**SOUND MORAL EDUCATION AND ADHERENCE TO CHRISTIAN VIRTUES ARE THE BEDROCK OF A DISCIPLINED SOCIETY**

(KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE 3RD BIENNIAL GRAND CONVENTION OF THE ACCRA WEST GRAND COMMANDERY/LADIES AUXILIARY OF

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DELIVERED BY REV. FR. JOHN KOBINA LOUIS)

1. **INTRODUCTION**

[Salutations and Appreciation of the invitation]

Mr. Chairman, Knights and Ladies of St. John International, today, acts of indiscipline can be found in almost every aspect of the life of society. In Ghana, in particular, if you drive on the road, you will spot Mr. Indiscipline committing traffic offenses. If you go to the marketplace, you will find his wife, Mrs. Indiscipline cheating and insulting customers. If you visit the school of their two children, you should not be surprised to find their son, Indiscipline Jnr, and their daughter, Miss Indiscipline.

In that school, there is a teacher nicknamed “Indisci” (you will be wrong to think that it is because he is good at teaching the mathematical topic of “Indices”). Rather, he is called “Indisci”, the short form of “indiscipline”, because he extorts money from pupils and exhibits a low moral standard. Worse still, if you should visit the church of Mr. and Mrs. Indiscipline, you will be saddened to meet Pastor Indiscipline who is applauded for stepping on the bellies of pregnant women, for making a church member drink some Dettol detergent as a means for spiritual purification, just to name a few cases.

Mr. Chairman, without even referring to acts of indiscipline in the various arms of governance, in the public sector as well as in the private sector, I believe the above “scenario” sufficiently captures the fact that indiscipline can be found almost everywhere in Ghana. Hence, the relevance of the theme of this Convention: “**Sound Moral Education and adherence to Christian Virtues are the Bedrock of a Disciplined Society”**.

Moreover, the importance of this theme could be seen from the fact a disciplined society allows for orderly socio-economic development and for the enjoyment of improved quality of life. A disciplined society is indeed a human right.

Mr. Chairman permit me at this point to acknowledge three people who made key contributions in my preparation for this address. They are Prof. Kodjo Senah of the University of Ghana, Mr. Richard Sagodo, a Senior Officer at the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) Secretariat, Accra, and Rev. Fr. John O. Mireku of Koforidua Diocese.

1. **OUTLINE**

Once again, Mr. Chairman, Knights and Ladies of St. John International, the theme is “**Sound Moral Education and adherence to Christian Virtues are the Bedrock of a Disciplined Society”**. Besides the above introduction, I have outlined the address on this theme as follows:

* Definition of Terms
* Indiscipline in the Society
  + The Present Situation
  + Some Factors Accounting for the indiscipline in Society
* Developing a Disciplined Society
  + Establishing the Bedrock of a Disciplined Society:

Sound Moral Education and Adherence to Christian Virtues

Roles of Stakeholders in Sound Moral Education

* + Some Conditions which facilitate Adherence to Christian Virtues
* Conclusion

1. **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Mr. Chairman, from the given theme, I wish to define the following four terms: “sound moral education”, “Christian virtues”, “bedrock” and “disciplined society”.

* 1. **Sound Moral Education**

Scripture says that: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). In other words, train up a child to distinguish what is morally right from what is wrong and to choose the one which is right and live by it. This is what moral education is about. Hence, we agree with Pramila Srivastava that “Moral education influences the social thinking of the individual and makes him/her distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

For Christians and the Israelites, that which determines what is morally right or wrong is the Word of God. Therefore, while adults should abide by God’s Word, they should diligently pass it on to their children. Thus, Moses instructed the Israelites: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.  You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:4-7).

In short, then, sound moral education from the Christian perspective could be defined as training up children and young people to distinguish between good and bad moral values as defined by the Word of God and to live by good moral values.

* 1. **Christian Virtues**

Whereas, moral values and virtues are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a distinction between them. Whereas the former are moral ideals, the virtues are the internalization and actualization of the ideals. So, a person is said to have, for instance, the virtue of self-control when he/she actually exhibits it in his/her life; otherwise it remains a mere ideal that he/she aspires to achieve.

