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Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana

Jeffrey Haynes

School of Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, London N7 8DB, UK; tsjhayn1@londonmet.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper argues that Christian nationalism is a significant religious and political ideology in Ghana, a west African country whose population is 70 per cent Christian. In Ghana, Christian nationalism is not simply Christians seeking to make their collective voice heard on issues of national interest. Instead, Christian nationalists pursue a religious and political project with the aim of remaking Ghana according to their values and beliefs. To embed and consolidate influence, prominent Christian nationalists in Ghana both cultivate 'insider' status with powerful political elites and develop a high media profile in order to promote their views, encourage the government to adopt their policies, and increase the number of followers. This article makes two main arguments. First, Christian nationalists in Ghana seek to change public policy to remake the country according to their understanding of Christian morals and ethical behaviour. Second, Christian nationalists in Ghana pursue their goal—to build the kingdom of God on earth—in three main ways: (1) strong support for Ghana's national cathedral, seen as a celebration of national unity and social cohesion; (2) attacks on alleged immorality of Ghana's LGBTQ+ community; (3) vilify followers of minority religions to encourage the view that Christianity is the most appropriate religion in Ghana and that other religions are inferior.

Keywords: Christian nationalism; dominion theology; national cathedral; LGBTQ+; inter-faith relations

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1. Introduction

Christian nationalism in Ghana is a religious and political ideology whose proponents seek to change public policy in order to build God's kingdom on earth. Christian nationalism in Ghana poses a serious threat to national cohesion by vilifying those believed to be slowing down or preventing the achievement of God's kingdom on earth: Muslims, followers of African traditional religions, and Ghana's LGBTQ+ community.

The main contribution of the article is to examine Christian nationalism in Ghana in comparison with other African countries where the phenomenon is noted. The main empirical contribution is to assess the impact of Christian nationalism in Ghana in relation to three controversial issues: the national cathedral, criminalisation of the country's LGBTQ+ community, and inter-faith relations between Christians and Muslims.

The paper addresses analytical issues via five questions. First, to what extent is Christian nationalism in Ghana a manifestation of a regional trend? Zambia was declared a 'Christian nation' over 30 years ago. Nigeria's politics have been significantly influenced by Christians, notably Pentecostals, for more than two decades. Côte d'Ivoire experienced the rise of Christian nationalism from the late 1990s, with significant effects on inter-faith relations. Ethiopia is a religiously plural country, where Christian nationalism is said to be 'tearing the country apart' (DeCort 2022). It is, however, unclear to what extent—if at all—'Christian nationalism' in, for example, Côte d'Ivoire is the same phenomenon as in Ghana. It will require comparative research to ascertain similarities and dissimilarities between expressions of what scholars identify as 'Christian nationalism' in various countries, both in Africa and more generally.

Second, what is the ideological and theological substance of Christian nationalism in Ghana? Christian nationalism is a vehicle for dominion theology. Dominion theology 'is a theological theorem that crosscuts Pentecostal megachurch networks [unfolding] a

Pentecostal theory of society and social change. . . . a master-narrative to exert hegemony over diverse "spheres" of society', including political and economic spheres (Heuser 2020). Influential Christian nationalists in Ghana, including Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, general overseer of the Action Chapel International ministry, are proponents of dominion theology (Acheampong 2018; Sallah 2020; Haynes 2022b). Dominion theology seeks national transformation via a government of Christians, ruling via biblical law. The goal is Christian authority over society and politics, to usher in 'God's kingdom on earth'. Duncan-Williams expresses it thus: Christians 'should rule in corporate, politics, the marketplace, everywhere'. To establish God's kingdom on earth is seen as a fulfilment of Jesus's prayer: 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.[1] Duncan-Williams is a close associate of both Ghana's president, Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo, and Paula White-Cain, Donald Trump's personal theologian. Duncan-Williams conducted the service at Trump's presidential inauguration in 2017. In addition, dominion theology provides a biblical justification both for attacks on Ghana's LGBTQ+ community due to a lionising of 'family values' and for asserting the superiority of Christianity over Islam and African traditional religions, regarding them as 'false religions' which help keep Ghana in 'darkness' (The Church of Pentecost 2019).

Third, how does Christian nationalism in Ghana resonate with local religio-political and cultural worldviews? Religious leaders have religious and social power when they are seen as being 'above politics' and with a moral authority seen as representative of the nation, which fuses national and religious identity (Grzymała-Busse 2015). The fusion's power draws on myths about the nation's religious character. Christian nation ideas are most powerful when they are believed beyond the most devout sections of the population and widely shared as integral to a national identity that must be maintained. In a recent study of Christian nationalism in the USA, Whitehead and Perry argued that Christian nationalist beliefs fuse multiple markers of traditional American identity (Christianity, whiteness, conservatism) into a single cultural framework that is not limited to devout evangelicals, while it is strongly associated with them (Whitehead and Perry 2020). In Ghana, Christian nationalist beliefs draw on traditional markers of Ghanaian identity (Christianity, conservatism, antagonism to 'progressive' ideas imported from abroad, such as LGBTQ+ equality) to articulate a single cultural framework that appeals not only to the especially devout but also incorporates people who more generally share such values.

Fourth, how is Christian nationalism embedded in Ghana's political economy? In Ghana, as in many other African countries, religion is not divorced from everyday experiences of economic and socio-political life, both personal and corporate. Religious considerations consistently affect economic pursuits, including when both performance and productivity outcomes fall below public expectations. 'Appropriate' religious beliefs and practices are viewed as indispensable to improve economic performance and outcomes. When economies fall to prosper, some may believe that the country is overrun with evil forces which need to be negated by prayer to request God's deliverance (Benyah 2019, p. 171; G. Int.). In addition, Christian nationalists espouse dominion theology to improve economic outcomes. Heuser notes that in recent years, high profile Christian nationalists, including Nicholas Duncan-Williams and Mensa Otabil, have led widely reported public events extolling the virtue of the prosperity gospel and the importance of Christians dominating the economy in order to ensure Ghana's prosperity and economic well-being (Heuser 2020, pp. 246–49, 252–56).

Fifth, what are the strategies through which Christian nationalists generate concrete socio-political effects? Prominent Christian nationalists have close personal relationships with members of Ghana's political elite, including the current president, facilitating access to policy makers more generally. This encourages Christian nationalists to influence policy via personal relations, as well as via open democratic channels such as political parties or the ballot box, with the endorsement of Christian nationalists much coveted by politicians bidding for power (The Church of Pentecost General Headquarters 2022).

The first section outlines the methodology employed in the paper. The second section surveys Christian nationalism in Africa, locating Ghana in the regional context. The third section examines the development of national religiousness in Ghana, explaining that today, Christian nationalism has a significant position. The fourth section assesses the effects of Christian nationalism on public policy in Ghana by focusing on three controversial issues: the national cathedral, the social position of the LGBTQ+ community, and Christian-Muslim relations.

2. Methodology

Little scholarly attention has so far been accorded to Christian nationalism in Ghana, although several relevant issues—including the national cathedral, the social position of the LGBTQ+ community, and Christian-Muslim relations—are popularly debated on social media, as well as in the press, radio and television. This may be because, as some contend, Christian nationalism is not a significant issue in Ghana and that attempts to analyse it are simply creating a strawman, creating a problem where none really exists.

