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ELECTIONS 2024: A CALL FOR RATIONAL DECISION-MAKING AMIDST RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Introduction

As Ghana approaches its general elections in December 2024, the interplay between religion, prophecy, and political involvement demands scrutiny. While faith certainly plays a vital role in the lives of many Ghanaians, it is essential to approach the upcoming elections with a clear understanding of the scriptural and philosophical perspectives that emphasize human agency in governance. It is imperative to engage in discussions that emphasize the importance of civic responsibility. Citizens should prioritize critical thinking, informed decision-making, and active participation in the electoral process. This means engaging with candidates based on their policies, integrity, and vision for the country rather than relying solely on religious endorsements, prophecies, and prayers for the individual candidates who seek God's presence. This is not to say God is not relevant in the election.

How do we then differentiate between politics and religion?

Politics is the process of making decisions that apply to members of a group or society. It involves governance, power dynamics, the formation of laws, and the execution of authority. **Religion**, on the other hand, is a system of beliefs, values, and practices related to the divine or sacred. It often provides moral guidance and a framework for understanding the world. This is to say that governance goes beyond religious groupings and associations. In the context of a country like Ghana, politics encompasses various systems, institutions, and practices that determine how the country is run, and these decisions are made by the citizens, both religious believers and nonreligious ones. In Ghana, a country with diverse religious affiliations, including Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions, religion plays a significant role in the cultural and social fabric of the country but does not override political systems.

The intertwining of religion and governance in Ghana poses significant risks that can undermine the country's democratic principles, social cohesion, and overall development. While religion plays a vital role in the lives of many Ghanaians, its integration into political processes can lead to various adverse consequences. The most dangerous part of it is the population of Ghanaians who can read between the lines and understand the situation by themselves to make an

informed decision is only small. This clearly shows that Ghana as a country is sitting on a very dangerous time bomb when detonated, could explode and carry everyone, including religious and political elites, away. The consequences of involving religious groups so much in politics tend to lead the country into **Social Fragmentation** where favoring one candidate or party over others in political discourse can alienate minority groups, leading to tension and conflict. Ghana is home to a diverse array of religious beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. When political decisions are influenced by a particular religious' ideology or beliefs, it can alienate those who do not share that faith. This alienation can lead to increased tensions and conflicts among different religious groups, undermining national unity. As noted by various scholars, the promotion of one religion over others in political discourse can create an environment of intolerance and division.

Again, the combination of religion and governance can also lead to **Political Manipulation**. Politicians may exploit religious sentiments to gain electoral support, often at the expense of ethical governance as we can see a political party promising to pay pastors and religious leaders when they get reelected into office for the religious roles they play for the country. This manipulation can result in policies that favor specific religious groups while marginalizing others. Another one also promised to involve the clergy and churches, including the mosque, in the governance of the country. This is a clear danger of political alienation and trying to play politics with religion to gain favor votes from the religious members. This is not entirely bad but where their major campaign now seems to focus on religion instead of policies is a clear indication they do not have any proper policies for the country but want to use populism and social outcry to source for votes. Political leaders in Ghana now have historically used religious rhetoric to rally support, which can distort the political landscape and prioritize religious loyalty over civic responsibility.

A fundamental principle of democracy is the separation of church and state but this does not happen, there is **Erosion of Secularism**. In Ghana, the erosion of secularism can occur when religious authorities gain undue influence over political matters. This influence can lead to the implementation of laws and policies that reflect religious doctrines rather than the diverse values of the population. For instance, a political party (NDC - John Mahama) is promising to solve the Hijab discrimination faced by Muslims sisters in Ghana if voted into power while the (NPP - Mahamudu Bawumia) also promised to establish the Zongos development funds which would see to the development of zongo communities. If political power becomes intertwined with religious authority, it can threaten the secular nature of the state, leading to discrimination against those who do not share the dominant faith, especially, threatening individual freedoms and human rights, particularly for those who do not adhere to the dominant religious beliefs.

When governance is intertwined with religious beliefs, there is a risk of **Policy Bias**. Laws and regulations may be shaped by religious doctrines rather than evidence-based practices that serve the common good. This bias can hinder progress in areas such as education, health care, and women's rights, as policies may reflect conservative religious views rather than the needs of a diverse society. Policies influenced by religious beliefs may not be inclusive or representative of

the entire population, resulting in decisions that do not serve the common good. Writers who have examined this issue have therefore emphasized the importance of creating inclusive policies representative of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations.