Some virtues which St. John the Baptist, the patron Saint of the Knight of St. John International (KSJI), exhibited are humility, respect, simplicity, honesty, courage, dedication, selflessness, self-control, chastity, etc. So, Knights and Ladies of KSJI should aspire to exhibit these and other Christian virtues.

* 1. **Bedrock**

A bedrock means the solid foundation of something. In the context of the theme under consideration, we hold the position that sound moral education and the adherence of Christian virtues constitute the solid foundation of a disciplined society.

* 1. **Disciplined Society**

According to Aristotle, “Discipline is obedience to rules formed by the society for the good of all”.[[2]](#footnote-2) In this perspective, a disciplined society is one in which people obey its rules, regulations and laws for the good of all.

1. **INDISCIPLINE IN THE SOCIETY**
   1. **The Present Situation**

Whereas all is not lost as far as discipline in our society is concerned, we are also not oblivious to the rampart acts of indiscipline in almost every aspect of our society, particularly Ghana. In the various form of media, we hear, read or view acts of indiscipline such as disregard of traffic regulations, bribery and corruption, examination malpractices, disrespect for the elderly, violent mob actions, murders, armed robbery, teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood, abortion, irresponsible fatherhood, homosexual activities, the abuse or use or sale of psychedelic substances (cocaine, heroin, marijuana, Indian hemp and now tramadol), insanitary environment, kidnapping, etc. Sadly, though, we do not only witness such and other acts of indiscipline, but we are sometimes the culprits.

These acts of indiscipline would not have escaped the prophetic condemnation of St. John the Baptist, the patron Saint of KSJI. About 2,000 years ago, when he observed that some tax collectors were collecting more than was due, that some soldiers were harassing citizens, and that there was greed and disrespect for others, he publicly called people to order (cf. Luke 3:10-14). Indeed, he was so fearless and forthright with his condemnation of indiscipline is society such that the governor, King Herod, who had taken his brother’s wife, would not escape his condemnation (cf. Mark 6:17-20).

The religious and national leadership as well as many of the people of his time would not listen to St. John the Baptist nor would they listen to our Lord Jesus Christ, whose way the former had come to prepare. Not obeying Jesus Christ has consequences; it is like building on a sandy ground: “anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!” (Matt. 7:26-27; GNT).

And, indeed, the nation that refused to listen to and obey Jesus was eventually destroyed by the Romans. Indiscipline, especially, when it reaches the high point of disobedient to God has a dire consequence for a society. We, therefore, need to critically examine the present state of indiscipline in Ghana and strategically work out a concrete path towards the realization of a disciplined society.

* 1. **Some Factors Accounting for the Indiscipline in Society**

In the light of the above, let us identify some factors accounting for indiscipline in our society, specifically, Ghana. The factors include:

* Inadequate moral education in our families
* Undue political influence on education policies
* Inconsistency of moral education in the curriculum of our (basic and senior high) schools
* Lack of sound moral education even in the period it was/is part of the curriculum
* Poor or lack of implementation of good policies of education
* Inadequate training of teachers to impact sound moral education
* Low moral standards of some teachers
* Inadequate teaching and learning contents and materials
* Inadequate projection of local models of Christian virtues in schools and in the larger society
* Unhealthy foreign influence on law and policy makers
* The politics of “personal gain”
* Moral cracks in the judiciary or judicial service
* Poor or lack of enforcement of good laws, rules and regulations
* High level of unemployment
* Urban and rural poverty. In the case of rural poverty, for instance, there are reported cases of “sex for fish”[[3]](#footnote-3) and child trafficking in fishing villages.
* Inadequate moral education in churches and other religious institutions
* Inadequate programmes of sound moral education by church associations (e.g. KSJI).
* Inadequate or lack of Christian virtues training by church associations
* Low moral standards of some leaders of churches and other religious bodies
* Bad moral influence through the media especially the social media
* Bad moral influence of some foreigners.

The above list is in no way exhaustive, but it makes one point clear: that though sound moral education and the adherence to Christian virtues are the bedrock of a disciplined society, they are not sufficient for achieving such a society. In other words, if we see the bedrock as the foundation of a building, we need other materials to complete the construction of the building. We need to keep this point in mind as we consider how to develop a disciplined society.