This article draws on the author's long-standing interest in religion and politics in Ghana, which began in the mid-1980s and involved lengthy research trips to Ghana in 1985 and 1990. The author undertook further research visits to Ghana in July 2022, November 2022, and April 2023, resulting in personal interviews with knowledgeable Ghanaians, including theologians, public intellectuals, political scientists, current and former government members, civil society organizations, and journalists, augmented by further interviews via Zoom in 2022–2023.[2] Additional information came via personal email conversations with knowledgeable Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians. The author selected interviewees and email respondents based on personal involvement and/or knowledge of politics and religion in Ghana. Material from interviews and email communications was augmented by peer-reviewed journal articles, research monographs, press statements, newspaper articles, Ghanaian and foreign news websites, blogs, and social media, notably Facebook and WhatsApp. Finally, this article benefited from the use of grey literature,[3] not least as much of the current debate about the political role of Christianity in Ghana is expressed in such fora. The result of this research was to confirm that many Ghanaians, both religious and less religious, regard Christian nationalism as an ideology that is gaining prominence in Ghana with religious, political, social and cultural effects.

This article adopts a comparative and qualitative methodological approach. While qualitative research methods obviously have limitations,[4] the author sought to overcome them via personal interviews and archival research. A full list of interviews is included at the end of the paper, as well as a complete list of references whose information informs the paper.

3. Christianity and Politics in Ghana

Ghana gained its independence from Britain in 1957. From independence in the 1950s to the early 1990s, Ghana saw a series of elected and unelected civilian and military regimes. Ghana democratised in 1993, and 2023 saw the 30th anniversary of Ghana as a democratic country, one of the few in Africa. Pressure to democratise built up from the mid-1980s. Mainline Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, were at the forefront of civil society pressure on the unelected military-based government of Jerry John Rawlings. Democratisation in the early 1990s encouraged civil society actors, including influential Christians, to comment publicly on issues of public concern (Haynes 1996). The 1990s also saw a rapid growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana (Benyah 2020). Together, these developments encouraged Christian leaders to contribute to debates about public policy.

Ghana's long-established Christian churches, the former mission churches, continue to influence public and government policy. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the former mission churches believed that the military-civilian unelected government of Jerry John Rawlings was denying democracy, human rights and religious freedom, and they worked

together with non-religious civil society organisations to change things. With democracy reinstated in 1992, high profile, publicly vocal Christians became prominent, including Pentecostals and Charismatics, then growing swiftly in numbers. Today, senior politicians vie with each other to appear 'holier than thou'. In May 2011, Ghana's then president, the NDC's John Evans Atta-Mills, declared at the annual convention of the Church of Pentecost that 'Christ is the president of Ghana', Atta-Mills' 'guiding principle as head of state'. Otu argues that this 'blatantly overlooked' Ghana's religious pluralism—which includes not only various strands of Christianity, several interpretations of Islam, numerous traditional African religions and various kinds of unbelievers—and 'essentially proposed Christianity as Ghana's national religion' (Otu 2019).

This is not to assert that Christianity was not influential in Ghana's politics before the 1980s. Christianity has also had an important historic role in Ghana in the project of nation-building both during and after the colonial period (Gifford 1998). In Ghana, religion and politics are traditionally connected through a notion of power, fundamentally of a spiritual nature (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). Before British colonialism, the Ashanti kingdom was the most powerful territorial political actor. Its source of power fused religion and politics, with the Ashanti kingdom based on the belief that the seat of power of the king ('the golden stool') descended from heaven, uniting the nation's soul and spirit. Reflecting an indigenous and precolonial notion of religious nationalism, Christian nationalism in Ghana is not entirely new and alien. It is a contemporary manifestation of a deeply rooted indigenous idea, albeit informed by contemporary regional and global discourses and influences. An abundant literature on Pentecostal Christianity and its paradox of dis/continuity with African indigenous religions provides a useful angle to explore this historical and religious context (Afolayan et al. 2018; Anderson 2018).

During British colonialism (1874–1957), mission churches unsuccessfully tried to appropriate the richness of autochthones' imagination and beliefs, seeking to convert local people to Western-style Christianity. Local people responded, and numerous African independent churches were founded. Following independence, former mission churches Africanised (Haynes 1996, pp. 23–51).

Asamoah-Gyadu notes that religion in Ghana is all-pervasive, linked to most popular communal and societal activities functions and, as a result, 'it is impossible to understand politics in contemporary Ghana without some knowledge of the role religion plays in it' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014, p. 165).[5]

When Ghana is referred to as a 'nation of Christians', to use Naomi Haynes' terminology, it is reflective of Christians' numerical superiority: 71.3% of the population were identified as Christians in the most recent census (2021). Pentecostals/Charismatics comprise 28.3%, Protestants 18.4%, Catholics 13.1%, and 'other' Christians 11.4% (Index Mundi 2021). 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' to 1.1% (Sasu n.d.).

Ghana's constitution forbids the formation of political parties based on religion. As a result, none of Ghana's political parties focuses overtly on religion in their electoral appeals. On the other hand, this does not stop both main parties, the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, from cosying up to religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, in their bid for votes at election time.

All of Ghana's post-independence leaders have been Christians,[6] sometimes referring to their faith when in power (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014). However, overt and frequent references to Christianity by presidents in Ghana—overlooking, for example, the country's religious pluralism and the importance of African heritage— are quite recent, starting with President Attah-Mills in the 2010s, who stopped the pouring of libation during independence day celebrations.

Since independence, Muslims have traditionally been politically marginal, which is not that surprising given that until recently, the faith was largely confined to the northern

territories and zongos in Ghana's major cities.[7] Ghana's national religiousness is linked to the ideology and preferences of Christians in power, which have varied over time.

Before discussing this issue, it is necessary briefly to discuss the relationship between the older Ghanaian secular nationalism and the more recent Christian nationalism. An explicit and lengthy comparison of Ghana's current Christian nationalism with the country's secular nationalism would arguably fall outside of the parameters of the current article. It is a topic that would warrant a treatment of its own. While the paper highlights the newness of Christian nationalism in Ghana, as well as its external origins, a discussion on novelty cannot be limited to contemporary observations. For the reader to understand its newness in a qualitative sense (and not only in a temporal context), a little background is necessary on what has preceded it.

In the British colonial territory of the Gold Coast, which preceded Ghana's independence in 1957, the Christian mission churches were often regarded by nationalists with great suspicion, even though the British missionaries had very often founded the schools that had educated the emerging nationalists, especially in the Gold Coast's relatively developed areas, such as Accra. Nearly all of Ghana's early nationalist leaders were Christians, products of mission education who retained close links with Christian churches (Haynes 1996, p. 56). However, to the Gold Coast's first mass nationalist leader, Kwame Nkrumah, the mission churches themselves were integral parts of the structure of colonial control, an instrument of social oppression by the colonialists rather than a force of beneficial change alone. For their part, the main mission churches in the Gold Coast (the Anglican and Methodist) entirely reciprocated Nkrumah's suspicions and were very concerned by his Convention People's Party's allegedly "communist" programme. In 1951, when the CPP gained a measure of power in a dyarchy with the British, and in a move redolent of the passing of material power from Europeans to Africans, education was taken out of the hands of the churches and transferred to the control of a government which was partly controlled by Africans. Post-World War II secular nationalism in the Gold Coast was largely driven by educated Christians who looked beyond their religion to modern secular ideologies—such as socialism and, in some cases, communism—to present and pursue their nationalist goal of independence from colonial rule. As the post-war decades passed and the clamour for independence from colonial rule reached an apogee, nationalists throughout much of Africa looked to secular ideologies for their framework for development and national liberation. As in the Gold Coast/Ghana, however, most nationalist leaders in Africa were educated Christians who highlighted the appeal and veracity of secular ideologies in order to set Africa free from colonial rule.

Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government, was a non-denominational Christian who sought to marginalise the church. Nkrumah sought to build a nation on religious and ethnic pluralism. His attempt to weld together Ghana's various religious and ethnic groups into a nation via a national consciousness of identity and loyalty was via a quasi-religious ideology: 'Nkrumaism', a kind of political religion, which employed several metaphors borrowed from religion (Pobee 1988). Nkrumah was a champion of African heritage and culture and discouraged the formation of political groups and public institutions based on specific religious ideologies. Nkrumah was ousted in a military coup in February 1966.

The military rule of the National Liberation Council (NLC; 1966–1969) exhibited another facet of national religiousness, with (the Christian) God centre stage. After the NLC, Kofi Busia's civilian government (1969–1972) expressed national religiousness by asserting that public officials should exhibit a 'God-fearing posture', including regularly attending church services (Fretheim 2011). Three military governments followed that of Busia: The National Redemption Council (NRC; 1972–1975), the Supreme Military Council I (SMC I; 1975–1978), and the Supreme Military Council II (SMC II; 1978–1979). The NRC and SMC I were led by General Kutu Acheampong, and SMC II, following Acheampong's ousting, was headed by General Fred Akuffo. Pobee (1987) argues that during Acheampong's rule, religion was often misused for political purposes: to mobilise support for Acheampong's

political ideology and to try to legitimise his authority. Acheampong was a Catholic who, over time, turned to all main religions in Ghana—Christian, Muslim, and African traditional religions—and also encouraged others, notably American Christian evangelicalism. Agyeman-Duah (2021, p. 172) explains that Acheampong 'did not disown his Catholic faith but shifted from the orthodox to the evangelical . . . [his] embrace of evangelicals (both from home and abroad) could be understood within the context of [his] anxiety for immediate remedies to the country's crisis'.

The People's National Party (PNP) government of Dr Hilla Limann, in power from 1979 to 1981, was preceded by the brief rule of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Haynes 2022a). The PNP government reflected a further manifestation of national religiousness. Limann claimed that the only solution to Ghana's economic travails was prayer and a belief in God (de Witte 2008).[8] Many Ghanaians disagreed, regarding the ineffectiveness of the PNP government in getting a grip on the economy as reflective of human failings, not the result of insufficient prayers (Haynes 1988).

The PNP government was ousted in a military coup on 31 December 1981. Flt-Lt Jerry John Rawlings' self-styled revolutionary regime, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC; 1981–1992), declared a 'holy war' (Kahiu 2020). Rawlings, a Catholic who once claimed he wanted to be a priest (Addy n.d.; B Int.), introduced dramatic changes in Ghana but without a clear or consistent approach to religion (T Int.).

Rawlings sought politically to sideline mainline Christian churches during his attempts at radical reform. Rawlings favoured neo-African traditional religion, including the Afrikania mission. The PNDC banned the politically outspoken *Catholic Standard* newspaper in 1986. Mainline church leaderships and civil society, including the 'professional' groups, such as lawyers, doctors and journalists, organised to demand the reintroduction of democracy and human rights improvements, including religious freedom. In response, the church hierarchies joined forces to attempt to prevent what they saw as a concerted attack on religion. That is, an apparent attack on Christianity was seen as a wider assault against religion. On the other hand, attacks on other religions are not necessarily seen by Christians as an anti-religion assault per se. The mainline churches worked together to encourage democratisation and religious freedom (Haynes 2022a).[9]

The reintroduction of democracy in 1993 led to a further phase of national religiousness, contoured by the growing religious and demographic prominence of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (Gifford 2004, 2015). According to Asamoah-Gyadu, 'the mainline churches or the historic mission denominations have relied on their human intellectual resources to respond to developments through communiques and statements in the media addressed to the parties involved. The Pentecostal/charismatic churches, on the other hand, have usually organised periods of prayer and fasting to deal with threats of violence occurring before and after elections.' Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, using biblical precedence to interpret and explain why Ghana was suffering, and employing prayer and prophetic declarations, tilted Ghana's Christian gravitational centre (Acheampong n.d.). They became 'the heartland of the Christian faith', dominating Ghana's religious landscape (Quasyi-Amakye 2015, p. 640). Asamoah-Gyadu notes that today, spearheaded by Pentecostalism, Ghana embraces 'the Christian faith with a fervour that is increasingly shaping its national identity', characterising the 'recent rise of faith . . . featuring ecstatic worship and . . . a God of miracles' (Asamoah-Gyadu quoted in Bigg n.d.).

4. Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana

Even though all of Ghana's post-independent presidents were Christian, with the possible exception of Hilla Limann, not all of them referred to the Christian faith in the sense of dominance. On the other hand, all sought to use religion for political gains. This is, however, an issue distinct from that of Christian nationalism.

The relationship between religion and nationalism may be indistinct and contentious. Many acclaimed writers on nationalism do not include a discussion of religion in their analyses, including Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1990). Instead, they high-

light the significance of various secular historical and economic factors. It is increasingly recognised, however, that to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the development of modern manifestations of nationalism, it is necessary to consider religion's direct and indirect influence. Anthony D. Smith (2003, p. ix) discusses the relationship between 'religion' and 'nationalism', claiming that 'perhaps more detrimental than anything to our understanding of these phenomena has been the general trend to dismiss the role of religion and tradition in a globalizing world, and to downplay the persistence of nationalism in a "post-national" global order'. For Smith, 'even' secular nationalism, often thought of as an archetypally irreligious ideology, typically draws on religious understandings of the world.

When the relationship between religion and nationalism is clear and sustained, then a hybrid term is useful: 'religious nationalism'. Religious nationalism signifies a demonstrably close relationship between two concepts, 'religion' and 'nationalism', which are not inevitably close ideologically. Religion fits in this context when it is a defining component of what a nation is said to comprise, helping to forge a collective ethos of identity and belonging expressed in a collective culture. Manifestations of religious nationalism depend on their historical, religious, political, and cultural contexts. For example, when the state, as in present-day Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, claims to derive political legitimacy from religious, not secular, doctrines, it implies that state ideology should be characterised by certain religious values, beliefs, and ideals (Haynes 2021a).

Note, however, that simply to point to potential relationships between the concepts of "religion" and "nationalism" as autonomous entities that may sometimes amalgamate is not sufficient to comprehend the fact that the relationship between religion and nationalism has long been understood as a fundamental component of the nation as a historical relationship in modern attempts to understand the concept of nation. Tocqueville's 1835 book, *Democracy in America*, contended that religion was one of three basic elements that provided a nation with its contract. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious* Life (1912), Durkheim argued that in Western modernity, new forms of expression of the sacred emerge that compete with established religious sects, such as Christianity. This might be the nation that makes sacred cultural or patriotic bonds believed to unite the entire national community. Alternatively, it might be humans who seek to make sacred concepts such as individual human rights a pivotal component of modern democratic political systems. Finally, in *Essays on the Sociology of Religion,* Weber examined the differentiation between religious, political and cultural spheres so as to contextualise relationships between religion and politics.