Lastly, there is **Loss of Moral Authority**. The merging of religion and politics can also lead to a loss of moral authority for religious institutions. When religious leaders become politically involved, their ability to provide spiritual guidance may be compromised. For instance, instead of the clergy using their pulpit to demand for ethical governance and justice from the ruling elites, they tend to hold prayers at certain places asking God for intervention instead of demanding political justice and action on such an important issue. Example: Pastors praying at Akosombo dam during President Kuffuor's era, the outburst of moderator of the Presbyterian church during President Mahama's era and the galamsey site prayers during president Nana Addo's time. This can result in a perception that religious institutions are more concerned with political power than with their spiritual mission as well as making mockery of the God of the religious groups. As noted by various commentators, this shift can diminish the trust that followers place in their religious leaders, ultimately weakening the moral fabric of society.

Cautioning Ghanaians: The Role of Religion in the 2024 Elections

The Scriptural Perspective: From a biblical standpoint, numerous examples underscore the importance of human choice in leadership. In the Book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), God provides guidelines for selecting a king, emphasizing that the people must choose a leader who embodies righteousness and humility. This implies that divine selection is not the primary mode of governance; rather, it is the responsibility of the citizens to discern and elect their leaders. Similarly, in Islamic tradition, the concept of Shura (consultation) illustrates that community involvement is crucial in making decisions, including the choice of leaders. The Quran (Quran 3:159) encourages consultation among the people, indicating that leadership is a collective responsibility rather than a divine imposition.

The Philosophical Perspective: Philosophically, the notion of democracy is rooted in the belief that governance is a social contract between the leaders and the led. Thinkers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have long argued that the legitimacy of authority derives from the consent of the governed. This perspective reinforces the idea that citizens have the power and responsibility to select their representatives. In the context of Ghana, where diverse religious beliefs coexist, it is crucial to recognize that the will of the people must prevail over prophetic assertions. While prophecies may provide personal guidance or hope, they should not overshadow the democratic process or manipulate public sentiment.

The Danger of Religious Manipulation: As we approach the elections, there is a risk of religious manipulation, where political entities may exploit prophetic claims to sway voters. Such tactics can divert attention from critical issues, such as economic stability, education,

healthcare, and national security. Citizens must remain vigilant and discerning, ensuring that their choices are informed by rational judgment rather than fear or blind faith. Furthermore, the intertwining of religion and politics can lead to polarization and division within society. When people begin to see their political choices as divinely mandated, dissenting opinions can be viewed as heretical or unpatriotic, undermining the very fabric of democracy.

Call for Separation of Religion from governance.

Biblical and Quranic Perspectives: According to the Biblical view, Christian teachings suggest a separation of spiritual and temporal authority. For instance, Jesus' statement, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21), illustrates the distinction between civic duty and spiritual obligation. This implies that while faith guides personal morality, governance should operate independently to ensure justice and equality for all, regardless of their beliefs and faith. Similarly, in Islam, while the faith does encompass aspects of governance, some interpretations advocate for justice and fairness that transcend religious boundaries. The Quran emphasizes justice (Surah An-Nisa 4:58) and the importance of upholding rights, which can be seen as a call for governance that respects diverse beliefs and practices.

Philosophical Perspectives: Philosophically, the separation of religion and politics is often defended on the grounds of pluralism and democracy. **John Locke** argued for religious tolerance and the idea that the government should not interfere in the personal beliefs of individuals. He believed that a secular state allows for a diverse society where varying beliefs can coexist without conflict. In doing so, the state or governance must be separated from religious activities no matter the condition or situation at hand. This would give each of them the power and authority to do justice and apply fairness where the need is to all manner of persons without fear and favor, without being labeled as a political-religious group. **John Stuart Mill** also emphasized the importance of individual liberty and the harm principle, suggesting that personal beliefs should not restrict the freedoms of others. A political system free from religious dictates respects individual rights and fosters a pluralistic society.

