

**GEORGE OSSOM-BATSA – NICOLETTA GATTI  
RABIATU DEINYO AMMAH (eds.)  
*Religion and Sustainable Development. Ghanaian Perspectives*  
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The book, *Religion and Sustainable Development, Ghanaian Perspective*, brings into relevant dialogue two disciplines that were hitherto thought to be unrelated. Religion and Sustainable Development are of interest to every individual within the Ghanaian context. Sustainable Development concerns our common future as a people. Ghanaians should be collectively concerned about the use of the natural resources of the country, so that we do not compromise our own future and that of future generations. The Brundtland report titled “Our Common Future”, published in 1987, defined Sustainable Development as that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations ability to meet theirs. The Brundtland Commission was inaugurated to develop a policy that would guide the use of natural resources worldwide. This was because of the thinking that resources were depleting at a rate higher than their regeneration in case of renewable natural resources. The wanton use of non-renewable resources was leading to the extinction of some of these resources.

The recent usage of the concept – Sustainable Development – emphasizes that any developmental agenda that any country or society undertakes being social, cultural, economic, political, etc. should be focused on benefiting both the present and future generations. Thus, the developmental agenda should be planned in such a way that they are not short-lived. It is against this background that concepts such as Sustainable National Development, Sustainable Development Goals and Millennium Development Goals are used in guiding national and global development agenda. As such, any discourse on Sustainable Development should be of interest to us because development affects the human person, society, and creation at large.

Religion also permeates every aspect of life in Ghana. «It negotiates the well-being of the individual and the community at large, between the here-and-now and the here-after» (*Introduction*, 14). Religion, including customs of the people, form the most important and influential elements in the social life of Africans. Development cannot be limited to material things alone but to spiritual things as well. Prof. Kwame Gyekye, in *Taking Development Seriously*, says that «development concerns behavioral change and must be perceived in terms of adequate responses to the entire existential

conditions in which human beings function, conditions which encompass the economic, political, social, moral, cultural, and intellectual and others» (quoted *ivi*).

Thus, for development to be sustainable there is the need for a dialogical encounter between the people's worldview, their self-understanding, and their environment in pursuit of an improved quality of life. This is what this Book focuses on to bring religion and sustainable development into a relevant dialogue in search for integral and sustainable development.

The Book, *Religion and Sustainable Development, Ghanaian Perspective* is a collection of essays dealing with the contribution of Religion to Sustainable Development. It shows how Ghanaian religious traditional thoughts and practices have shaped and continue to shape development in the country. It also gives an opportunity to Ghanaians to express an understanding of Religion and Development.

The content of this book is a result of a collaborative research workshop in 2015 between the Department for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana, and the Faculty of Theology of the University of Basel in Switzerland. This later developed into a dialogue among scholars living and working in Ghana. The implication here is that the methodologies employed in the research, ideas expressed, and conclusions drawn, have been shared and discussed amongst scholars and religious practitioners over time. Thus, the essays are well thought out, engaging and practical and have a now and future application.

African Indigenous Religion, Christianity, and Islam are the three religious traditions that are covered in this book. These three traditions have a wide following in this country and Africa in general, so the content of this book is relevant to Ghanaians. Religious traditions shape and continue to shape the development agenda in Ghana.

The contributors to this book are from public and private universities. Thus the essays show strong evidence of collaborative research. It is interesting to find academic staff and doctoral students collaborate on a number of the essays. Besides, with respect to Christianity, the contributors come from the various denominations-historic mission churches, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches. Thus the views expressed do not reflect a particular denominational orientation. On the whole, the book does not intend to present the contribution of the different religious traditions or denominations to development, but rather illustrates how the different religions together can dialogue with sustainable development and impact integral development.

The book contains fifteen multi-religious and multidisciplinary essays with a common aim of exploring how religious ideas affect development in culture, education, health, sport, music, indeed all aspect of life. The articles challenge readers, politicians, educationists, religious leaders, policy makers, social analysts; in fact, all groups of people to take religious ideas, practices, organizations, and experiences seriously in the development debate and praxis.

There is an introduction to the volume, which gives a comprehensive overview of the book. It covers religion and development debate, Ghana's religious landscape, origin and orientation of the project, and outlines the various contributions in the book. The essays have been grouped under three main parts. These are

- *African Traditions and Cultures as Development Partners*
- *Religion, Crises and Development*
- *Religious Identity and Development*

The first part, *African Traditions and Cultures as Development Partners*, has four essays grouped under it. The second part, *Religion, Crises and Development* has six essays, and the third part, *Religious Identity and Development* has five essays. All the articles are clearly written and argued out well. The conclusions are carefully drawn from the analysis of the materials, using a variety of methodological approaches – phenomenology, exegesis, linguistic, historical and others. The language is lucid and easy to comprehend.