Christian nationalism is a modern form of religious nationalism, drawing on specific Christian values and beliefs. Christian nationalism is understood in various ways. Some contend that Christian nationalism is 'a healthy form of Christian patriotism, of loving God and loving one's country' (NAR and Christian Nationalism Statement 2022). Others understand Christian nationalism as a religious and political project to make publicly dominant a singular interpretation of Christianity (Van Klinken 2014). In the United States, a recent scholarly focus on Christian nationalism, Whitehead and Perry define Christian nationalism as 'a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life' (Whitehead and Perry 2020, p. 10). They argue that in the USA, Christian nationalism 'is undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation (though not necessarily a political party), Bible belief, premillennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest' (Swanson 2022). Their characterisation of Christian nationalism is relevant to Ghana, as Christian nationalists advocate a fusion of Christianity with Ghanaian civic life. In addition, they adhere to traditional political values while not necessarily belonging to the same political party. Their ideas are typically expressed by quoting verses from the bible, and they often allude to severe moral decline in Ghana. Finally, some, but by no means all, refer to the ideas of dominion theology while rarely, if ever, using the term 'dominion theology explicitly. Dominion theology or 'dominionism' is the 'theocratic idea that regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called conservative Christians to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions' (Clarkson

2016). In Ghana, influential individual Christian nationalists, as well as prominent churches, such as Ghana's largest, the Church of Pentecost, seek to realise God's kingdom on earth via dominion theology.[10]

Dominion theology is a relatively recent expression used broadly to explain the prosperity mindset associated with contemporary Pentecostalism. Dominion theology begins with the exercise of moral restraint over a person's life and then the privilege of Christians to access God's blessing and, eventually, the exercise of Christian influence over the public sphere, including politics and the economy. In Ghana, dominion theology has not been systematically developed and articulated as such, but it generally describes a Pentecostal religious paradigm shift in terms of what it means to be a believer in contemporary contexts, including increased Christian influence over the public sphere. Because in Ghana, dominion theology has not been systematically developed and articulated, the analysis below necessarily limits dominion theology both to statements made by Pentecostal pastors on issues of governance and politics and to the Church of Pentecost's publication, *Vision 2023,* which can be seen as a 'how to' manual to create God's kingdom on earth via influence over the public sphere (Heuser 2020; The Church of Pentecost 2019).

Pentecostal/Charismatic church leaders are often publicly influential in Ghana via, among others, the media, press conferences, Facebook and other social media pages, and their personal websites (Benyah 2019). Some churches, notably the Church of Pentecost, work strategically to build God's kingdom on earth via dominion theology (The Church of Pentecost 2019).

The Ghanaian public at large does not, to the knowledge of this author, a frequent visitor to Ghana, use the term "Christian nationalism". Christian nationalism is not, to the knowledge of the author, an explicit topic of popular conversations in Ghana; it is a topic that has engaged Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian academics, including political scientists and theologians (D. Int., S. Int.).

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's election as president of Ghana in both 2016 and 2020 confirmed Christianity's political and economic prominence, explaining how his personal and political development were shaped by his faith. Akufo-Addo, a Presbyterian, publicly stated in May 2022 that 'his faith in God as a Christian has shaped his professional life as a Lawyer and Politician which has heavily influenced his vision for Ghana and Africa's transformation' (AllAfrica 2022). His party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), overtly included allusions to Christianity, reflected in the party's electoral slogan in both campaigns: 'For the battle is the Lord's'.[11] Today, Christian values and beliefs are very prominent in traditional (print, television, radio) and new social media, including Facebook and Twitter (Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach 2019; Adjepong 2021; Lauterbach et al. 2022; Daswani 2021; Okyerefo 2019; Bawa et al. 2022).

Access to and close relationships with senior politicians is an important aspect of attempts by Christian nationalists to increase their influence. Prominent Christians, including Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, Pastor Mensa Otabil, founder of International Central Gospel Church, Reverend Professor Paul Frimpong-Manso, former General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Ghana, and president of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, and Apostle Dr. Isaac Owusu Bempah, are close associates of President Akufo-Addo and other senior elected politicians in both the ruling NPP and main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress.

It is important to make clear what 'influence' means in this context. The reality is that political office holders actively court the patronage of influential Christian leaders, so the relationship between Christian leaders and senior politicians is necessarily symbiotic, with each needing the other. In Ghana, a country with a free and vibrant private media environment, Christian leaders do not necessarily need a politician to be influential, but it may help to associate yourself with powerful elected politicians to increase the cachet of your 'brand'.

However, close relations with prominent politicians are but one possible strategy to expand influence. Prominent Pentecostal churches, notably the Church of Pentecost, with

more than three million members in Ghana (Klutse 2022), also work to increase influence by lobbying parliamentarians, organising high profile events, including a 'National Politicians' Conference', 14–16 June 2023, and 'National Development Conference', 26–27 July 2023. Both attracted senior politicians from Ghana's major political parties, offering the chance to network with such groups as Advocates for Christ,[12] in order to promote biblical Christian values in all sectors of national life.

Dominion theology asserts that it is necessary to adopt biblically ordained values and beliefs in order to build God's kingdom on earth. The Church of Pentecost's (2019) document, *Vision 2023*, sets out in great detail a strategy to achieve this. In addition, individual Christian nationalists are also active in furthering dominion theology. Mensa Otabil focuses on building a capitalist economy where Christians, in particular, flourish via prosperity theology. Archbishop Duncan-Williams embraces prosperity theology as the way to build Ghana's capitalist economy (Heuser 2020; Sallah 2020). He asserts that 'dealing with Presidents or politicians is part of [his] calling'. In a March 2019 television interview, he claimed that 'Jesus categorically gave us the command to disciple nations and to win souls... so when it comes to governance, leadership, giving direction, it is supposed to come from the church... we should rule in corporate, politics, the marketplace, everywhere' (Daswani 2020).

Frimpong-Manso was, until recently, president of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, the public voice of over 250 Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.[13] Like Otabil and Duncan-Williams, Frimpong-Manso claims that Ghana's economic and social travails are divine punishment, the cost of departing from 'traditional' Christian—that is, biblically ordained—values and beliefs (The Church of Pentecost General Headquarters 2022).

Bempah is the founder and leader of Glorious Word Power Ministry International, 'a Word based ministry coupled with Prophetic and Healing grace' (Glorious Word Chapel: Who We Are n.d.). Bempah was ordained and commissioned as a Christian pastor by Archbishop Duncan-Williams. Bempah is popularly known as '"The Nation's Prophet" due to the accuracy of the prophetic utterances he made concerning the outcome of the 2016 elections' (Ghana Famous People: Isaac Owuse Bempah n.d.). This endeared Bempah to Akufo as Bempah prophesised that he (Akufo-Addo) would win the election due to God's favour. Bempah and President Akufo-Addo were close acquaintances for several years but recently fell out with each other. Bempah claims that Akufo-Addo 'no longer listens to the voice of God' ("I'm no Longer Close to Akufo-Addo"—Rev Owusu Bempah 2022).

