion (AIR), Islam or Christianity, which are the dominant religions claiming the centre stage at the public square.

This calls for increased religious and moral education both at formal and informal sectors so as to create a morally healthy society for accelerated and sustained national development. By and large, the study establishes that people's moral behaviours are being informed by the religion they practice. Thus, on the one hand, bad and undesirable religious doctrines and practices are a recipe for bad morals such as dishonesty, greed and lust with serious detrimental consequences for nation building. On the other hand, healthy and desirable religious teachings produce good morals such as honesty, selflessness, humility and hard work. In the views of the study, the latter is a recipe for holistic nation building. This resonates with the fact that character is essential to morality in African cosmological milieu.

In the light of the above, I concur with Sam Woode that it is the rejection of God's moral order in the world that is causing selfishness, discrimination, gossiping, rumour mongering, telling lies, nepotism, sexual immorality, bribery, corruption, plunder, greed, rapaciousness, misconduct and abuse of power in most societies today.[33] Hence, in

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[31] Ghana Statistical Service, *2010 Population & Housing Census Summary Report of the Final Results* (Accra: GSS, 2012).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Sam Wood, *Ethics in Business and Public Administration: An Introductory Essays and Cases* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2000).

my judgement, the moral corruption that is being experienced in most communities in Ghana of late stems from the promotion and the use of secular values as the standard for life.

In a Ghanaweb Press article, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the current president of the Republic of Ghana adduced one of the most distinctive arguments for the use of religious values in tackling the problem of development. In a statement I consider to be profound and unprecedented, he opined that "We are a nation of religious people. Religion permeates all aspects of our lives and it is an every day, every time and every place affair. We must, therefore, be able to use religion to play a positive role in providing the guidance that is needed for the progress of our country."[34] He goes on to underscore the fact that "We should use religion to engender patriotism and love for our nation and that, the ethical foundation of religion must give us the impetus to enjoin rights and forbid wrongs."[35] This view resonates strictly with the claim made by Jerry John Rawlings, a former president of Ghana that there is "divinity in truthfulness, justice, integrity, loyalty, faith-fulness, good work, respect and concern for one another, the environ-ment and the divinity in the golden rule."[36] It is against this backdrop and the arguments so far advanced that I underscore the point that development cannot be propelled exclusively by technological ad-vancement and political expediency in post-colonial Ghana. In my view, the drive for holistic and accelerated and sustainable develop-ment lies in the use of sound religious teachings and values as a moral force in public life and political discourse and technological revolu-tion.

In effect, I am of the opinion that the concepts of nation building and socio-economic development play out heavily with easy access to basic necessities of postmodern life such as food, water, clothing, shelter, sanitation, health care, education, employment, communica-tion, transportation and security. In this vein, greater human freedom,

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[34] Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, "Religion must Engender Patriotism," *Ghanaweb*, January 13, 2017, https://www.ghanaweb.com.
[35] Akufo-Addo, "Religion must Engender Patriotism."
[36] Jerry John Rawlings, "Why God should lead NDC," *Ghanaweb*, February 6, 2017, https://www.ghanaweb.com.

justice, creativity, self-discipline and financial security are typically associated with holistic human well-being and sustainable development. As such, even though the effect of religion on morality is enormous and that religious beliefs and behaviours continue to exert significant deterrent effect on people's immoral behaviours, I strongly argue that religion and morality are bedfellows and that the best life for the African necessitates that a person must be both moral and religious.

Conclusion

I argue from the foregoing discussions that the current moral chaos in Ghana is due to the decline of religious moral values. This leads to the upsurge of social vices including corruption, robbery, lawlessness, rudeness, envy, laziness, injustice, impatience, drug abuse, alcoholism, abortion, war, euthanasia, lust and sexual immorality.

I also show that in our quest to build a prosperous nation in this post-colonial era and globalised world, there is the need to engage religion in the nation's political and economic discourse and processes. I am nonetheless aware of the major challenging issue facing this proposal, the ability to determine right religious values since many religions are competing for space at the public gallery with their respective truth claims and struggle for superiority and prominence. I therefore recommend that in the context of rising religious pluralism and secularism, there should be positive consensus about using a hybrid of religious value systems towards holistic development of Ghana. This must be based on the harmonisation of religious development trajectories to achieve widespread development and reduction in poverty, injustice, crime, corruption, immorality and poor work ethics among citizens.

The article contends that even though aspects of religious dictates can be immoral, leadership system based on secular ethics cannot be sustained in contemporary discourse on morality and development in Ghana. This is because, even though it can be argued that non-religious people demonstrate good morals in both public office and private life, I am of the view that by and large, as Africans, when we come to the crossroads of our moral dilemmas, it is our faith and religious persuasions that decide for us right or wrong actions. This is

why I insist on the inclusion and strengthening of religious and moral education in both formal and informal educational sectors for holistic nation building.

In conclusion, I will like to reemphasise the had-core argument of the study that religion is indispensably the primary root of morality and character building and good leadership in Ghana, and Africa by extension, and that religion and morality are inextricably intertwined since pre-colonial era till date. As a result, as a nation and continent for that matter, we seem willy-nilly to be moving towards our own doom by downgrading the role of religion in development and the moral vision of the society.

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