

## The Church of Pentecost and the Moral Transformation of Ghana

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### Abstract

The paper argues that the close relationship between Ghana's largest church, the Church of Pentecost, and the country's main political parties is indicative more generally of an increasingly close relationship between Christianity and politics, including in relation to seeking to amend and improve the moral behaviour of Ghanaians which in turn could help improve the quality of the country's democracy, said to be declining. The paper adopts a comparative and qualitative methodological approach while also drawing on Afrobarometer's quantitative data. The key result is that there is a link between morality and democratic health in Ghana, while the major conclusion is that the potential to improve democratic health by improving national morality is limited, mainly because many citizens are sceptical that such a path is likely to achieve the desired objective.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Church of Pentecost, morality, development, democracy

### Introduction

The paper argues that the close relationship between the Church of Pentecost (CoP), and the country's main political parties is indicative more generally of an increasingly close relationship between Christianity and politics. This relationship includes ways to try to amend and improve the moral and ethical behaviour of Ghanaians in order to help improve the quality of the country's democracy, which is said to be declining due in part to increasing corruption among politicians.<sup>1</sup> It examines the Church's landmark policy document, *Vision 2023*, specifically to assess ways that the CoP envisages improving the country's morality. In addition, the paper reviews the CoP's National Development Conference 2023, entitled: 'Moral Vision and National Development', during which a host of speakers, both from the CoP and from outside the Church, expressed support for the CoP's initiative to improve Ghana's morality.

Following independence in 1957, Ghana had a series of elected and unelected civilian and military regimes. Following a decade of military rule, Ghana democratised in 1992. In 2023, Ghana celebrated three decades of the Fourth Republic, an impressive feat of democratic longevity, one of Africa's few continuously democratic regimes. Pressure to democratise developed from the mid-1980s. The historic mission churches,

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<sup>1</sup> John Osa-Kwarpong. 'Ghana's democracy. Worrying signals from 2023 Democracy Index', *Daily Graphic*, 21 February 2024, 18.; Interview with Dr Charles Prempeh, Church of Pentecost member, and Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.

both Protestant and Catholic, were at the forefront of civil society pressure on the unelected military-based government of Jerry John Rawlings to democratise.

Democratisation encouraged various civil society actors, both secular and religious, including the Christian Council of Ghana, to comment publicly on issues of public concern.<sup>2</sup> The onset of democratisation in 1992 coincided with a period of rapid growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these developments encouraged Christian leaders to contribute to debates about public policy in various areas, including Ghana's moral calibre.

Senior politicians from Ghana's two main parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Convention (NDC) became increasingly open about how their faith affected their parties' public policies. For example, Ghana's then president, the NDC's John Evans Atta-Mills, declared in May 2011 at the annual convention of the Church of Pentecost that "Christ is the president of Ghana and he owe[d] no one any apologies for the statement which, according to him, is his 'guiding principle as head of state.'"<sup>4</sup> With this statement, Otu notes, Atta-Mills "essentially proposed Christianity as Ghana's national religion."<sup>5</sup>

This does not imply that Christianity was uninfluential in Ghana's politics before the 1980s. Christianity had an important historic role in Ghana in the nation-building project both during and after the colonial period.<sup>6</sup> In Ghana, religion and politics are traditionally connected through a notion of power, fundamentally of a spiritual nature.<sup>7</sup> Before British colonialism, the Ashanti kingdom was the most powerful territorial political actor. This source of power fused religion and politics within the Ashanti kingdom, based on the belief that the king's seat of power ('the golden stool') descended from the sky, uniting the nation's soul and spirit. This reflects an indigenous and precolonial notion of religious nationalism, suggesting that the political philosophy of fusing religion and politics in Ghana is neither historically novel nor alien. Rather, it is a contemporary manifestation of a deeply rooted indigenous idea, albeit informed by contemporary regional and global discourses and influences. Among the latter is the contemporary impact of Pentecostal Christianity and its paradox of dis/continuity with African indigenous religions, which provides

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Haynes. *Religion and Politics in Africa*. (London: Zed Books, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Benyah. 2020. "Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches and the Provision of Social Services in Ghana." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 38: 16–30.