1. **DEVELOPING A DISCIPLINED SOCIETY**

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned above, to develop a disciplined society, we need to establish its bedrock (i.e. sound moral values and Christian virtues) as well as ensure the provision of those conditions which facilitate the practicing of Christian virtues.

* 1. **Establishing the Bedrock of a Disciplined Society**

Mr. Chairman, here I wish to emphasize the indispensability of sound moral education and adherence to Christian virtues for the establishment of a disciplined society. Secondly, I will consider the roles of some stakeholders in achieving sound moral education and adherence to Christian virtues.

* + 1. **Indispensability of Sound Moral Education and Adherence to Christian Virtues**

Abigail Adams (1744-1818), the wife of the second President of USA, once said: “Great learning and superior abilities will be of little value...unless virtue, truth and integrity are added to them.”[[4]](#footnote-4) A little over a century later, Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), the 26th President of USA, would concur: “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Therefore, he would rightly conclude that: “A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education [without morals], he may steal the whole railroad.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Both Theodore Roosevelt and Abigail Adams were Christians and spoke at a time when Christian values and principles were fundamental to the American Society. Their statements cited above affirm our conviction that sound moral education and by implication adherence to Christian virtues are indispensability to the establishment of a disciplined society as much as a solid foundation is indispensable for stability of a building.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Similarly, our Lord Jesus Christ admonishes us: “anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.  The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock” (Matthew 7:24-25; GNT).

Mr. Chairman, our society will stand the test of time and any evil storm, if it is built on the bedrock of the moral values and virtues which are based on the teachings of Christ. And this is the whole business of sound moral education which trains people to adhere to Christian virtues.

* + 1. **Roles of Stakeholders in Sound Moral Education**

Often when moral education is mentioned, we think of schools. However, besides the schools, the families, churches, neighbourhood communities, hospitals, recreational or sports grounds, offices, marketplaces, the media, the larger society, etc. are all environments for impacting sound moral education. Hence, the stakeholders are numerous and make up a complex network which is beyond the scope of this address. I will, therefore, identify a few key stakeholders and highlight their roles. To be considered are parents, teachers, Government/Ministry of Education, church leaders, and church association leaders.

1. **Parents**:

In Ghana, long before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, the extend family and indeed the whole community were responsible for nurturing good moral values in children and aiding them to acquire moral virtues. So, despite the social changes in contemporary Ghana, the task of sound moral education of children and other young persons should be seen as the responsibility, first and foremost, of the family, at least, of the nuclear family.

With the above point established, I wish to focus on the role of parents. It is not enough to pay fees of their children. It is not enough to provide only that which makes it conducive to achieve academic excellence without socio-moral excellence. Parents should be as much keen in the moral development of their children as in their academic performance.

Therefore, parents, despite their busy schedules, should make adequate time to discuss with their spouses and possibly other child-upbringing “consultants” how best to give sound moral training to their children, to be with their children and nurture in them good moral values, to ascertain their behaviours in school and collaborate with teachers to discipline children when they misbehave. Also, they should make time to pray with their children, and to attend church together as much as it is possible. Furthermore, parents should make available for children some religious and moral education aids (the smart phones and tablets could be put into better use), model the values by exhibiting Christian virtues, and reward the demonstration of virtues by their children and sanction their display of vices.

1. **Teachers:**

It should be clear that sound moral education cannot be realized by teaching it as a mere academic subject. Teachers need to model what they teach and so they should exhibit high moral standards or Christian virtues in and outside the classroom.

They should see impacting sound moral education as essential as the intellectual and physical education of their pupils or students. Therefore, they should be very passionate about forming their pupils or students to actualize Christian virtues in their lives.

1. **Government and Ministry of Education:**

Various Governments of Ghana through the Ministry of Education should see sound moral education and therefore the inculcation of virtues in the future leaders of the country as salient and entrenched agenda of the nation. Therefore, they should ensure that there is a stable policy of having religious and moral education as a subject on the curricula of both basic and senior high school education. In addition, they and by extension the Ghana Education Service should promote the “Infusion Approach” of Moral Education by which all the other subjects and extra-curriculum activities inculcate in pupils and students some moral values.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Also, they should ensure that a high moral standard is a prerequisite for the selection of teacher trainees. Furthermore, they should ensure that the training of future teachers, the re-training of current teachers, and their supervision all contribute to the realization of sound moral education. In this respect, the sanctioning of teachers who fall short of the required moral standards should be strictly adhered to. In addition, they should ensure the provision of adequate syllabi (in collaboration with the churches and other religious bodies) and the availability of adequate teaching materials for sound moral education.

