

The Role of Ghana Baptist Convention in Addressing Human Rights, Freedom, and Moral Issues in Ghana: Successes and Challenges

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ABSTRACT: Globally, human beings everywhere expect the realisation of diverse systems of rights, freedom and moral values to ensure their individual and collective well-being. This was highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which emphasises provision of access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Human rights, freedom and morality as concepts continue to generate a lot of debate within the global community; and Ghana is not an exception. **The purpose** of this study was to examine and evaluate how the Ghana Baptist Convention responds to contemporary debate on human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society. **Methodology:** Qualitative research approach and descriptive research design were employed. Data was collected from various historical documents of the Ghana Baptist Convention to enhance an in-depth study about the role of Ghana Baptist Convention in addressing moral issues in Ghana. Nine laity and ordained Ghana Baptist Convention personalities were purposively sampled and interviewed to gather data. **Data analysis:** The data gathered was analysed qualitatively to describe the role of the church in dealing with moral issues related specifically to human rights and freedom. **Results:** The study found that there was a relationship between human rights, freedom and morality and that, unfettered assertion of right and freedom has impacted on morality negatively. **Conclusion:** the study concluded that the unprincipled assertion of human rights and freedom without recourse to societal norms and ethical standards prescribed by God impact on morality negatively. **Recommendation:** This study recommends that Ghanaians should critically examine the concepts of human rights and freedom in the light of our value system, laws and religious faith. Again, all churches in Ghana and for that matter the Baptist Convention must intensify its missionary work so as to win more souls for the Lord.

Keywords: Human Rights, Freedom, Ghana Baptist Convention, Morality, Successes, Challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that human rights and freedom are very critical for the total development of an individual and the society in general. This notwithstanding, much efforts have been made globally to regulate how it is asserted and exercised. The call for *freedom* has always found expression in almost all documents which regulate human behaviour. In pursuance of freedom, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) issued by the United Nations (UN) made extensive provisions for such expressions. For instance, Article 19 reads: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." Ghana is a signatory to the UN Charter on Human Rights. In that regard, it has solemnly declared and affirmed its commitment to freedom in the preamble of the Fourth Republic Constitution of 1992. In addition to other provisions for the enjoyment of freedom made in the constitution of Ghana, the whole of chapter five of the constitution entitled "Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom" has been entrenched as an attempt to protect and guarantee the enjoyment of rights and freedom by Ghanaian citizens (Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Chapter 5).

However, the exercise of freedom has been a bit of a problem and has significantly impacted negatively on the moral fibre of every community in Ghana. Today, we find so much immorality in our society manifesting itself in the form of general indiscipline among people, sexual problems including homosexuality, irresponsible media reportage and a lot more. Surprisingly, all these immoralities are strongly defended as expressions of the individual's rights and freedom of choice. The consequences of these developments are that, our societies are fractured to the core in the name of human rights and freedom. The church should be at the forefront because it

has the mandate to reform society and to create a culture of decency. According to Colson and Pearcey, (1999) this mandate is what some theologians call the *cultural commission* (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). All Christians, Moslems and Traditionalists can do better in their effort to deal with issues of immorality in our society amidst human rights and freedom. However, empirical literature reviewed indicate that researches have not treated the role of individual churches in the promotion of human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society with the seriousness it deserves. The present study was therefore conducted to fill this knowledge gap by examining how the Ghana Baptist Convention responds to contemporary debate on human rights and freedom relative to moral issues in Ghana, highlighting the successes and challenges.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation of Morality

For many decades now, understanding human morality has been of particular interest to researchers. This study, which examines the role of Ghana Baptist Convention in addressing human rights, freedom, and moral issues in Ghana is guided by Divine Command Theory of morality. This theory is employed to better understand human morality as pertained to the Ghana Baptist Church Convention.

Divine Command Theory

Given the high place in the biblical ethics for God's commands and the assumption throughout Scripture that his commands are to be obeyed, and emphasis on God's commands, biblical principles are an integral part of Christian ethics. Frequently, when Christians stress God's commands in their system of ethics, they advocate what is called a *divine command* theory of ethics (Rae, 2000). A divine command system is one in which the ultimate foundation for morality is the revealed will of God, namely, the commands of God as found in Scripture. God knew that not all people would have access to truths of Scripture at all times, so he inscribed a law upon their hearts. Some have described this knowledge of the law as *innate* or as a *natural inclination*.

Morality may be conceived as a value system. As a value system, morality constitutes a form or pattern of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and thus cherished by every society irrespective of cultural differences. These differences notwithstanding, morality has a universal appeal. Both Christians and non-Christians admit the universality of moral law.

Perhaps, the main text in the bible which affirms this position in a broad sense is Romans 2:14-15. Paul states,

Indeed when Gentiles, who do not have the moral law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them (N I V).

Paul in this context, was making reference to natural law. According to him, natural law manifests itself in the conscience of every man and is the norm according to which the whole human race will be judged on the day of reckoning as he continued in the verse 16. On the basis of this, human beings are expected to live according to God's divine command. Plato also pointed out that "being moral, was inherently valuable, apart from any additional benefits it produced or harm that it enabled a person to avoid" (as cited in Rae, 2000.p 11).

III. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Human Rights: An overview of its Origin and Conception

The basic understanding of the idea of the modern concept of human rights emerged from the philosophical understanding of the idea of natural rights. As a result of this, some people do not recognise any difference between the two concepts. Some people regard both concepts as the same. Others, however, choose to differentiate between them with the view of eliminating the traditional features associated with natural rights because they consider the concept of natural rights as frequently requiring natural law for its existence. Emphatically, the old age natural law is what became natural rights and eventually human rights. In the words of D'Entreves (1962, p.7), "for two thousand years, the idea of natural law has played a prominent part in thought and in history." It has, however, been associated with a lot of ambiguities. According to D'Entreves, Cicero (106-43 B.C) defined Natural Law as:

True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; ..., and there will be one master and one ruler, that is, God, over us all, for He is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge" (1962, pp. 20-21).

The content of the above definition is believed to have set forth the doctrine of natural law into proper perspective. Basically, the function of natural law was considered as a moral standard and an ultimate foundation of divine providence (D'Entreves, 1967). This function was however narrowly circumscribed with time. Eventually, medieval conception of natural law became progressively tilted towards Natural Rights. As a result, philosophies espoused by Grotius, Pufendorf and others detached natural law from religion, laying the foundation for the secular, rationalistic version of modern natural law. Consequently, Grotius for instance defined natural law as a "dictate of right reason" (as cited in D'Entreves, 1967, p. 37). With the disintegration of natural law, the great treaties such as Magna Carta (1215), The Petition of Rights (1628) and the English Bill of Rights (1689) in England which emerged from the medieval times right up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not contain many theological elements. Writers of 17th and 18th centuries elaborate the "modernist" conception of natural law as meaning or implying natural rights. The scientific and the intellectual discoveries of the time also ushered in the Age of Enlightenment. This actually fuelled a growing confidence in human reason and in the perfectibility of human affairs. This led to a more comprehensive expression and secularisation of the concept of natural law. All these efforts were aimed at resolving moral problems which had confronted society.

At a point in time, there was seemingly settled notion that the natural rights theory had resolved moral problems society had been confronted with over the centuries. Unfortunately, this seemingly settled notion was again challenged. According to D'Entreves (1962), the natural rights theory was revisited because of the horrors which took place during World War II. As a result, there emerged a large variety of presentations and analyses among scholars who sought to address the inadequacies inherent in the theories of moral philosophy. The common idea which emerged from the modern theorists of human rights was that a minimum absolute or core postulate of any just and universal system of rights must include some recognition of the value of individual freedom or autonomy (Shestack, 1998, para. 55). It is evident that the "modified version" of natural rights theory has had an influence on our modern conventional international human rights norms. A classical reflection of that influence is found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself (UDHR, 1948).

Freedom: An overview of its Origin and Conception

There has been every indication that the desire for freedom has been momentous in human history. That desire has been publicised all over the world. It has often been characterised with protest movements on our streets, on school campuses and in conference halls. Even revolutions which have been so rampant in human history are usually justified in the name of freedom. One may however ask; what really is the meaning of freedom? Perhaps, Martin Luther King Junior's statement may help shed more lights on freedom. He asserts that, "there is nothing in the entire world greater than freedom. It is worth paying for; it is worth losing a job for; it is worth going to jail for" (as cited in Clark, 1973, p. 1). Reitmerster has indicated that "with origins and the study of origins, we find that as life emerged, freedom emerged – in the separation and movement of the first amoeba, the first protozoa, and the first stir of animal life" (1970, p.136). It is upon this reflection that he (Reitmerster) probably made the statement that "freedom is probably the sweetest word in any language. It is also the most affirmative" (1970, p. 3).

The assertion and the exercise of freedom has been varied over the years at different times. This notwithstanding, there are certain conditions which help a people to formulate a conception of freedom generally. Among these conditions are "the wants of man, what man feels threatened by and the possibilities for progress in that age" (Clark, 1973, p. 2). Socrates (469 – 399 B.C), Plato (427 – 347 B.C) and Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C) among others, wrote extensively on the subject of freedom. They placed humans above ordinary natural transactions because of their humanness. On the basis of this, it was believed that the nature in which humans participate transcended physical nature and that the actions of humans were most human if in harmony with what was known to be true. Implicit in the above conception is a notion of freedom as self-control by surrender to a higher reality.

Philo (20 B.C – 40 AD) wrote during the post-pagan period. In Philo's view, "man participated in God's own freedom from natural laws" (Clark 1973, p. 6). Philo therefore tried to indicate as it were that, spiritual liberty was a free obedience to God. Philo in this regard, cited Paul and Augustine's conversion experience and advocated this for Christians. During the medieval period, thinkers and philosophers like Aquinas (1224 – 1274 AD) did not argue so much about whether or not humans have the will to choose freely. Instead, much of their task was focused on an explanation regarding how humans can choose freely. Like their predecessors, they also rooted human's free choice in relation to Infinite Goodness by the analysis of the formal objects of the faculties of knowing and willing. By so doing, the medieval writers detected that the dynamism towards infinite being is implicit in the experience of willing anything (Clark 1973).