<sup>4</sup> 'Christ is President'. 2011. GhanaWeb.

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Christ-Is-President-President-Mills-208162> Accessed 18 August 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Kwame Edwin Otu. 2019. *Skewing Sexuality*. Africa Is a Country. Available online:

<https://africasacountry.com/2019/12/skewingsexuality>

<sup>6</sup> Paul Gifford. *African Christianity: Its Public Role*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Ellis and Gerri Ter Haar. *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Power in Africa*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004).

a useful angle to explore the historical and religious context of Christianity in Ghana.<sup>8</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu notes that religion in Ghana today is all-pervasive and linked to most popular communal and societal activities, and, as a result, “it is impossible to understand politics in contemporary Ghana without some knowledge of the role religion plays in it.”<sup>9</sup>

The reintroduction of democracy in 1992 led to a new phase of national religiousness, contoured by Pentecostal-Charismatic churches’ growing religious and demographic prominence.<sup>10</sup> Professor Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, immediate past President and Baeta-Grau Professor of Contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostalism at Trinity Theological Seminary at Accra, explained that the historic mission churches traditionally “responded to [political] developments through communiques and statements in the media,” addressing their comments to those in power.<sup>11</sup> The Pentecostal-Charismatic churches took a different approach to political concerns. Typically, they would organise mass ‘prayer and fasting’ among their followers in order to deal with “political issues during elections, such as threats of violence both before and after elections.”<sup>12</sup> Pentecostal-Charismatic churches used biblical precedence to interpret and explain why Ghana was suffering, employing prayer and prophetic declarations, which over time tilted Ghana’s Christian gravitational centre.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches became the heartland of the Christian faith, dominating Ghana’s religious landscape.<sup>14</sup> Over time, rather than secularising, many Ghanaians have embraced their Christian faith with great fervour, which in turn has significantly impacted many Ghanaians’ sense of national identity.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the return of democracy in 1992 and the growing influence of religion in public life and politics, many Ghanaians, both Christians and Muslims, express

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<sup>8</sup> Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola, eds. *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*. (London: PalgraveMacmillan, 2018); Allan Heaton Anderson. *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. ‘God Bless our Homeland Ghana’: Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State, in Cephias N. Omenyo and Eric B. Anum (eds.), *Trajectories of Religion in Africa. Essays in Honour of John S. Pobee*. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 165.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Gifford. *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, Accra, 17 April 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, Accra, 17 April 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Fredrick Acheampong. n.d. Unpublished review of J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘God Bless Our Homeland Ghana’.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277009276\\_Acheampong\\_Fredrick\\_review\\_of\\_God\\_Bless\\_Our\\_Homeland\\_Ghana\\_Religion\\_and\\_Politics\\_in\\_a\\_Post-Colonial\\_African\\_State\\_by\\_J\\_Kwabena\\_Asamoah-Gyadu\\_in\\_Trajectories\\_of\\_Religion\\_in\\_Africa\\_Essays\\_in\\_Honour\\_of\\_J/link/555ddf3f08ae6f4dcc8d4345/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277009276_Acheampong_Fredrick_review_of_God_Bless_Our_Homeland_Ghana_Religion_and_Politics_in_a_Post-Colonial_African_State_by_J_Kwabena_Asamoah-Gyadu_in_Trajectories_of_Religion_in_Africa_Essays_in_Honour_of_J/link/555ddf3f08ae6f4dcc8d4345/download) (accessed 31 May 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Quayisi-Amakye. 2015. “Pentecostals and Contemporary Church-State Relations in Ghana.” *Journal of Church and State*, 57: 640.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, Accra, 17 April 2023.