Close personal relationships between President Akufo-Addo and leading Christians are the subject of much speculation in Ghana's press and on social media. In addition, the topic is attracting growing scholarly attention, although interpretations of the general issue of the growing influence of the Christian nationalism phenomenon appear most frequently in blogs and brief commentaries (R. Int.). In addition, a number of scholars have studied the same phenomenon with which this paper is concerned, even though in published works, they have not necessarily explicitly labelled it "Christian nationalism". As a result, it is necessary for this paper to explain what it adds to this existing scholarship. However, to bring into the paper a necessarily extensive discussion about how the concept of Christian nationalism employed by the author of the paper builds on the work of such significant figures as Gifford, Meyer, De Witte and Asamoah-Gyadu would lead to a very much longer paper with a somewhat different focus. What this paper adds to the ongoing discussions and analyses of Christian nationalism in Ghana is clearly to define and operationalize the concept in the Ghanaian context. In addition, it identifies some of the key political and religious figures in Ghana who refer—often frequently—to the key concerns of Christian nationalism. Third, the paper identifies and discusses the impact of Christian nationalism in Ghana on three controversial issues: the national cathedral, LGBTQ+ rights, and interfaith relations between Muslims and Christians.

Adjepong contends that influential Christians 'have long held sway over the government'. She claims, first, that President Akufo-Addo 'strategically uses Christianity' to court powerful Christians 'who, in turn, incite their congregations to vote'; second, these intimate

relationships help to entrench 'fundamentalist Christian ideas in the state's operations and curtail opportunities for the advancement of progressive social agenda' (Adjepong 2021), and, third, Akufo-Addo's 'vision for [Ghana] and Africa's transformation is heavily influenced by the Bible' (The Church of Pentecost General Headquarters 2022).

The Christian Nation Project, led by Naomi Haynes at the University of Edinburgh, has recently published several commentaries identifying close and sustained links between prominent Christian nationalists and President Akufo-Addo (Emmanuel 2022). Lauterbach, Milliar, and Boakye argue that the national 'Cathedral project ... acknowledge[s] the perception of Ghana as a religious nation and to the central role of [the Christian] God for the well-being and strength of the nation' (Lauterbach et al. 2022). Daswani argues that 'the apparent contradiction of a secular country building a cathedral as a symbol of "national unity" magically turns into a non-contradiction when interpreted through a Biblical history and when Ghana's Christian majority becomes the measure of value for national identity' (Daswani 2021).

With these comments in mind, the next section examines three controversial issues: the national cathedral, the social position of the LGBTQ+ community, and Christian-Muslim relations. Each exhibits the influence of Christian nationalism and highlights the close relations between Christian nationalists and powerful politicians.

5. The National Cathedral

Ghana's national cathedral is a Christian symbol endorsed by many, but not all, Christians (National Cathedral of Ghana n.d.). Supportive Christians include individual church leaders. Support also comes from politicians associated with both the ruling NPP and the opposition NDC, although in both parties, some senior figures are against the national cathedral, typically on the grounds of cost (NDC Will Convert National Cathedral into Hospital When Voted in Power—Chairman 2023; "I'm Surprised Government Is Funding the National Cathedral"—Kwabena Agyapong of the NPP n.d.).

During an address to the 29th Biennial General Council Meeting of the Assemblies of God Church in August 2018, President Akufo-Addo stated his desire to partner his government with Christian churches 'to collaborate in the collective agenda of uplifting the moral, political, spiritual and economic life of the Ghanaian people, and, thereby, help accelerate the pace of development in the country'. For Akufo-Addo, the national cathedral is a celebration of 'national unity and social cohesion', a 'priority among priorities'. While some Ghanaians regard building an interdenominational—explicitly Christian national cathedral—as an event of 'biblical proportions', others are not convinced of the project's benefits, regard the national cathedral as a colossal waste of money during an economic crisis (Daswani 2020; I. Int; K. Int.; F. Int.).

President Akufo-Addo announced the national cathedral project on 6 March 2017, amidst celebrations marking Ghana's 60 years of independence from British colonial rule. For Akufo-Addo, the national cathedral is a fulfilment of a personal promise he made to God, made during the election campaign: if he won the 2016 presidential election, he would build a national cathedral (Daswani 2020; H. Int.) Akufo-Addo did this, he stated, to thank 'God for his blessings, favour, grace and mercies on our nation', to provide 'an avenue to call the nation to prayer, to worship, to celebrate, and to mourn', to promote 'deep national conversations on the role of faith in building the progressive and prosperous Ghana we all want', and to encourage 'ideas and values that should help us build a new Ghanaian civilization'. For Lauterbach and Bob-Milliar (2023), the 'National Cathedral project symbolizes a new, more direct and visible linkage between the Christian and political elites in Ghana'.

The national cathedral is envisaged as a 'non-denominational Christian worship centre', scheduled to be completed by June 2024 (I. Int.).[14] The cathedral complex occupies six hectares (14 acres) of state-owned land in central Accra, beginning at the Ridge roundabout area and ending at the western side of the State House/Parliament House. Preparatory work to create sufficient physical space for the national cathedral involved razing homes

then occupied by judges and demolishing a passport office. The cathedral complex will include a community hub, chapels, baptistry, an art gallery and Africa's first 'Bible Museum', along the lines of Washington DC's bible museum (Daswani 2021).

The cathedral's architect, a British-Ghanaian, David Adjaye, contends that the cathedral complex is a place 'where religion, democracy and local tradition are seamlessly and symbolically intertwined' (Okeke-Ogulu 2018). For supporters of the project, the national cathedral is much more than Ghana's primary Christian symbol: it is a key emblem of a rising Ghana to inspire the country to rise even further (L. Int.). In addition, advocates of the national cathedral claim that it will significantly boost the economy, inspire 'other grand national projects', and, as a result, consolidate Ghana's democracy (Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach 2019). Chika Okeke-Ogulu, professor of Art History at Princeton University, claims the national cathedral 'signals that the country is poised to consolidate the gains of decades of democracy' (Okeke-Ogulu 2018). Thus, supporters and advocates of the national cathedral regard it not only as a symbol of spirituality and moral uplifting but also as a sign of Ghana's deepening democracy, national improvement and significant economic opportunity, including greatly increased tourism and pilgrimages (L. Int.).

Critics question the desirability of the national cathedral project on the grounds of cost, an estimated USD 400 million, during a severe economic downturn and associated developmental challenges (Dayour and Essel 2023). The national cathedral is not to be built using state funds beyond a relatively small sum—around USD 25 million—as 'seed money' to get the project rolling, including establishing a secretariat. The national cathedral is to be constructed by voluntary contributions from Ghanaians both at home and in the diaspora. President Akufo-Addo launched a national cathedral fundraising campaign in the forecourt of the State House, Accra, on Friday, 28 December 2018. To encourage others, Akufo-Addo pledged a personal contribution of GHC 100,000 (c. USD 8736 (September 2023)).[15] In February 2019, he took the fundraising campaign to the USA. He delivered a speech at the 'Museum of the Bible' in Washington D.C. during a banquet for wealthy diasporic Ghanaians, accompanied by Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, then chair of the national cathedral's fundraising committee and member of its Board of Trustees. Duncan-Williams asked those attending to give generously in order to receive the blessings of the God of Abraham, referring to a passage in Genesis 22 (Daswani 2020).

The national cathedral generated much public debate in Ghana on the relationship between politics and religion. For some, the national cathedral represents a new, more direct, and visible linkage between Ghana's Christian and political elites, a relationship with which some Ghanaians are uncomfortable (Lauterbach and Bob-Milliar 2023). Sitting presidents have traditionally taken care to appear to be religiously plural, not least out of self-interest: to encourage members of all of Ghana's religious traditions to vote for them and their party. Some argue that President Akufo-Addo is partnering with prominent Christians, expecting that their followers will vote for the NPP candidates in the December 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections. For Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach (2019), the 'National Cathedral and the ever-less-hidden links between the President and certain Pentecostal/Charismatic leaders is a sign of Ghana going in the direction of being an enchanted democracy, as seen elsewhere on the continent (such as Nigeria and Zambia)'.