1. **Church Leaders:**

It is the whole Church which is a major stakeholder in the sound moral education of children and other young people. Particularly, for the Catholic Church, moral education and the development of Christian virtues in the light of the Gospel of Christ are essential elements of holistic education. This is how Vatican II’s *Declaration on Christian Education* puts it:

**No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith. So indeed, the Catholic school, while it is open, as it must be, to the situation of the contemporary world, leads its students to promote efficaciously the good of the earthly city and also prepares them for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God, so that by leading an exemplary apostolic life they become, as it were, a saving leaven in the human community**.[[9]](#footnote-9)

It is in the light of the above, that we briefly consider the role of church leaders, the key drivers of the mission of the church in education.

They should ensure the reevaluation of the place of Religious and Moral Education in our Catholic and public schools in general. They should collaborate with the Governments/Ministry of Education as mentioned in the preceding section. In addition, they should ensure that Catholic Colleges of Education churn out teachers with holistic excellence and with the right passion to instill good moral values in pupils and students.

They should negotiate with Governments to secure effective management and supervision of Catholic public schools so as to instill discipline among teachers and students in such schools. They should strive to secure the concession which allows the teaching of Christian virtues-enhancing Catechism as a subject in Catholic public schools.

They should ensure that Catholic Private Schools are strictly managed and supervised to impact sound moral education and to develop Christian virtues.

Furthermore, church leaders, with the help of expertise of some lay faithful, should ensure the development and consistent implementation of comprehensive programmes which will aid families/parents in the task of sound moral education of children at their various stages of human development. Such programmes could be organized at the parish level, while aspects could be employed by parents in their various homes.

There is also the need to reevaluate existing youth programmes and to develop systematic and comprehensive ones which incorporate better schemes or activities for sound moral education and the enhancement of adherence to Christian virtues.

Also, church leaders should work out with the various leadership of Church associations more effective programmes for sound moral education and adherence to Christian virtues.

In addition, church leaders should be very mindful of their lifestyles; they should regularly preach about good moral values and exhibit Christian virtues. Sanctions should be applied where church leaders fall short of required moral standards. There should also be a more critical look at the selection and training of future church leaders.

1. **Church Association Leaders:**

Church associations, under the direction of their leaders (who in turn collaborate with the clergy), should reevaluate their programmes. They could be guided by the following questions:

* Is indiscipline in the association a (major) concern?
* To what extent does existing programmes and activities foster sound moral education?
* Are there systematic programmes and activities to inculcate Christian virtues among young members?
* In practice, is the development of personal and group spirituality a major goal?
* Is the mode of electing or appointing leaders healthy?
* What do members look out for when nominating or electing leaders?
* Are the lifestyles of association leaders worthy of emulation?
  1. **Some Conditions which facilitate Adherence to Christian Virtues**

The young who are taught moral values in the families, schools and churches need to find a conducive environment in society in order to develop habitual Christian virtues. To have more and more people whose character will exude several Christian virtues, the following are some of the conditions that must prevail in Ghana:

* There should be an environment in which the good common is cherished and fostered by the majority of people
* Human rights should be respected
* The primary, overwhelming and genuine objective of politicians should be the development of the nation and its people.
* Law and policy makers should embrace only foreign trends which are morally good in accordance with the Gospel of Christ.
* The judiciary or judicial service should meet the moral standards of the Gospel of Christ.
* There should be a strict enforcement of good laws, rules and regulations
* There should be a good rate of employment
* Urban and rural poverty should be minimized
* Good moral models should be held in high esteem
* The media especially the social media should be used to impact good moral influence.
* The bad influence of foreigners who visit the country should be checked.

**6.0 CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairman, Knights and Ladies of St. John International, we have been looking at the theme: “**Sound Moral Education and adherence to Christian Virtues are the Bedrock of a Disciplined Society”**.