concern about what they regard as a serious decline in morality and integrity at both elite and popular levels.<sup>16</sup> Moral decline is believed to fuel corruption, undermine national development, and diminish faith in democracy as the best available system of government. Kwame Gyekye examines the nexus between corruption and morality in his 1997 book, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*.<sup>17</sup>

Senior figures in the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana's largest church, with more than 3.8 million followers – over 10% of the country's population are concerned both with the apparent decline of morality in Ghana and with the chances of political violence in the run-up to the December 2024 elections.<sup>18</sup> The Chairman of the Church of Pentecost, Apostle Eric Nyamekye, voiced his concern in May 2024 that Ghana's 2024 elections could turn into a religious battle with one presidential candidate, the NPP's Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, a Muslim, and his main challenger, John Mahama of the NDC, a member of the Assemblies of God church.<sup>19</sup>

Apostle Nyamekye and other senior CoP figures have developed close relationships with senior figures in Ghana's political class, including Ghana's two main political parties, the NPP and NDC. A close relationship between the CoP, the NPP and the NDC informs political debate in Ghana in two main ways. First, the CoP seeks to develop a framework to improve Ghanaians' moral behaviour, which accords both with Ghana's traditional culture and with the CoP's values and beliefs. Second, the CoP seeks to improve Ghanaians' morality in the run-up to the 2024 elections and to achieve this goal politically by voting for politicians who exemplify a suitable sense of morality in both their public and private lives.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, spokesperson of Ghana's National Chief Imam, Accra, 6 February 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Kwame Gyekye. *Tradition and modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. (Oxford, UK, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Justice Anquandah Arthur, Senior Lecturer, PSTM, Pentecost University, Accra, 13 April 2024; Interview with J. Asare, CoP Pastor, 13 April 2024; Emmanuel Bonney. 2024. 'Don't turn elections into religious battle - Apostle Nyamekye to Ghanaians', *The Daily Graphic*, 3 May. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-dont-turn-elections-into-religious-battle-apostle-nyamekye-to-ghanaians.html> Accessed 18 August 2024.; Felix Delah Klutse. 2022. The Church of Pentecost membership hits over 3.3 million. 'Modern Ghana' <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1155852/the-church-of-pentecost-membership-hits-over-33mi.html> (accessed 16 August 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Bonney. 2024. 'Don't turn elections into religious battle - Apostle Nyamekye to Ghanaians', *The Daily Graphic*, 3 May. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-dont-turn-elections-into-religious-battle-apostle-nyamekye-to-ghanaians.html> Accessed 18 August 2024.

Following this introductory section, the second section of the paper outlines the paper's research methodology. The third section examines links between morality and politics in Ghana. The fourth section looks at how moral vision is connected to national development. The concluding section sums up the findings of the paper.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper adopts a comparative and qualitative methodological approach while also drawing on Afrobarometer's quantitative data. It builds on the author's long-standing interest in religion and politics in Ghana, which began in the mid-1980s, involving lengthy research trips in 1985 and 1990. The author undertook further research visits to Ghana in July and November 2022, April 2023, and February and June 2024. These visits resulted in many personal interviews with knowledgeable Ghanaians, including theologians, public intellectuals, political scientists, current and former government members, civil society organisations, and journalists.<sup>20</sup> The article also draws on other sources of information, including research monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, press statements from politicians and religious figures, relevant articles from Ghanaian newspapers, Ghanaian and foreign news websites, blogs, and social media channels. Finally, the article benefited from grey literature,<sup>21</sup> not least because much of the current debate about the political role of religion in Ghana is expressed in such fora.