6. The LGBTQ+ Community

The social position of Ghana's LGBTQ+ community is a controversial, widely debated issue. Many Ghanaians are against the idea that members of the LGBTQ+ community should have social equality because they believe it does not accord with Christian values, while others believe that the West is trying to impose 'unnatural' and culturally alien practices on Ghana in a neo-colonial manoeuvre (Ossé 2021; P. Int.; A. Int.).

For Christian nationalists, there is but one true interpretation of Christianity—theirs—which centrally informs their worldview. They may find it convenient to identify 'enemies of the people', that is, those believed to be an achievement of God's kingdom on earth. Prominent among such 'enemies' is Ghana's LGBTQ+ community, said to be in thrall to

alien Western ideas about sexuality and the family. A draconian anti-LGBTQ+ private members bill was unanimously passed in July 2023. If the bill becomes law, critics claim that it would represent a major challenge to internationally accepted values and norms informing landmark international agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), part of the United Nations (UN) treaty-based human rights system, effective from 1976. The UN monitors the ICCPR through the Human Rights Committee (HRC) (Viljoen 2007). The HRC specifically links universal human rights with LGBTQ+ rights via Resolution 17/19. UN member states must report the basis on which they are meeting treaty obligations, including LGBTQ+ human rights (Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity 2011).

This resolution led in 2011 to the first official UN report on LGBTQ+ rights issues prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The aim was to determine how international human rights law can be used to end violence and related human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Discriminatory Laws and Practices and Acts of Violence against Individuals Based on Their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity—Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2011). There was opposition to the production of this report, mainly from some African and Middle Eastern countries, despite the fact they have obligations under international treaty law not to violate LGBTQ+ human rights, a position which also conflicts with human rights aspects of the African Charter effective from 1986.

Strong support for the proposed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation came from two national Christian religious organisations, together representing over 500 churches: the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), led by Rev. Dr. Cyril Fayose, and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), headed by Rev. Prof. Paul Frimpong-Manso. CCG and GPCC issued a joint statement in October 2021 in support of the proposed anti-LGBTQ+ law (CCG and GPCC 2021 Joint Communique: Full Text 2021). They urged parliament to pass the bill and President Nana Akufo-Addo to sign it into law, claiming homosexuality is an 'unacceptable behaviour that our God frowns upon' and is 'alien to the Ghanaian culture and family value system'. Their joint statement also claimed that the proposed law would 'help safeguard our cherished family system in Ghana' (Truscott 2021). In addition, Ghana's national Muslim organisation, the Coalition of Muslim Organization Ghana (COMOG), was also supportive of the bill. (A. Int.)

Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare, founder and leader of a prominent Pentecostal church, Perez Chapel, asserted that for championing the bill against same-sex relationships in Ghana, Sam Nartey George, Member of Parliament for Ningo-Prampram, should receive 'tonnes of prayers'. Bishop Agyin-Asare 'anointed the MP, an elder of the church, for the "task" ahead. For this battle, You [God] will bring a new anointing upon him and great grace. We say no weapon fashioned against you shall prosper. . .protect him, protect his family"' (Anti-Gay Bill: For this Battle, you'll Receive a New Anointing—Agyinasare Prays for Sam Georg 2021).

External support for the proposed anti-LGBTQ+ law also came from an influential US-based Christian conservative organisation, the World Congress of Families (WCF) (Haynes 2021b). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center: 'The World Congress of Families promotes right-wing Christian values globally, including in Africa. It opposes same-sex marriage, pornography, and abortion and supports a society built on "the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage"'. The WCF is active in many African countries with its anti-LGBTQ+ agenda, which, critics claim, the organisation seeks to hide 'behind anti-colonial rhetoric, blaming reproductive rights efforts on Western colonialists which the WCF accuses of trying to curb the number of African babies' (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.; Asante 2019).

The WCF organised a high-profile conference in Accra (31 October–1 November 2019) to highlight the importance of the 'natural' family and 'family values', and to condemn homosexuality, Islam, abortion, and other reproductive health rights (Sekyiamah 2019). The conference was a catalyst for what followed: increased pressure on Ghana's LGBTQ+

community and support for the proposed law (African Regional Conference of World Congress of Families to Be Held in Accra n.d.; R. Int.). According to Davis Mac-Iyalla, Executive Director of the Interfaith Diversity Network of West Africa, the WCF's footprint in promoting and sponsoring anti-LGBT laws in West Africa is known, but the wider general public does not know much about them and their agenda. That is why they mostly target influential politicians and religious leaders as their entry points. Mac-Iyalla added that 'numerous Ghanaian government officials including former president Kufuor Mahama [sic] and speakers of parliament are giving the WCF considerable attention' (Samanga 2019).

Support from the WCF for Ghana's proposed anti-LGBTQ+ law is evidence of a decades-long relationship between Christian nationalists, such as Duncan-Williams, politicians in Ghana and conservative, Christian-influenced American organisations, such as the WCF. According to Asante, these relationships have played a 'significant role in shaping the perceptions of gender, sexuality and morality in Ghana' by stressing 'the importance of traditional norms regarding sexual purity and gender, often tying these values to economic prosperity' (Asante 2023). In sum, while support in Ghana for anti-LGBTQ+ legislation does not come exclusively from Christian nationalist or, more generally, Christian sources, it is the case that American evangelical preachers and organisations, including WCF, are instrumental in shaping parameters of social acceptability of the LGBTQ+ community in ways that seem to conform to the concerns of dominion theology (Finn 2018).

7. Christian-Muslim Relations

Christian-Muslim relations are potentially problematic in Ghana, as in many other African countries. Most Ghanaians are aware that the country has a long track record of mainly harmonious inter-faith relations, and few wish to jeopardise that. On the other hand, some Christian nationalists are overtly anti-Muslim, and some Muslim radicals are strongly anti-Christian. There is potential for deteriorating inter-faith relations, especially in the context of Islamist extremism in neighbouring countries 'spilling over' into Ghana (O. Int.; C. Int.).

Unlike neighbouring countries, including Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, Ghana has not witnessed serious or sustained inter-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims (GIGA Focus Africa 2017). Now, however, some fear that Christian-Muslim conflict in Ghana may be encouraged, including by building the national cathedral, a very prominent symbol of the perception that Ghana is a 'nation of Christians' (J. Int.; M. Int.).

Muslims in Ghana have increased from an estimated four per cent in 1948 to 19.9% in 2021, that is, around six million people. Some live in Ghana's relatively impoverished northern and upper regions, and others reside primarily in Accra, the capital city, Kumasi, the country's commercial centre, and Sekondi-Takoradi, a major port. The Muslim presence in Kumasi—mainly divided between Hausa from Nigeria and immigrants from Mali and Burkina Faso—is the longest established outside Ghana's northern and upper regions. In Kumasi, the number of Muslims grew consequent to the development of trade between the Ashanti state and Muslim areas to the north, which pre-dated mid-19th century British intrusion. In Accra, the Muslim community is divided ethnically, as it is in Sekondi-Takoradi, where Hausa and Zabrama from Burkina Faso are the most numerous (Pobee 1987, p. 107).