Before modern conception of freedom, there had been a settled notion on the functioning of nature. That notion had been built on the deterministic philosophy which Democritus (460 BC-370 BC) and the Epicureans (431 BC-270 BC) had elaborated. Hence, the basic understanding of freedom which had featured in philosophies up to the medieval time had been that humans only participate in a world ordered by God. But Descartes (1596 – 1650) taught that man chooses freely. He did this by a “drastic separation of man as mind from nature as an extended matter” (Clark, 1973, p.9). According to Clark, (1973), it was necessary because the understanding of this lofty venture was as it were, to justify that the functioning of the material universe, according to its own “mechanical laws” could take place without bringing man’s freedom into the “equation.”

There has been several efforts by many to elaborate Descartes’ conception. To a large extent, there has been much success. By establishing the human mind as a judge of all truth, these philosophers eventually rendered God irrelevant. One thing must however be understood. All traditional notions of social order are grounded in morality and responsibility. This conception is derived from self-control by surrender to a higher authority. These moral convictions got crumbled when God was “dismissed” and considered as irrelevant and nonexistent in the affairs of humans.

Morality: An overview of its Origin and Conception

Morality cannot be spoken of independent of a system of conventions, customs and laws. It can only be spoken of if the question of the correctness or incorrectness, truth or falsity of the rules prevalent in a community are asked. It can only be spoken of if the prevailing behaviour patterns of community members violate the existing norms according to which it is governed. It must, however, be noted that the talk of morality within any community raises questions as to whether what is considered moral is for the common good of the entire community. Morality refers to “the actual content of right and wrong” (Rae, 2000, p. 15). According to Russel, “Superstition is the origin of moral rules” (as cited in Reitmeister, 1970, p. 549). From a sober reflection, Reitmeister (1970, p. 12) concluded that, “the *primitive man* got on well before “puritans” came to be. He further argued that this knowledge was manifested in handling the physical relationships between male and female among other things” (1970, p. 549). From the above, there is every indication that the issue of morality and for that matter moral speculation has not, like other aspects of human life any abrupt and absolute commencement. Morality simply has its roots in the “naive and fragmentary utterances of sage precepts for conduct, in which nascent moral reflection everywhere first manifest itself” (Sidgwick & Widgery, 1931, p. 12). The implication is that, to attempt to place any timeline on the beginning of morality will be an effort in futility.

According to the Christian and Jewish Law of God, morality is conceived as a positive law of a theoretic community (Sidgwick & Widgery, 1931). It is believed to be contained in a written code and imposed by divine revelation, and sanctioned by express divine promises and threatening. The original nucleus of the code, it is believed, had been written and promulgated by Moses (Exodus 20:2-17; Deut. 5: 6-21, whilst other precepts have been revealed by the later prophets. There is a fundamental relationship, and for that matter, a similarity between what became accepted as “Christian” and “pagan” ethical philosophies. A study of the so called pagan philosophy indicates that, its pith and core was rightness of purpose, preference of virtue and suppression of vicious desires (Sidgwick & Widgery, 1931). These, Christian philosophy also uphold. The fundamental differences between pagan and Christian ethics do not depend on any difference in value set on rightness of heart or purpose, but on different views of the essential form or conditions of this inward rightness. In all cases, it is presented purely and simply as moral rectitude. The only difference is that pagan philosophers conceived the inner springs of good conduct in a form of knowledge or wisdom. Whereas according to Christian evangelists and teachers, the inner springs of good conduct were generally conceived as Faith and Love (Sidgwick & Widgery, 1931). Unfortunately, it could be remarked that the mainstream of modern conception of morality flows independent of revelational theology.

Practices of the Ghana Baptist Convention

The Baptist faith is grounded in Scripture. The Baptists believe that “the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God’s revelation of himself to human beings” (Ghana Baptist Convention Constitution, 2013, p. 6, Article 6[1]). The constitution also affirms the Baptists’ belief in God to whom we owe the highest love, reverence and obedience. To the Baptists, “the eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being” (Ghana Baptist Constitution, 2013, p. 7, Article 6[2]). By this, we can see that Baptists are confessional Trinitarians. The doctrine of the Baptist about human beings is that, we are special creations of God, made in his image (Gen. 1:26 – 30; 2:5, 7). This idea is best rendered in Latin which is *Imago Dei*. To be created in the image of God means humans reflect the sacredness of God.

It is in the light of this that the Ghana Baptist Convention has articulated its position on human rights as a need for human beings, because we are God's creation and His image bearers. Embedded in the creation of human beings, is the sacredness of the human life from which the dignity of humanity derives. To the Baptist, "the sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love..." (Ghana Baptist Constitution, 2013, p. 9). The Ghana Baptist Convention ties human creation to redemption in Christ. By this connection, it draws attention to the respect for the dignity of all human beings devoid of socio-economic, cultural, political and religious barriers.

There are two ordinances which Baptists observe. These are Water Baptism and Lord's Supper. The Baptists practise baptism by immersion. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialise the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming (Ghana Baptist Constitution, 2013, pp. 14-15). The Article 3 (Clauses 1 and 2 of page 2) of the Ghana Baptist Convention's Constitution states the Vision and Mission statements of the church. Clause 1 states that, the vision of the Convention is "to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 28:18-20). Clause 2 also states the Mission of the Convention. That is, "To lead Ghana Baptist Convention to evangelise the lost disciples, the believers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, plant churches, train leaders and minister to the spiritual and socio-economic needs of the believers."