### **Morality and Politics in Ghana**

Ghana's national development is said to be undermined by what many Ghanaians regard as a serious decline in morality and integrity at both elite and popular levels. Moral decline is believed to fuel corruption and diminish some citizens' belief in democracy as the best available system of government. The role of religion in morality

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<sup>20</sup> The author conducted fieldwork for this article, including relevant interviews, as an emeritus professor of London Metropolitan University, during 2022-24. Research ethics approval was obtained from the author's university, London Metropolitan University. Research ethics approval was also granted by Professor William Otoo Ellis, Chairman of the CoP's Research and Development Committee. The author's request to interview Professor Opoku Onyinah, Apostle Dr Emmanuel Anim, and Apostle Dr Christian Tsekpoe, was granted by Prof. Ellis in March 2023. Unfortunately Prof. Ellis' approval came too late for the author to interview the named persons during his February 2023 research visit to Ghana. Names of interviewees who contributed to the research for this paper are included at the end of the paper. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interview questions are included at the end of the paper.

<sup>21</sup> Grey literature is any information not produced by commercial publishers, including research reports, working papers, conference proceedings, theses, preprints, white papers, blogs, podcasts, social media posts, guidelines, policy documents and reports produced by government departments, academics, business and industry. For this paper, such sources of information were often useful in helping find out current information on emerging areas of concern, enabling the author to learn from diverse range. Such information is not of course peer reviewed, and its quality is variable. As a result, the author sought to triangulate any information from grey sources with further insights from peer reviewed material.

is highly important in Ghana, a highly religious country.<sup>22</sup> Most Ghanaians belong to a religious faith. The most recent census (2021) indicates that 71.3% of the population identify as Christians.<sup>23</sup> About three-tenths of Ghanaians (29%) – that is, about 10 million people in a population of 30.8 million – are not Christian. Muslims comprise a fifth (19.9%) of Ghana's population, those following 'traditionalist' religions amount to 3.2%, 'other religious groups' to 4.5%, and those with 'no religion', 1.1%.<sup>24</sup>

Today, the public voice of Christian leaders is very prominent in Ghana. Bediako examined the central role of Christian leaders in calls for Ghana's re-democratisation from the mid-1980s.<sup>25</sup> Bediako identified the then contemporaneous emergence of a new public theology, which, contesting a tendency unquestioningly to vest political power with sacred authority, had a central role in changing Ghana's political culture in a genuinely democratic direction.

Scholars have also written extensively on the relationship between religion and morality in Ghana. These include their assessments of what determines moral or immoral behaviour.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear whether religious belief is a key determinant of moral behaviour. Discourse on the sources of morals found its way into African ethics from the West, augmenting Africans' own examinations of the religious roots of morality.<sup>27</sup> For Christians, the foundation of the church is the Bible, teaching principles such as love and compassion. Consequently, Christians are encouraged to shun greed, bribery and corruption and thus improve society's moral fibre.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kofi Quashigah. *Religion and the Secular State in Ghana*. (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015); Interviews with Hajj Abdel-Manan Abdel-Rahman, Chairman of Coalition of Muslim Organisations of Ghana, via Zoom, 10 May 2023, Mr Kpanie Addy, Executive Director, Arrupe Jesuit Institute, Accra, 17 April 2023, and Dr John Azumah, Executive Director, The Sanneh Institute, University of Ghana, Accra, 21 April 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Christian denominations in Ghana include Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist, and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Today, the latter demographically overshadow the historic mission churches, including the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches (<https://africanchristian.info/ghana-christianity/>).

<sup>24</sup> Doris Dakua Sasu. N/d. Religious affiliation of the population in Ghana in 2010 and 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1172414/religious-affiliation-in-ghana/> (accessed 1 June 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Kwame Bediako. "Christian Witness in the Public Sphere: Some Lessons and Residual Challenges from the Recent Political History of Ghana", in Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (eds.), *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 117.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Kofi Quashigah. *Religion and the Secular State in Ghana*. (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015 and George Anderson Jnr. 2013. 'Religion and Morality in Ghana: A Reflection', *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (3): 162-170.

<sup>27</sup> Kwame Gyekye. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996); John Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Heinemann, 1990); George Anderson Jnr. 2013. 'Religion and Morality in Ghana: A Reflection', *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (3): 162-170.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with the executive director of a national religious project, Accra, 26 April 2023, and with a retired Romam Catholic priest, Accra, 21 April 2023.