Academically, the separation of religion and politics is viewed as essential for maintaining social cohesion in diverse societies. Scholars argue that intertwining the two can lead to **Conflict** when political decisions are based on religious doctrines, it can marginalize non-adherents and create societal divisions. It can again lead to **Authoritarianism** Whereby Religious authorities may impose their beliefs on the populace, undermining democratic values and human rights. **Corruption of Religion** can also occur where politics can taint religious institutions, leading to a loss of moral authority and integrity. When it comes to the issue of corruption of religion, one can attest to the fact that under a certain regime (NDC John Mahama), there were religious calls for individuals to speak out on issues deemed threats to the country. Most Ghanaians use their pulpit to preach against the regime and call for a change of government and direction. There comes another regime (NPP Nana Addo); these individuals and groups who used to preach or speak out their views and concerns on the ills of the country have suddenly gone into

hibernation, putting those religious groups into a state of dilemma, making clear to everyone that corruption has set into those religious institutions.

The claim that prayers alone can resolve the issues caused by a government's bad ruling—such as the illegal mining (Galamsey) crisis in Ghana—can be critically examined from both a theological and philosophical perspective. According to the **Theological Perspective**, many religious texts emphasize the importance of **Faith** accompanied by **Action**. For instance, the Book of James (James 2:26) states, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." This suggests that while prayer is vital, it should lead to tangible actions. Scriptures often call for **Stewardship** of the earth (Genesis 2:15). This includes caring for the environment and ensuring sustainable practices. Relying solely on prayer without taking action can be seen as neglecting this responsibility. Religious teachings often emphasize community action which is the need for **Collective Responsibility**. In the New Testament, for example, Christians are encouraged to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). This could imply that collective action against societal injustices is necessary.

Similarly, **Philosophical Perspective**: this philosophical approach advocates for **Pragmatism** which is the practical consequences as the basis for meaning and truth. In the context of Galamsey, while prayer may hold spiritual significance, the practical consequences of immediate citizen action (such as advocacy, protests, and policy change) are essential in addressing the issue. Again, there is the notion of **Ethics of Responsibility** where Philosophers like Emmanuel Kant argue for a duty-based ethics where individuals are responsible for their actions. In this view, citizens have a moral obligation to actively engage in rectifying injustices rather than solely relying on spiritual interventions. Lastly, the **Social Contract Theory** that posits that citizens have a responsibility to hold their government accountable. If citizens remain passive, they undermine the very contract that legitimizes governance. This suggests that prayer alone is insufficient without civic engagement and activism.

Conclusion

The dangers of combining religion with governance in Ghana are profound and multifaceted. From social fragmentation and political manipulation to the erosion of secularism and policy bias, the consequences of this intertwining can be detrimental to the nation's democratic values and social cohesion. The separation of politics and religion is crucial for fostering a harmonious and inclusive society in Ghana. By keeping governance distinct from religious influence, the country can promote unity, respect diverse beliefs, and ensure that all citizens are treated equally under the law, allowing them to fulfill their respective roles without compromising one another. Ultimately, a secular political framework is essential for the stability and prosperity of a diverse nation like Ghana. While prayer can provide spiritual support and hope, during crises like Galamsey's require both spiritual and practical responses. Engaging in advocacy, education, and direct action aligns with both scriptural teachings and philosophical principles about

responsibility and ethics in society. Thus, citizens need to complement their prayers with concerted efforts to bring about change - the need for active participation in societal issues.

Let us remember that while faith can inspire and guide us, it is ultimately the citizens of Ghana who hold the power to choose their leaders. As we navigate the complexities of the 2024 elections, may we do so with mindfulness, ensuring that our choices reflect our collective aspirations for a better future. By doing so, the country can foster an inclusive environment that respects diverse beliefs while promoting unity and progress.

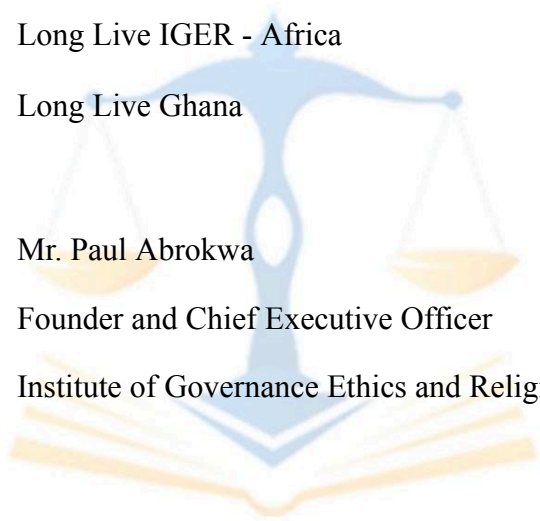
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Long Live Ghana

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