The framers of the constitution were mindful of the fact that for the church to be able to realise its vision and attain its mission, a certain kind of social order is not only needed, but also mandatory to members. In this view, Article 6(20) of the constitution states that "Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society... should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography" (p. 18). Membership in a Baptist church could be attained through the following. The person must be a believer who has repented of his or her sins and has accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Saviour, must be baptised by immersion and must be voted upon and accepted by the church members. A person's membership could also be terminated by death, transfer, exclusion or ex-communication and by erasure. Erasure may take place if a person shows no interest in the church for an extended period of time.

State of Morality in Ghana

Generally, human beings are responsible to their neighbours and the social groupings which they belong. Above all, human beings are responsible to their creator. Being responsible to a creator suggests that the issue of the ultimate end of human beings is fundamental to the kind of moral life individuals and communities lead. Hence, "the ultimate goal of man and the world is an ultimate criterion for the moral goodness of his actions" (Peschke, 2010, p. 13). So the issue of ethicists separating ethics into personal ethics – those which basically concern the decisions made by individuals, and social ethics – those concerning morality for groups, raises more questions than answers. According to Rae (2000, p. 22), "a social ethic mandates morality for the society at large..." The individual is inclusive. It is, however, lamentable that in the name of self-expression and enjoyment of unfettered freedom, there has been much disregard for social ethics in Ghana probably dating back to the 1970s. General assessment of the state of morality in Ghana over the years reveals a state of indiscipline within our societies as well as sexual problems - including homosexuality and pornography. The issues of child rights and other factors in Ghana have led to our schools becoming breeding grounds for all manner of unacceptable behaviours including drug abuse, free sex and homosexuality mostly in our secondary schools. Sometimes you hear people say that, about 20 to 30 years ago, younger people used to offer their seats to older people on buses and other public places. This has now become a thing of the past. Older people are now seen daily standing in public buses and other public places, while children of even less than ten years of age are seated comfortably and not prompted by anything to offer their seats to these older people. Unfortunately, we now live in a sex-saturated society these days. The secular views of sexual license have penetrated deep into the Ghanaian society to the extent that pornography and homosexuality have become issues of public debate in spite of the fact that Christians are urged by the scripture: "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2 RSV). This biblical command is implied in a sense in the other two major religions in Ghana, namely-Islamic and African Traditional Religions. Yet, Christians, Moslems and Traditionalists alike have largely abandoned this biblical imperative about sex and sexually related activities.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area and Research Design

The study was conducted in the Headquarters of the Ghana Baptist Convention located in Accra – Abelenkpe and the Calvary Baptist Church located in Adabraka – Accra with its satellite mission – Calvary

Baptist Worship Centre – Shiashie. The study used a qualitative research design which sought to find out how Ghana Baptist Convention responds to contemporary debate on human rights, freedom and moral issues in Ghana. This design was chosen because it was realised by the researcher that it would encourage respondents to introduce concepts which would be of importance during the research, rather than only adhering to subject areas that have been pre-determined by the research (Jones, 1997, p. 4).

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population for the study comprised all members of the Ghana Baptist Convention (both ordained and laity) numbering about 140,155 (Annual Session Reports, 2012, p. 22). The sample size for the study was made up of nine people comprising of both the ordained and lay members of the church. The sample size of the study was relatively small in relation to the target population. This did not, however, constitute a problem for the study since much of the data used for the study was gathered from documentary sources such as pastoral reports, minutes of board meetings, historical records, journals and other publications of the Church.

Purposive sampling technique was used to locate respondents for the study. This was used because some specific people (both lay and ordained) were needed to provide information for the study. According to Black, “the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest which will best enable you to gather relevant data to answer your research questions” (1999, p. 15). In view of this, the researcher considered the following people as respondents with the requisite knowledge and experience needed to shed light on the questions for the research. They included the Vice President of the Ghana Baptist Convention and some Departmental Heads at the Convention’s Headquarters, Senior Pastors of Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka with its satellite mission at Shiashie as well as a cross-section of pastors of these churches. A cross-section of Deacons were also interviewed. Finally, the past Director of Baptist Relief and Development Agency (BREDA) was also interviewed.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Unstructured interview was the main instrument used to collect data for the study. The items on the interview guide were reviewed by experts in the field to ensure its face and content validity after which they were pre-tested. In addition to the interviews, informal conversations, and discussions were employed. Relevant data on the list of what are basically considered as virtues or good character traits such as probity, patience, kindness, and fairness (Gyekye, 1996, p.68) were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

During the data collection from the primary sources; interviews, informal conversations, and discussions with pastors, lay leaders and common believers of the Ghana Baptist Convention were conducted. These instruments and procedures were used because it was anticipated that some issues could come up in the course of the interview for which there would be the need for questions to be asked for clarifications on the spot. The secondary sources of data used include church publications such as Pastoral Reports, Minutes of Board Meetings and Historical Records. They were used in the analysis and evaluation of the data. Additionally, pertinent literature on the topic was used to interpret, analyse and evaluate the implicit ideas from the data so as to systematise and formulate concepts and ideas in the study.

V. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The data collected using the interview were first transcribed verbatim to identify the core categories that emerged from the data. After familiarisation with transcripts through extensive reading and discussions with colleagues, a thematic framework was developed with themes and further organised into broad categories using thematic analytical procedures outlined in Krippendorff (2004); Miles *et al.*, (1994) and described in detailed. These categories served as the basis for further analysis. These further analyses involved two basic levels including manifest and latent descriptive analyses of human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society. During the manifest analysis, descriptive account of the data (what study participants said) was carried out dwelling most on what was actually said, documented or observed with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it. Also, during the interpretive stage, descriptive analysis was carried out extensively dwelling on what were meant by the responses on human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society, what was inferred or implied. In stage three, the data was put together in new ways and this was achieved by identifying causal relationships between core categories and sub-categories. The objective of this was to make explicit connections between categories and sub categories of participants’ responses on human rights, freedom, and morality issues in the Ghanaian society. Relationships between categories were then identified and this helped in understanding the phenomenon to which they relate. In stage four, relationships between core categories were selected and related to each other through validation of relationships, filling in, and refining and developing those categories. Relevant illustrative quotes that reflected group opinions were identified. In stage five, detailed

descriptive analyses of the final categories were carried out to compare the opinions of participants from the sampling points using the quotes to support them.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of the present study was to examine and evaluate how the Ghana Baptist Convention responds to contemporary debate on human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society. Unstructured interview, informal conversations, and discussions were conducted to collect relevant data on the issues. The results of the study are presented in the following description and discussed using manifest and inter predictive procedures.

The State of Morality in Ghana

It appears some people, even pastors think that some Ghanaians push their conceptualisation of human rights and freedom outside the *parameters*. To such people, the principle of human rights and freedom provides a lee way to living anyhow. Rev. Amable, a pastor at Calvary Baptist Worship Center-Shiashie noted with grave concern that:

Morality in Ghana today is at its low ebb and that, things which our grandparents would not do are being done publically without shame (Interview, 25th January, 2015).

Implied in the above is that, these days, people are not living responsibly. The situation could generally be due to society's inability to uphold ethics of responsibility. As a result, certain practices such as gambling and pornography which were seen as abominable are done today by many people with their chest out. Eventually, they claim these practices to be rights which they are entitled to. Unfortunately, modernity has been understood to mean breaking ancient moral boundaries. Indeed, people have been emboldened because they know that they could be defended by the courts in the name of human rights. To a large extent, this has given people the boldness to do anything and describe them as human rights and freedom. No wonder it has become so common to hear the adult population remark that morality in our nation is declining judging from what used to be the case some few years back. The consciousness of being a kind of moral agent to please God has been lost. According to Wuver, a Deacon at Calvary Baptist Church-Adabraka:

"Hardly can one boast of morality today" (Interview, 1st February, 2015).

One may not be far from right if a conclusion is drawn that the state of immorality in Ghana is attributable to the *unprincipled* assertion of human rights without the stress of the responsibilities attached. A careful study of the above trend reveals much about our disregard of the generally held notion of "ethic of responsibility" in our society today. The above notwithstanding, others think that the situation might be caused by other factors apart from issues of human rights and freedom. When Thompson, Vice President, Ghana Baptist Convention was asked about his views on morality and as to whether human rights and freedom have impacted negatively on morality, he indicated that:

It may not necessarily be that immorality has increased. It might be because of the many outlets we now have. This makes it easy for us to hear of immoral issues most often. The widespread of immorality has much to do with social media and not necessarily human rights and freedom and that, it is simply because of proliferation of media. This has made it possible for all manner of information to be put in the public domain. This was not the case in the recent past (Interview, 16th February, 2015).

Democracy requires free flow of information. This is because, "communication is what enables a free people to keep in touch with one another, with their leaders, and with important events" (Patterson, 1990, p. 269). Recognising the vital role of the process in building a vibrant society, Ghana has put in place means to create an environment for that. Consequently, the injection of modern technology into the media industry has dramatically increased the reach and speed of communication in Ghana. The media has a responsibility to educate, inform, and entertain the public. These functions are regulated by ethics. Media ethics demand that before issues are presented as facts, there is check with the source to authenticate its validity. If this is adhered to, it will promote what is called objective journalism. Objective journalism is a model of news reporting based on communication of "fact" in that it presents all sides of issues. It is, however, unfortunate to a large extent that this media principle has been relegated to the background in Ghana. Consequently, the media was mentioned by respondents as another problematic source when it comes to moral issues in Ghana. These days, everything is

thrown into the air waves by the media without regard to time-tested cultural values in the name of democracy and freedom of speech.

Basically, the right and freedom to express oneself are controlled by tradition, law and religion. Every society therefore, puts in place measures to ensure that these things are in place, because the moment these things are broken, the human person becomes free to do “anything.” This might be due to the fact that, if people are given freedom without restraint, there is the tendency is to become immoral, especially if religious conceptions of the people are destroyed. In reality, things or practices which may be considered immoral are the things which our law, religion and tradition place limitations on. These things are basically deviation and diversion as far as our Ghanaian culture is concerned but they are practiced. These are attributable to certain teachings based on human rights and freedom, coupled with the understanding that the individual is free to create himself by his own choices. However, the main goal of inculcating moral values or virtues in African societies is premised on a belief. A belief that, it leads people to pursue the kinds of morally commendable actions and behaviours expected of them in the context of a social morality. Consequently, in the consciousness of the African and for that matter Ghanaians, the foundation of a practical moral life is based on the possession and the practice of such virtues. A list of what are basically considered as virtues or good character traits include; probity, patience, kindness, fairness, humility, gratitude, moderation, temperance, generosity, contentment, hospitality, perseverance, trust-worthiness, truthfulness, honesty, respect for older people, chastity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage (Gyekye, 1996, p.68). One may asked, what happened to these time-tested virtues?