Anderson Jnr and Inusah identify moral values as “guiding principles, virtues, or standards of behaviour” widely understood “as desirable and important” and “held in high repute by a society or an individual.”<sup>29</sup> The values guide the moral agent in his or her interaction with other moral agents. The authors identify the following moral values extant in Ghana: honour, respect, hospitality, gratitude, truthfulness, obedience, unity, godliness, hard work and courage. For Gyekye, moral values are “forms or patterns of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and cherished by society.”<sup>30</sup> Moral values are principles of behaviour and objectives of both social and individual actions. Sarpong adds that moral values may be peculiar and differ from one culture or society to another; yet there are some values such as respect, truthfulness and honesty inter alia which are universal.<sup>31</sup>

Leading Christians in Ghana publicly assert that the country is undergoing significant moral decline.<sup>32</sup> Reverend Joseph Felix Mensah, Chairman of the Apostolic Council, Great Commission Church International, stated in August 2022 that “the Church has failed in its responsibility of nurturing people of integrity and sound character.” This is because “issues of morality and integrity were no longer of major concern, especially in educational institutions” and “moral breakdown” was negatively affecting society, leading some to ridicule the Christian faith. Mensah’s concerns were echoed a few months later in a June 2023 newspaper article, by Most Reverend Emmanuel Kwaku Asante, former Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana and past Chairman of the National Peace Council.<sup>33</sup> Asante quoted a prominent Ghanaian theologian, the late Rev. Prof. Joshua Kudadjie:

In private as in public life there is irresponsibility, dishonesty, corruption, subterfuge, people of all walks of life and status engage in currency and drug trafficking, abuse of office, cheating, fraud, misappropriation, embezzlement, nepotism. It looks as if we cannot distinguish between right and wrong and have no recognizable standard of behaviour. ... There is lawlessness, lack of respect for authority.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> George Anderson Jnr and Hussein Inusah. 2023. “Virtue Ethics as a Model for Addressing Moral Decline in Ghana,” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 4, 3:170.

<sup>30</sup> Kwame Gyekye. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Sarpong. *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*. (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 64.; Interviews with Reverend Michael Nortey, Research Fellow, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, Accra, 24 April 2023 and Father Joop Visser, Catholic priest, Accra, 21 April 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Church of Pentecost Pastor, Bright Nyamedor, National Director of the Ghana Evangelism Committee, Accra, 16 February 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Most Reverend Emmanuel Kwaku Asante highlighted his concerns to the author during a personal interview with the author via WhatsApp on 3 May 2023. This form of interview was necessary as Reverend Asante was not been in Ghana during the author’s April 2023 research visit to Accra.

<sup>34</sup> Emmanuel Asante. 2023. ‘Message For Fathers’ Day Celebration: To Be Celebrated Or Not To Be Celebrated?’, *The Chronicle*, 23 June. <https://thechronicle.com.gh/message-for-fathers-day-celebration-to-be-celebrated-or-not-to-be-celebrated/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

The following section examines the Church of Pentecost's approach to Ghana's morality dilemma, as exemplified in *Vision 2023* and the Church's National Development Conference 2023, entitled Moral Vision and National Development.

### **Moral Vision and National Development**

The Speaker of Ghana's Parliament, Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, announced that parliament would not sit on Wednesday, 26 July 2023, due to an event of great national importance taking place away from parliament. Not only Bagbin, but also the 'Leadership of the House, and other Members of Parliament' (MPs) participated in the country's first National Development Conference on 26-27 July, organised by the Church of Pentecost at the Pentecost Convention Centre in Millennium City, Gomoa Fetteh, near Kasoa in the Central Region.<sup>35</sup> Others in attendance included National Executives of political parties, leaders of religious bodies, civil society organisations and governance experts. Conference keynote speakers were drawn from Ghana's political, legal and religious elite: the vice president, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, speaking on behalf of Ghana's president, Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo, Speaker Bagbin, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Gertrude Araba Esaaba Torkornoo, two former presidents of Ghana: John Agyekum Kufuor and John Dramani Mahama, the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost Apostle Eric Nyamekye, and Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, spokesperson of Ghana's National Chief Imam, Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu. Clearly, this was an important event featuring the involvement of leading figures from Ghana's political and religious environments.