Traditionally, relations between Muslims and Christians in Ghana have been largely harmonious, a result of both sharing identity characteristics and being well integrated into Ghana's culture (Q. Int.). Christianity and Islam both arrived in what is today Ghana in the 15th century and were influenced and shaped by local cultural values. Islam is said to have preceded Christianity in Ashanti, and when the latter faith arrived, the Asantehene, monarch of the historical Ashanti Empire and today ceremonial ruler of the Ashanti people, sought to accommodate both harmoniously (Haynes 2022c). More generally, there was a period of approximately four centuries during which older, indigenous Ghanaian society was refashioned. The intrusion of various European contacts, including colonial rule until 1957, was especially influential. Most recently, the recent intrusion of Pentecostal

theology, including the 'gospel of prosperity' approach, has been influential in encouraging some Ghanaians to see Christianity in a new light. Like Pentecostalism, the widespread animosity in Ghana, not only from Pentecostal Christians, towards LGBTQ+ persons, is a manifestation of neo-colonialism, a continuation of a much earlier historical trend that began with the first contact with Christianity and Islam in the 15th century.[16]

Muslims generally welcomed Ghana's new national mosque, inaugurated in July 2021. The largest new mosque in West Africa, it is modelled on the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. With the financial support of Turkey's government, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation paid for the mosque's construction, receiving no financial support from Ghana's government. The 15,000-seater-capacity mosque complex, constructed on a 40-acre site at Kanda in Accra, includes a library complex, an office and residence for Ghana's Chief Imam, research and senior high school complexes, a clinic, an administration block, an auditorium, and a conference centre (Obeng n.d.).

It may seem surprising that Ghanaians do not generally see the national mosque as controversial, given that many find the proposed national cathedral problematic. The reason for the difference in perception of the mosque and the cathedral is primarily because the mosque was paid for by the government of Turkey and several Turkish non-governmental organisations. The cathedral, on the other hand, is generally seen as the 'pet project' of Ghana's national president, Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo. He committed around 50 million USD of state funds as 'seed money' to get the cathedral project started without consulting parliament. In addition, the cathedral has been dogged by persistent claims of corruption, and the national mosque has not. Overall, most Ghanaians have no problem with two national religious sites despite the fact that Christianity is numerically dominant.

In August 2018, COMOG, Ghana's umbrella Muslim organisation, criticised state financial involvement in the national cathedral project, arguing that it was an unwarranted interference in religious matters in a religiously plural state (Durmaz n.d.). Seeking to quell Muslim discontent, in August 2021, the supreme leader of the Islamic community in Ghana, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, made a personal donation of GHC 50,000 (c. USD 8000) towards the national cathedral's construction (Ghana's Muslim Leader Gives GHC50,000 towards Construction of National Cathedral n.d.). The Sheikh's spokesperson explained that he made the donation as a symbolic gesture to encourage peace, solidarity and inter-religious harmony (Why Chief Imam Donated towards National Cathedral—Spokesperson Speaks 2021). Not all Muslims in Ghana were in favour of the Sheikh's donation. One claimed:

> You have violated our Islamic laws (Sharia laws). How much did your office contribute towards the building of the Ghana National Mosque? Do you know that there are vulnerable people (Muslims) in societies who can't afford to eat and that others don't have better places they can gather for their daily compulsory prayers? (Muslims Descend on Chief Imam Over Cathedral Donation 2019)

Some Muslims in Ghana feel under-represented, missing out on development opportunities, and subject to discriminatory practices by the state (A. Int.; J. Int.). A Muslim activist, Bashiratu Kamal, stated in a 2020 interview with a Turkish news website, *TRT World*, that in Ghana, 'Muslims and children of other faiths are subjected to attending compulsory church services in schools, Muslim women and girls are also forced to remove their hijab and government has not said a word about this act of discrimination' (Durmaz n.d.).

While these concerns do not imply generally inharmonious relations between Christians and Muslims in Ghana, there are strains on interfaith harmony. First, Muslim-Christian tensions emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Weiss claims that there is increasing uneasiness among Christian communities about Islam due to the rise of political Islam in many parts of the world, including Africa,[17] with some Christians in Ghana perceiving Islam as promoting violence, extremism, and terrorism (E. Int.). Tensions were exacerbated following the 11 September 2001 (9/11) al-Qaeda attacks on the USA. Some Christians in Ghana became wary or suspicious of Islam, encouraged by the rapid spread of social media (E. Int.). Tensions were also stimulated by Christian efforts to convert

Muslims, leading to violent confrontations in some parts of Ghana. From this time, Nonterah and Peprah argue, relations between Christians and Muslims became 'more strained, even frayed'. It did not help that by preaching the 'prosperity gospel', Pentecostal and Charismatic churches began to transform Ghana's 'religious eco-system', which served to turn 'faith groups into business entities, hungry, even desperate for followers', leading to increased rivalry both between Christians and between Christians and Muslims (Nonterah and Peprah 2021; N. Int.).

Harmonious inter-faith relations were not helped by public statements via social media from some of Ghana's most prominent Christian leaders. In March 2016, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, a man of great political influence and an important symbol of Christian leadership in Ghana, was a focal point of national controversy. Duncan-Williams claimed in a sermon broadcast on YouTube that:

> Muslims are not just praying; they are invoking all kinds of entities. They are dealing with all kinds of forces in Pleiades, in Orion, in Arcturus, in Mazzaroth—the Zodiacs, the powers of the underworld, the water kingdom. They are not just praying; they are dealing with white magic, black magic—different levels and dimensions of witchcraft—for total takeover of the world and of our nation.[18]

Duncan-Williams was 'referring to what he considered to be Islam's theocratic and imperialist program for government', threatening his view that 'Ghana [is] a Christian nation.' His claim was critiqued by COMOG, and Duncan-Williams subsequently apologised for disrespecting Islam, asked for forgiveness 'in the name of Allah, the most merciful and gracious One' and promised to study the Qur'an. Daswani (2021) claims it was 'rumoured that he was instructed by then Ghanaian President (John Mahama) to publicly apologize for his statements as Ghana could not afford inter-religious tensions in an election year'.

Another prominent Christian, Dag Heward-Mills, made inflammatory statements about Islam on social media a year earlier, in 2015. Heward-Mills, founder and presiding Bishop of the United Denominations Originating from the Lighthouse Group of Churches, also serves on the board of directors of Church Growth International, as well as on the executive committee of the Pentecostal World Fellowship and, until August 2022, the Board of Trustees of the National cathedral project (Slaw 2023). Heward-Mills, who has 3.6 million followers on Facebook,[19] stated in a Facebook post that Islam is a false religion 'taking root in poor African countries', where Muslims are 'becoming radicalized and giving rise to terrorists' and 'fanatic Muslims . . . are prepared to die for their faith'.[20]

Another prominent Christian, Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare, asserted that Muslims were conducting 'a religious cleansing campaign aimed at exterminating all Christians from the face of the earth'. He declared that 'the world's 1.2 billion Muslim population were targeting Christians to harm them for being Christians . . . We won't keep quiet anymore, some people believe that they should kill others so that they are the only people who can worship their "whoever"' (Islamic Fundamentalists Can't Stop Us from Being Christians—Agyin-Asare 2015). Following these inflammatory pronouncements, there were calls from both government and civil society for religious leaders to moderate their speech to avoid increasing tensions between Christians and Muslims. However, the National Chief Imam, Dr Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, sought to dismiss claims of Muslim-Christian tensions, stating that 'we are living in harmony and would continue to do so' while noting that Muslims and Christians should engage in dialogue to resolve any problems between them (No Tension between Muslims, Christians Chief Imam 2015).