In the light of the above, Rev. Deedge, a Senior Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church-Adabraka, noted that:

We have become so westernised due to globalisation and urbanisation. The basis of our virtues and good character traits cherished as a people in the development of society are not so much enforced these days. Consequently, not too many people uphold morality (Interview, 18th February, 2015).

The reality of the above would be very much appreciated by comparing the “old village life” to the *modern city life*. In the past, it took a whole village to raise a child – the family, church, the school and the community but now there are *other voices*. Our values have therefore shifted. In the past, people led good lives so that they could earn a good name because it was taught that a good name was better than riches. This has however changed. People do not care about what they do to become rich these days.

In any case, it must be noted that as a people, whatever yardstick we use in determining the state of morality, we should be mindful of the fact that, it should be judged in terms of what we have put in the constitution because Ghana is not a theocratic state. It is a secular state, and that it is only when things are judged against what we have in the constitution that we can draw conclusions because, according to Gyan, a lecturer-Ashesi University;

Human rights in itself is not a bad idea because our constitution upholds it and that whatever we do as a people must be within the confines of what our constitution says (Interview, 22nd March, 2015).

A constitution contains among other things, the aspirations of a nation. These aspirations are expressed in the light of the values of the society. Against this background, there cannot be a talk of any meaningful aspirations enshrined in any constitution at the expense of grounded societal values.

Successes of Ghana Baptist Convention in Addressing Moral Issues in Ghana

A careful study of the ethics of Jesus of Nazareth shows that it was grounded on a profound respect for the infinite intrinsic value of each human person. Implicit in his ethics, was the notion that the individual person is worth more than anything else on this earth. To Jesus, the human person should be regarded as priceless with no object equivalent to him or her in value. This notion of Jesus’ ethics is revealed in Matthew 16:26, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul...?”(NKJV). One remarkable fact which could not be overlooked is the “value principle” which Jesus enunciated in his sermons as noted by Sahakian:

A single personality, possessing dignity or infinite worth, is equal to a hundred persons in moral value; for a value scale with but one person... balance the scale on the other, inasmuch as infinity balances infinity (or 100 times infinity is still equal to infinity). Furthermore,

concern for a solitary individual takes precedence over concern for a hundred persons if that particular person happens to be one who is in need (1974, p. 179).

The above is a value principle which was used by Jesus to indicate the importance God places on human beings. It was aptly highlighted in his parable of a hundred sheep (Luke 15:1-7). The same notion was also implied in the parable of the landowner hiring labourers in his vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). Admittedly, there was also much insistence on morality in Jesus' sermons. As Sahakian observes, for Jesus, "morality is an inner experience, not an overt act but a state of being. Morality is not so much a question of doing well as being good" (1974, p. 178). Article six (6) of the Ghana Baptist Convention (2013, p. 6) has to do with human beings. It reads, "Man is the special creation of God, made in his image. God created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation." In view of this, the Baptist church has always placed the human person above all created objects, and has always treated human beings with dignity and respect.

To effectively actualise the above, the Baptist Convention established a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called Baptist Relief and Development Agency (BREDA). The organisation was established in March 2000 and was registered as a corporate body under the companies code of 1963 (Act 179), with the aim of implementing the socio-economic activities of the Convention. BREDA over the years, has focused on relief services and advocacy against "Trokosi" among others (Ghana Baptist Convention 50th Anniversary Brochure, p. 32). In addition to this, resolutions, sermons, provision of social amenities, and other constitutional provisions made by the church are among the practical steps taken to deal with moral issues. There are other voices as well. The following discusses these steps.

Indeed, "the solemn proclamation of human right is contradicted by a painful reality of violations" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, Ch. 3). The Council added that the spreading, on a virtual worldwide dimension, of ever new forms of slavery, such as trafficking in human beings, exploitation of workers, and prostitution, are issues of blatant disregard for human rights. One wonders why even countries with high respect for human rights do not always fully protect their citizens. Ghana could be counted among such countries when it comes to the practice of Trokosi. The practice is a customary rite practiced in the south-eastern part of the Volta Region and the Dangbe areas of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. With this practice, a virgin girl is taken to a shrine to pay for the wrong-doings of a family member. The girl is bestowed to the shrine. As a result, she loses the chance of getting married to any man, since she is believed to be married to the fetish priest immediately the rite is performed. Ghana Baptist Convention has played a critical role in the campaign against the practice of the system. The Convention actually drew the attention of the government to the inappropriateness of this practice. Djokoto, a former director of BREDA, noted that:

"The campaign by BREDA made the government to pass a law in June 1998 to outlaw the practice which eventually resulted in the liberation of several of such girls" (Interview, 12th July, 2015)

The Ghana Baptist Convention's Constitution (2013, p. 14), stipulates that, the Convention shall organise annual sessions and emergency sessions as the need arises. During such annual sessions, topical issues which impact on the nation are discussed and resolutions passed to indicate the position of the church on such issues. Among such topical issues which are discussed are those which have to do with morality. For instance, in 1998, during the church's annual session, the Convention made a very strong resolution on moral issues which demanded that "the members of the convention join in the crusade against corruption, gambling, immoral acts like homosexuality, lesbianism..." (Ghana Baptist Convention, 35th Annual General Session minutes Book, 1998; p. 62).