The 2023 CoP-organised national development conference followed publication in 2019 of *Vision 2023*. *Vision 2023* sets out in detail how the Church strategically addresses Ghana's development problems. The Church's strategy, "to possess the nations", is to be achieved via three approaches: "equipping the church", "strengthening and realigning church institutions and structures", and "transforming societies." Pastor Kwasi Asante Annor, General Manager of the CoP television station, PENT TV, explained that the National Development Conference was an important component of "transforming societies." The conference was "a historic event that brought together the influencers of society to deliberate and reflect on the moral vision of our nation - Ghana - and its implications for National Development."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Parliament suspends July 26 sitting for National Development Conference. 2023. 'The Ghana Report'. <https://www.theghanareport.com/parliament-suspends-july-26-sitting-for-national-development-conference/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

<sup>36</sup> Kwasi Asante Annor, 2023 'Deepening the Call For Moral Vision and National Development: The Rwandan Model- Lessons For Ghana - Part One'. <https://thecophq.org/deepening-the-call-for-moral-vision-and-national-development-the-rwandan-model-lessons-for-ghana-part-one/> (accessed 16 August 2023).



*Vision 2023* is a manifesto to transform Ghanaian society in line with biblical pronouncements, including Genesis 41: 39-41 and Jeremiah. 29: 4-7.<sup>37</sup> A section of *Vision 2023*, entitled, "Community Transformation Overview," states:

The Church is commissioned by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to advance the Kingdom of God on earth. Its mandate is the discipleship of the nations, which also brings along societal transformation and development. In other words, to develop and transform the nations and communities is to move those communities towards Christ. This calls for a change of worldviews, opinions, attitudes and ways of life.<sup>38</sup>

CoP efforts to transform society involve working with the government, traditional authorities, such as chiefs, and the media. Specific steps include:

- rolling out 'programmes to strategically engage/disciple the nation's existing governance structures'.<sup>39</sup>
- deepening 'engagement with the chieftaincy institution in order to impart values of the Kingdom of God to traditional authorities'.<sup>40</sup>
- embarking 'on strategic partnerships with government in developing the nation,
- partnering with 'Government to establish public schools at strategic places to enable the poor to have improved access to education'.
- contributing 'to national level dialogues and discussions on highly relevant issues that promote national development and border on the welfare of Ghanaians'.<sup>41</sup>
- initiating a security-based development project dubbed 'Police Station & Post Project (PSPP)' to put up police stations/police posts in some selected deprived and insecure areas. This will be "our contribution to government's efforts to provide police posts in communities where they are needed,"
- collaborating 'with the Ghana Prisons Service, the church will initiate the construction of accommodation facilities (cells) for selected prisons in the country as part of efforts to support government ease congestions in those prisons'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Genesis 41: 39-41: Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.' Jeremiah. 29: 4-7 'So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

<sup>38</sup> The Church of Pentecost. *Vision 2023. Five-Year Vision Document for The Church of Pentecost Covering the Period 2018-2023. Theme: Possessing the Nations: Equipping the Church to Transform Every Sphere of Society with Values and Principles of the Kingdom of God.* (Accra: Church of Pentecost Ghana, 2019), 62.

<sup>39</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 53.

<sup>40</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 57.

<sup>41</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 61.

<sup>42</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 61-62.