However, I wish to comment on two of the articles from Part 1.

In the first four articles, the contributors draw heavily on African traditions and cultures and relate these to development. In the first article by Lawrence Boakye Akan *Oral Tradition as Functional Epistemology in Scholarship, Social Change and Development in Ghana*, the author discusses how oral tradition can contribute towards innovation, social change, and development. He rightly concludes, amongst others, that if oral tradition is considered as a social product, then it is appropriate to use it to bring about social change and development in society. Besides, knowledge of tradition can be used as a tool to establish control and order over others in the community. The use of media technology to expand and promote the relevance of oral tradition is discussed and points raised are clearly buttressed with relevant examples. The paper calls for the promotion of the training of teachers and specialist in the area of oral knowledge, an approach that the author argues «could create a platform which will begin to confront the

problem of epistemic crisis that has opened the door to endless influx of hegemonic influences which have not contributed to the development of Africa» (*ibid.* 43-44).

The question that comes to mind immediately is this: how can these conclusions be implemented in Ghana, when there appears to be a determined effort to play down on the study of Ghanaian culture and languages in our schools? The teaching of religious and moral education is gradually disappearing in schools, thus reducing students' appreciation of Ghanaian traditional values.

The essay does not confront this dilemma. This should, however, engage our minds, if the lessons from the essay would be of sustained benefit to the country.

The second article, *Chieftaincy and the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 16: The Role of the Akan Chief* by Vincent Assanful argues and rightly, too that chieftaincy institution is an important ally of the state in ensuring development in traditional areas. As political, religious, judicial, and social leaders, the chiefs are in better stead to galvanize their people to help attain the SDGs. The article assesses how the chieftaincy institution can help to achieve the vision of Goal 16. The goals include

- Ensuring peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development,
- Provide access to justice for all,
- Build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

I do agree with the reason adduced for the retention of the Chieftaincy institution in Ghana. The author cites Abotchie that «the utility of retaining the position of the chief should find support in the argument that Ghanaians are predominantly traditional and still look up to their chiefs for leadership» (*ibid.*, 53). This may be true for a good number of the chiefs. I wish to observe that there are Akan Chiefs whose attitudes and activities are a draw back to their communities, and impact negatively on development. There are Chiefs who have lost the respect of their subjects and therefore cannot be agents of development. The essay is silent on how to change the orientation of such chiefs to support development. How do we ensure that all Akan chiefs, and indeed all chiefs, become agents of change in our societies so that they can become effective players in development?

Part 2 of the book is sub-titled *Religions, Crises and Development*. It has 6 essays. These draw on the coping strategies of religion, its conflict resolution strategies, and inherent development strategies and apply these to the development agenda of Ghana. I wish to comment on three of the es-

says. The first one is titled *Religious Actors' Role in Health and Humanitarian Crises: A Case Study of the Ebola Virus Disease Preparedness in Ghana*, by Liv Adams and Nicoletta Gatti.

Health is an important consideration in any developmental agenda. The mention of Ebola still strikes fear in the heart of people living in some parts of West Africa, in view of the devastation it caused in some of these countries. A possible outbreak in Ghana was a real threat in view of the free flow of people across her borders. In view of this the essay is very relevant to the development agenda of the country.

The article brings to the fore the role of religious actors in complementing technical efforts to ensure a holistic interdisciplinary approach to address the crises. The article shows clearly that religious actors are unique assets to development because they have a wider reach and enjoy the trust of the public.

What makes the findings relevant is that they can be applied to other scenarios of the outbreak of infectious diseases like cholera which occasionally spring up in the country with disastrous effect. The lessons have a practical application but could have a lasting impact, if the sense of continuous education had been factored into the essay. Continuous education of the public would put an end to the crises management syndrome which afflicts this country, when such outbreaks occur.