Moral issues also form an integral part of churches under Ghana Baptist Convention sermons. This is done with the view of shaping the morals of the members of the church to reflect Christ. When asked to explain the extent to which the Baptist Church has addressed moral issues through sermons, this was what Thompson (Vice President, Ghana Baptist Convention had to say:

"...the Bible is the message of the church. Accordingly, the church has an obligation to teach members about the truth. The truth goes beyond church dogmas. It also includes morals whose source lies in human nature itself and in the gospel" (Interview, 16th February, 2015).

The Baptist church believes that the truth which is taught must not only be heard but also observed and put into practice in fulfillment of what the Scripture has revealed (Math.7: 24; Luke 6:46-47). The above is critical because according to Thompson:

“Life is a critical component of human rights. In view of this, the church provides education, access to good drinking water and health services to a number of people, especially in the rural areas e.g.Nalerigu hospital in the northern part of the country”(Interview, 16th February, 2015).

The Ghana Baptist Convention also has Constitutional Provisions as part of the practical steps which the Convention takes to deal with moral issues. What the constitution of the church stipulates is clearly consistent with what the Bible teaches. Article six (6) of the Ghana Baptist Convention’s constitution has clearly spelt out the Convention’s faith and message. It reads: “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.” To the extent that the Scripture is what informs the Baptist Church’s conduct, the church has been clear on certain behavioural patterns which are inconsistent with God’s ethical standards. To this end, the church takes a strong exception to what constitutes sin. To the Baptists:

“Sin is defined as rebellion against God. It is yielding to the power of evil rather than to God...some examples of sin-unbelief, crookedness, violence, lawlessness, iniquity, wickedness and rebellion. Sin is innate...” (Romans 4:25; 3:23; I Corinthians 15:3-5, 17; John 3:16-17) (Ghana Baptist Constitution, 2013, p. 10),

It must, also be indicated that, the Convention’s fight against moral derailment, particularly homosexuality, has been approached also from ecumenical front. The Convention joined other churches to protest against the legalisation of same sex relations. This went a long way to reinforce the position of the general public against homosexuality.

One thing must be made clear. The Convention is not the only ranger in the fight against matters of immoral practices which are justified in the name of the individual’s rights and freedom. There are other voices. By virtue of Ghana’s cultural values, a mention of certain things generates much debate. A typical example of such a debate is what occurred between 2006 and 2011. The whole debate bordered on whether the issue of same-sex unions should be considered a human right in Ghana or not. The first of such an issue was reported in *Reuters News* on 2nd September, 2006, entitled; “Ghana Bans Gay and Lesbian Conference.” The content of the reported news was that; “a number of gays and lesbians were going to have a meeting at Koforidua.” This issue and many more happened during the time when Ghana had already been caught up in an emotionally charged debate on the issue. “Government officials, including the president, as well as officials of the opposition parties, followed the public expression of disapproval and issued statements affirming that same – sex relationships were alien and could not be permitted under the laws of the country” (Atiemo, 2013, p.40). The then president of the nation, (the late John Evans Atta -Mills) was emphatic and resolute in his condemnation of the practice. He stated categorically that, “I, as President of this nation, will never initiate or support any attempt to legalise homosexuality in Ghana.” (*The Chronicle*, Tuesday, 3rd November 2011, p. 3).

The above are some of the successes in dealing with moral issues in Ghana by Ghana Baptist Convention. These notwithstanding, it must be noted that the unpredictability of human behaviour makes it a bit illusive to determine the extent to which measures put in place to reform character have succeeded. This fact was alluded to by all the respondents. They noted that it was difficult to determine the extent of success of the Convention’s quest for morality in Ghana over the years. Meanwhile, there is the general feeling among some Pastors that, the church can still do more. Degadzor, in reaction to this maintains that:

“...It is time that the church translates its idealism into realism as espoused in its sermons and annual resolutions” (Interview, 29th January, 2015).

The above is indicative of the fact that the Convention has been more reactive to moral issues than proactive. The reactionary stance by the church on morality was corroborated. In regards to this assertion, Owusu, a pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, Adabraka noted emphatically that:

“We are not doing what we are actually supposed to do. We have been too silent.” (Interview, 29th January, 2015).