- 'strategically collaborate with some selected media houses to push the transformation agenda of the church.'<sup>43</sup>

The anticipated outcome of the strategy, covering the years 2018-2023, was set out in a section entitled: 'Expectation of a Transformed Society':

- A society free from negative behaviours or vices,
- A society where Christ-like behaviours are displayed,
- Increase in godliness in the society, i.e., people of integrity,
- Considerable reduction in corruption,
- Reduction in crime-rate and social vices such as teenage pregnancy, smoking and rape cases,
- A society whose members are law-abiding citizens,
- Godliness in the society,
- The Church will be actively involved in the discipling of the nation's existing governance structures (executive, judiciary, legislature) and corporate and social institutions with the values and principles of the Kingdom of God.<sup>44</sup>

Achievement of the goals of *Vision 2023* is dependent on the ability to achieve a moral transformation of Ghana. The theme of the 2023 National Development Conference, 'Moral Vision and National Development', highlighted links between morality and national development. Conference speakers addressed the theme in several ways. For example, the vice-president, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, 'pledged that the Government would work assiduously' to establish a free and just society, where entrepreneurship and individual initiative are the sources of wealth creation with "a strong social safety net for the marginalised and disadvantaged; and the improvement of the governance architecture to deepen accountability and respect for the rule of law in our body politic."<sup>45</sup> Dr Bawumia did not have the time to explain how this would be done, or what particular reforms would be needed to ensure success.

A second speaker, the Chief Imam's spokesperson, Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, emphasised the "significant role of religion in upholding moral uprightness for national development." Shaibu asserted that "religion and morality are inseparably intertwined, with religious norms shaping and governing behaviour to achieve moral goals." To define morality as a system which society uses to understand what is right involves for Shaibu, "a code of conduct that guides individuals to engage in behaviours deemed good and encouraged while discouraging harmful actions (moral vices)."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 67.

<sup>44</sup> The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023*. 105-110.

<sup>45</sup> The Church of Pentecost is a Steadfast Development Partner – Veep'. 2023.

<https://thecophq.org/category/church-news/page/4/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

<sup>46</sup> Religion Plays a Significant Role in Nation Building – Sheikh Shaibu Asserts. 2023.

<https://thecophq.org/category/church-news/page/5/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

At its close, the conference issued a communique, stating that: “The moral character of the nation has dipped, as evidenced in the increasingly inefficient leadership at all levels (such as family, Chieftaincy, religious, political etc.), degradation of the environment, lack of integrity, disrespect in public discourse, corruption, lack of patriotism and volunteerism in Ghana.”<sup>47</sup> The conference called for establishment of a National Moral and Integrity Council (NMIC), with the status of Ghana’s Peace Council.<sup>48</sup> The aim of the NMIC is to oversee “a process of restoration of generations of decay and moral decadence that Ghana has experienced over the years,” via a ‘National Moral Vision Plan’.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the NMIC would appoint a ‘multi-electoral team’ led by ‘Faith Based Organisations’ to engage national bodies, such as the National Commission on Civic Education and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, and other relevant stakeholders to actualise the National Moral Vision Plan.

The government did not publicly respond to the call for a NMIC, a National Moral Vision Plan, or a faith-dominated ‘multi-electoral team’, and there were no further details provided by the CoP, such as terms of reference or how progress would be assessed. To seek to assess how Ghanaians felt about the NMIC and other aspects of the CoP plan, the author communicated during the week of 5-12 August 2023 with around 20 Ghanaian colleagues and friends, some religious people and some not. The aim was to seek their views on the NMIC and whether they believed it could fix Ghana’s perceived morality and integrity concerns, including significant state-level corruption, identified by Afrobarometer as one of the most serious issues facing the country, many Ghanaians believe.<sup>50</sup> Responses ranged from, on the one hand, a belief that such a council was not needed and/or would not be established, to a belief, on the other hand, that the NMIC was potentially a good idea but unlikely that the government would see it as a priority with presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2024. Several respondents noted a problematic issue: Whose morals are appropriate to judge elite and public morality and integrity, and what standards should be used to make judgements?