I began by looking at the present state of indiscipline in our society, focusing on Ghana. In doing so, I enumerated some factors which account for the indiscipline in society. Optimistic that the present situation could change for better, I considered how we could develop a disciplined society which is essential for orderly socio-economic development and for the enjoyment of improved quality of life. Here, in line with the theme, I affirmed that sound moral education and the adherence to Christian virtues are the bedrock of a disciplined society. In doing so, I indicated the roles several key stakeholders can play to establish and consolidate the bedrock. KSJI, as an association in the Catholic Church, is a key stakeholder. Besides some of you being parents, teachers, etc. I have made a few suggestions as to how as members of KSJI you could promote/foster sound moral education and adherence to Christian virtues.

Furthermore, conscious of the fact that the bedrock, though indispensable, is not a complete edifice, I have called attention to the fact some conditions which are required in the larger society to ensure that the adherence to Christian virtues is sustained.

It is my hope that this address stirs in you a collective drive towards fostering sound moral education at various levels and a personal zeal towards actualizing habitual Christian virtues with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Long live KSJI! Long live Mother Ghana! Long Live the Catholic Church!

Thank you.

1. <https://www.newdelhitimes.com/the-need-for-moral-education/> accessed on May 15, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cited in <https://www.centuryassociation.org/assad-bhuglah-toc/2780-discipline-the-backbone-of-a-civilized-society> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Some teenagers in the Central region are bartering sex for fish in some fishing communities in the region” reported by Shirley Asiedu-Addo, 7 December 2017 ([https://earthjournalism.net/stories/ central-region-teenage-girls-exchanging-sex-for-fish](https://earthjournalism.net/stories/%20central-region-teenage-girls-exchanging-sex-for-fish), accessed on 12th July, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cited in Aynur Pala, “The Need for Character Education”, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*. Vol. 3, no. 2, 2011, p. 23. ISSN: 1309-8063. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cited in <https://www.newdelhitimes.com/the-need-for-moral-education/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cited in <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/moral-education-in-schools-1.2098516>; accessed on May 15, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ## The history of Moral Education in public schools in USA is as checkered as that of Ghana, though there are some differences in their details. The first Europeans who settled in America were mainly Protestants, so initially Moral Education in the schools from the Protestant Christian perspective. When later, Catholic settlers were increasing they establish their own schools for fear that their children in schools where Moral Education had a protestant could lead to the conversion of their children. With the advent of Islam and other religions and rise in the voices of secularism and atheism, Moral Education in public schools were replaced with the subject of Values Clarification. This “rests on little theory other than the assumption that students need practice choosing among moral alternatives and that teachers should be facilitators of the clarification process rather than indoctrinators of particular moral ideas or value choices. This approach, although widely practiced, came under strong criticism for, among other things, promoting moral relativism among students.” A second approach followed, namely, the *cognitive developmental moral education.* “In contrast to values clarification, cognitive moral development is heavy on theory and light on classroom applications…. Teachers are encouraged to engage students from an early age and throughout their schooling in discussion of moral issues and dilemmas.” This also did not yield the desired results. “In the early 1980s, amid the widespread concern over students' poor academic achievements and behavior, educators rediscovered the word *character.* Moral education had a religious tinge, which made many uneasy. Character with its emphasis on forming good habits and eliminating poor habits struck a popular and traditional chord…. A widely repeated definition (i.e., character education is helping a child to know the good, to desire the good, and to do the good) straddles this issue. For some people the internal focus of character education comfortably can be both religious and civic and for others the focus can be strictly civic, dealing exclusively on the formation of the good citizen” (Kevin Ryan, “A Brief History of Moral Education, The Return of Character Education, Current Approaches to Moral Education” [https://education.stateuniversity.com/ pages/2246/Moral-Education.html](https://education.stateuniversity.com/%20pages/2246/Moral-Education.html); accessed on May 15, 2019).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kevin Ryan, “A Brief History of Moral Education, The Return of Character Education, Current Approaches to Moral Education.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Second Vatican Council, ***Declaration on Christian Education***, 1965, no. 8; cf. Code of Canon Law (1983), no. 795. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)