This means that the church must shift from inactivity to proactivity on moral issues of national interest and concern. The church is said to be the prophetic voice of the Lord Almighty. As a prophetic voice, it is supposed to mould character and also speak to the ills in addition to other functions it perform in society. In performing such a function, the church will have to be *clean* to be able to perform such moral obligation. Unfortunately, there are sometimes question marks about the *church* globally today. Until the church repents, the church cannot respond to its prophetic mandate as expected. However, 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 Freeman (1968, pp. 48-50) were that, they were divinely appointed as moral and ethical preachers and teachers of religion in Israel. The prophets were also supposed to be watchmen standing on the walls of Zion to sound the trumpet against dangers of religious apostasy (Ezek. 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 of society by the church using the word of God. Specifically, the purpose of the church is to place itself at the service of the Kingdom of God, announce and communicate the Gospel of salvation and establish new Christian communities. Considering the purpose of the church as stated, it is evident that the Ghana Baptist Convention and all other churches have much to do in their effort to deal with issues of morality in our society. To be able to achieve this, they must be faithful to their calling.

VII. CHALLENGES

The above successes notwithstanding, there are some challenges which the Ghana Baptist Convention faces in dealing with moral issues in Ghana. The universal church has a mission. The mission as summed up by Colson and Pearcey (1999, p. x) basically is to “prepare for Jesus’ return 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. According to Colson and Pearcey:

“... 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...” (1999, p. x).

Indeed, it is not enough that the church concentrates only on what it does as its core mission. It must also extend its mission to embrace *non-traditional* spheres like moral advocacy. The fact is that, Christianity is more than a private belief, and more than personal salvation. It is the truth about all reality. In view of this, it is the responsibility of the church to show that it is a comprehensive life style that answers all age-old questions which have to do primarily with our origins, purpose and destination (Colson and Pearcey (1999). 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 clause 1 and 2 of the Convention’s constitution, 2013, p. 2) spells out the vision and mission of the church as noted earlier on. The universal mission has guided the Ghana Baptist Convention in designing and executing its duties as prescribed by Scripture. However, in the church’s operations to fulfill such mandate, especially those concerning morality, the church faces a number of 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 noted were: the problem of human nature, the politicised environment, wrath from human rights advocates, and resources (both human and financial).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The objective of the present study was to examine and evaluate how the Ghana Baptist Convention responds to contemporary debate on human rights, freedom, and morality in the Ghanaian society. The study has provided strong evidence on the successes chopped and the challenges thwarting the efforts of the church in its quest in addressing human rights, freedom, and morality issues in Ghana. In the discussion, it was realised that morality has deteriorated and that unprincipled assertion of human rights and freedom has contributed to the

state of morality in Ghana. It was, however, noted that if concerted efforts are made, our societies could be made better. Ghanaians therefore needed to critically assess the nature of what is accepted as human rights and freedom espoused by the West. Further, the position of the Ghana Baptist Convention on human rights, freedom and morality are not new in the consciousness of the African and for that matter Ghanaians. These issues have been cardinal in all circumstances. By this, the position taken by the respondents suggests that the current assertion of unprincipled human rights and freedom must be weighed against time-tested values of the nation. The demand for human rights and freedom must also be consistent with acceptable norms cherished by our society.

The study also revealed a number of challenges the Ghana Baptist Convention faces in its advocacy for morality in Ghana. The study affirmed that the problem could be addressed if only all Ghanaians will make a conscious effort towards dealing with immoral practices which are justified in the name of human rights and freedom. The church has the Holy Spirit which is an unlimited resource to be able to carry out the task of reforming society. The church only needs to be consistent with the truth and there will be a change.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the discussions it was evident that human rights, freedom and morality have gained much prominence in public discourse recently in Ghana. Having examined the various issues above, the researcher recommends that what is advanced by the West as human rights and freedom must be critically evaluated. After that, the good aspects which seek to protect human dignity in accordance with God's ethical standards must be retained. The "bad" aspects must, however, be discarded. This calls for serious education on what actually constitutes human rights and freedom so that there would be a clear understanding on the concepts. The education will enable people to actually think through and adopt the good aspects of human rights and freedom to enhance their circumstances.

The study further recommends that human rights defenders should exercise restraint when it comes to practices which are alien to the Ghanaian values, laws and religious faith. The *church* should also intensify its missionary work so as 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. Specifically, it is also recommended that, the Ghana Baptist Convention intensifies its missionary work so as to win more souls for the Lord.

Furthermore, this study has not delves into all the issues relating to human rights, freedom and morality in Ghana. The study therefore recommends that other researchers take it up for further study, possibly at a higher level, but with emphasis on looking at other issues which have not been fully dealt with in this study such as the extent to which the Gays, Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) society in Ghana have succeeded in contributing to immorality in the country. Finally, the study recommends that Ghanaians should critically examine what they accept as human rights and freedom in the light of our value system, laws and religious faith.

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- [25] Deacon Alfred Wuver – Deacon – Calvary Baptist Church (12/05/2015).
- [26] Rev. Reynolds Degadzor – Pastor – Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka (29/01/2015).
- [27] Rev. Felix Owusu – Pastor – Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka (29/01/2015).
- [28] Dr. Nana Gyan – Student Pastor – Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka and a Lecturer at Ashesi University College (22/03/2015).
- [29] Rev. Enoch Thompson – Vice President, Ghana Baptist Convention (16/02/2015).
- [30] Rev. Tse Amabla – Pastor – Calvary Baptist Worship Center. Shiashe (25/01/2015).
- [31] Rev. Dr. Fred Deegbe – Senior Pastor – Calvary Baptist Church – Adabraka, a Former President of National Peace Council and a Former President of Ghana Baptist Convention (18/02/2015).