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<sup>47</sup> The communique is reproduced in full at <https://thecophq.org/category/church-news/page/5/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

<sup>48</sup> Ghana’s National Peace Council is an independent statutory national peace institution established by 818th Act of Ghana’s Parliament, named The National Peace Council Act, 2011. The core function of the Council is to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict and to build sustainable peace <https://www.peacecouncil.gov.gh/>

<sup>49</sup> Letitia Osei. 2023. Clergy, chiefs, others call for establishment of National Moral and Integrity Council. ‘Citi Newsroom’. <https://citinewsroom.com/2023/07/clergy-chiefs-others-call-for-establishment-of-national-moral-and-integrity-council/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

<sup>50</sup> Afrobarometer. 2023. ‘Summary of results. Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey in Ghana, 2022 <https://www.afrobarometer.org/countries/ghana/> (accessed 16 August 2023).

## **Conclusion**

The narrative in this brief paper suggests several points for those seeking to understand the links between religion, morality and democracy in Ghana. The aim of this paper was modest: to set out the role of the Church of Pentecost, in accord with the government of Ghana, to introduce and develop a framework of national importance to improve Ghana's morality, development and democracy.

First, it is clear that to ascertain links between corruption, values and the role religion plays in people's attitudes and lives, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research into Ghana's specific cultural and religious context. The current paper is no more than a preliminary effort to do that. Second, the potential contribution of religion to improve morality, for example, by tackling corruption, is inherently limited, not least because in contemporary Ghanaian society, values are subject to many non-religious influences. Third, recent Afrobarometer data indicate that many Ghanaians, despite the great majority being followers of religious faith, are sceptical of their religious leaders, believing many to be prone to corruption.<sup>51</sup>

Recent data from Afrobarometer reveals that democracy in Ghana is falling short for many citizens due to various factors, including heightened perceptions of both petty and state-level corruption. There is also a growing sense of pessimism regarding national development and a lack of confidence in the ability of successive governments to address these issues. According to Afrobarometer, "77% of Ghanaians believe that the level of corruption in the country has increased over the past year," and "87% of citizens feel that Ghana is moving in the wrong direction." Additionally, when asked about the current government's effectiveness in "fighting corruption in government," responses were as follows: 33.5% indicated very badly and 21.0% fairly badly.

Afrobarometer posed a further question: "How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Religious leaders?" The results revealed that 61.5% perceived 'some' religious leaders as corrupt, while 17.7% believed 'most' were corrupt, and 9.5% thought 'all' were corrupt. Consequently, a significant 88.7% of Ghanaians surveyed in 2020 believed that either 'some', 'most', or 'all' religious leaders are involved in corruption. Furthermore, over half of those surveyed expressed limited faith in religious leaders: 21.0% indicated 'not at all' and 31.3% said 'just a little'. These findings are particularly relevant in light of proposals for a National Moral and Integrity Council and a National Moral Vision plan, which are likely to be influenced by prominent Christian figures, including those from the Church of Pentecost.

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<sup>51</sup> Afrobarometer. 2023.

Fourth, despite the scepticism of some Ghanaians, there is clearly untapped potential for religious ethics and narratives to contribute to curbing corruption. However, this would only be the case if religion is not merely interpreted in terms of ritual practices, but in terms of its values consistently lived out and translated into appropriate moral behaviour. To attain this, spiritual training and appropriate values should be infused from childhood, and then consistently reinforced throughout adult life.

The Church of Pentecost's organisation of Ghana's initial national development conference underlined growing calls for religion to be used in the fight against 'moral decadence' and corruption on the assumption that Ghana's religious elite are more ethical and moral compared to other Ghanaians. Yet, this may be a dubious assumption, not least because many of the more corrupt countries in the world, including Ghana according to Transparency International, also rank highly in terms of religiosity; yet many religious leaders are believed to be corrupt by 'ordinary' Ghanaians, according to Afrobarometer data. Some Ghanaians may believe that there is a causal relationship between religion and corruption, involving some religious leaders. Religion may have some impact on attitudes towards corruption, but it may have only a limited impact on actual corrupt behaviour. This is because – despite universal condemnation of corruption – the latter is widely seen by Ghanaians as being so systemic that being incorrupt may make little sense.

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