The second essay *The Role of Interreligious Collaboration in Conflict Prevention and Peaceful Multi-Religious Co-existence: A Case Study of Northern Ghana*, by Sylvia Owusu-Ansah, lauds Ghana for largely peaceful inter-religious coexistence, because of the active involvement of the two main religions, Christianity and Islam, in fostering peaceful relationship and creating structures for a fruitful dialogue. The author asserts that Ghana has enjoyed a peaceful religious atmosphere, because of the activities of three groups-Interreligious body, Interreligious forum and Interfaith Dialogue programmes which were set up following the 1994 conflict in Northern Ghana among the Konkomba, the Nanumba and the Dagomba. They were set up to deal with issues and problems arising out of the conflicts, to curtail future occurrences of such conflicts, and to collaborate to promote issues of national interest, such as peaceful elections. The paper provides a framework for preventing religious conflicts on grass root level in Ghana and the West African sub-region. Although the conclusions are valid, it ignores a new phenomenon cropping up in Ghana that, if it remains unchecked, can be a source of religious conflicts. This is what I refer to as

yearly prophecies of death, which Ghanaians are subjected to at the end of every year. The end of the calendar year, especially during midnight services, “prophets” make “prophetic utterances” into the New Year which can be explosive. This year, for example, Muslim youths attacked church buildings of a particular Christian denomination because of such utterances. Some thoughts on how to reel in some of these “prophets” would be beneficial to the country.

“Ghana beyond Aid” is a call of the current Government to mobilize every citizen to sustained economic growth. Every effort should be made to integrate Ghanaians into the country’s development agenda. It is in this light that the article by Mustapha Abdul-Hamid and Mohammed Fawzi Aminu Amadu, *Islam and Ghana’s Sustainable Development Agenda: Negotiating the Involvement of the Muslim Community in Mainstream Economic Activity* is relevant. Muslims constitute a significant part of the population of the country. Thus if the country is to harness the full potentials of its citizens including Muslims, then the Muslim world view ought to be factored into the country’s development agenda. Using the Islamic economic and business models as a basis, the paper explores ways by which the Muslim community can be brought into the mainstream of economic activity for sustainable development. The author asserts that with appropriate legislation Islamic business practices can be brought into consonance with secular economic law to draw the Muslims from the periphery of economic activity to the centre to ensure sustainable development for Ghana. The lessons from this paper, about Ghana reforming its financial and banking laws, to allow for the operation of Islamic financial instruments, is worth reading. The Islamic Banks do not charge interests on monies that they lend. This will not only attract Muslims into economic activity but people of other religious persuasions too and would boost the growth of the Ghanaian economy. However, I wonder how applicable this would be in this country where, even though there is peaceful coexistence, there is so much suspicion between Christians and Muslims with respect to Government policies, and whether they favor a particular religious group over another. Introducing Islamic financial regulations into the existing banks will be difficult and allowing the influx of Islamic banks into the country can raise serious eyebrows in the Christian. An indication of how to negotiate this dilemma would further enrich the paper.

Part 3 of the book sub-titled *Religious Identity and Development*, contains five essays. I wish to comment on one of the essays here. Prophetism is a ris-

ing phenomenon in this country. However, the utterances of some of these prophets have the potential of derailing the peace in this country. The article by Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Prophetism and Development? Past and Present of Ghanaian Phenomenon*, makes an interesting reading. The author asserts that because of their «apparent supply of spiritual succor they tend to enjoy much patronage» (*ibid.*, 259). The author examines Prophetism in contemporary times and asserts that «the activities of these prophets have raised concern among many critical Ghanaians about the effective contributions to the development of their followers and their country at large» (*ibid.*, 276).

The paper proffers various reasons for their operations, particularly economic explanations. The inordinate «desire for overnight affluence drives many a prophet to employ unconventional methods including the occult and trickery to cash on the unsuspecting» (*ivi*). It concludes that this makes «it imperative for the Ghanaian Church to take the prophetic problem serious to save the unwary from miscreants» (*ivi*). How do we achieve this in a country where any attempt to reign in some of these prophetic excesses would be fiercely resisted by Christians as an attack on religious freedom? A clear indication of how to resolve this dilemma would make the lessons of the essay more practical.

All the articles are educative and relevant to our contemporary Ghanaian situation. They address issues that touch on the well being of this country—peace, economic growth, inculcation of values, health, peaceful coexistence and in totality focus on how Ghanaians can have sustained development, drawing on religious traditions that permeate all aspects of our life.

This book makes a major claim that you cannot ignore religious traditions in considerations of sustainable development agenda. Religion makes a major contribution to development.

The work appeals to academics, development practitioners, educationalists, students of theology and development studies, religious leaders, politicians, in fact anybody who is interested in the development of this country.

The Book is beautifully bound with a glossy cover. It makes interesting reading and will make a good addition to your library.

Own a copy and help build a prosperous Ghana for Ghanaians.

*Emmanuel Adow Obeng*