Dr Sharubutu's tolerance was, however, tested when another prominent, high profile Christian, Reverend Isaac Owusu Bempah, Overseer of the Glorious Word Power Ministries International, prophesised on 31 December 2018 that either Dr Sharubutu or Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia, a Muslim, would die in 2019. It is not clear what was the purpose of Bempah's prophecy, although this did not stop some of Ghana's Muslim community from taking violent exception to the prophecy. Dr Sharubutu called Reverend Bempah a 'charlatan of the pulpit', and urged 'the Christian fraternity, the Inspector-General of

Police (IGP), the National Security and, indeed, all relevant stakeholders to call Rev Owusu Bempah to order in the interest of national unity, peace and harmony' (Kwame 2023). After Bempah's remarks, '[a]ngry Muslim youth . . . attacked a church in Ghana's capital after its pastor [Bempah] predicted the possible death of the country's chief imam in 2019. An organ, windows and chairs were damaged' (Ghanaian Isaac Owusu-Bempah's Church Stormed over Prophecy 2019)

Expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment, especially the ahistorical suggestion that Christian nationalism is more Ghanaian, may be regarded as a manifestation of old-fashioned power politics, with elites seeking to maintain their share of economic and political power for themselves, supported by the assertion that Ghana's principal religion's theology—Christianity—is the one supporting prosperity, an allegedly more authentic Ghanaian outlook.

8. Conclusions

The paper addressed five analytical questions.

1. To what extent is Christian nationalism in Ghana a manifestation of a regional and global trend?
2. What is the ideological and theological substance of Christian nationalism in Ghana?
3. How does Christian nationalism in Ghana resonate with local religio-political and cultural worldviews?
4. How is Christian nationalism embedded in Ghana's political economy?
5. What are the strategies through which Christian nationalists generate concrete socio-political effects?

Regarding the first question, it is unclear whether what the paper conceptualises as 'Christian nationalism' in Ghana is the same as in other country contexts, both in the West, including the USA, and in Africa, including Zambia and Nigeria. What is clear, however, is that religious nationalism in Ghana, including in relation to national symbols, such as the national cathedral, is strongly informed by Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity.

Second is the issue of the ideological and theological substance of Christian nationalism in Ghana. It is widely agreed that Ghana is a religious country, which the 1992 constitution affirms. The first line of the constitution proclaims:

> IN THE NAME OF THE ALMIGHTY GOD
>
> We the People of Ghana,
>
> IN EXERCISE of our natural and inalienable right to establish a framework of
>
> government which shall secure for ourselves and posterity the blessings of liberty, equality of opportunity and prosperity . . . DO HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION (emphases in the original; Ghana's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 1996 n.d.)

This indicates that the constitution recognises Ghana as both dependent on and cognisant of the public importance of God. But which God? Reference to 'Almighty God' does not imply any particular God, whether Christian or Muslim, or any other specific deity. 'God' in this context may refer to a non-specific creator rather than a faith-specific deity. It does not necessarily imply that the God to which the constitution refers is the God of dominion theology seeking to establish God's kingdom on earth. Christian nationalists use a variety of means—including press conferences, social media, and public meetings with senior politicians both in power and in opposition—to work to establish God's kingdom. They include prominent high-profile Christians, such as Nicholas Duncan-Williams, Paul Frimpong-Mensah, Mensa Otabil and Charles Agyin-Asare, as well as the biggest Pentecostal church, the Church of Pentecost. Both individuals and church regularly publicly pronounce on important political and social questions of the day, often via social media where millions of followers are recipients of communications on various issues, including the parlous state of the economy, high levels of corruption and what to do about

them, the need to pray more to fix Ghana's ills, the question of LGBTQ+ equality and same-sex marriage, and the danger of the growth of Islam, especially Islamic radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

Third, Lauterbach and Bob-Milliar (2023) identify an influential 'theocratic-political elite' in Ghana, which they argue represents 'an interesting crossover of two dominating trends in which culture, religion and politics merge, namely the ambition to create and define the future of civilization in Africa'. Some aspects of Christian nationalism in Ghana clearly resonate with local religio-political and cultural worldviews. For example, anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in Ghana is high, just as it is in all other African countries. What has recently changed is that today, there is increased popular support for draconian punishments for members of the LGBTQ+ community, which appears to chime with the views of the 'theocratic-political elite' asserting Christian nationalism (Ossé 2021; R. Int.)

Fourth, dominion theology is a recent expression broadly used to explain the prosperity mindset associated with contemporary Pentecostalism (Heuser 2020). High profile Christians, including Nicholas Duncan-Williams and Mensa Otabil, organise public events extolling the virtues of the prosperity gospel and the importance of Christians dominating the economy in order to ensure Ghana's prosperity and economic well-being.[21]

Fifth, regarding strategies through which Christian nationalists generate concrete socio-political effects, we have seen in the paper that prominent Christian nationalists have close personal relationships with members of Ghana's political elite. This encourages Christian nationalists to influence policy not only via personal relations but also through democratic channels, including political parties and the ballot box. Many politicians covert prominent Christians' endorsement when seeking election.

President Akufo-Addo stands down in January 2025 after two terms in office. What of the future of Christian nationalism afterwards? Akufo-Addo's aim was to complete the building of the national cathedral during his presidential tenure. It may also be the case that legislation to further criminalise LGBTQ+ people will become law during his period in office. Thus, two aims of Ghana's Christian nationalists will be fulfilled.

What will happen beyond that? The current vice-president of Ghana, Mahamudu Bawumia, is likely to be adopted as the NPP's 2024 presidential candidate. Bawumia is a Muslim whose main challenger will be a Pentecostal, the NDC's John Mahama, president of Ghana between 2013 and 2017. What would a Muslim president mean for the progress of Christian nationalism in Ghana? How might the relationship develop between Christian nationalists and the first Muslim president of Ghana? From the evidence presented in this paper, it seems unlikely that having a Muslim president would significantly diminish Christian nationalism's influence for at least one important reason: both NPP and NDC presidential candidates will in 2024 be very keen to have the endorsement of prominent Christian nationalists in order to attract at least some of their followers' votes. If Bawumia becomes president, it is almost certain that he would appoint prominent Christians to his cabinet, as would, no doubt, Mahama. As a result, Christian nationalism is very likely both to have a place at the top table and to increase further its political and social influence.

9. Author Personal Interview Questions

(1) How would you characterise inter-faith relations in Ghana today?
(2) Do you think the national cathedral is conducive to good inter-faith relations, given that its justification is as a national symbol?
(3) Do you think the national cathedral should attract state financial support?
(4) Do you feel any 'religious groups' in Ghana work against the national values as reflected in the 1992 constitution?
(5) What government policies could help develop further good relations between Christians and Muslims in Ghana?
(6) Overall, do you think that Ghana is an example of religious harmony in a region—West Africa—sometimes noted for growing religious disharmony?

10. Author Personal Interviews Cited in the Paper

A. Chair, Muslim Non-Governmental Organization, via Zoom, 10 May 2023.
B. Executive Director, Christian Institute, Accra, 17 April 2023.
C. Director of Research, Peacekeeping Non-Governmental Organization, Accra, via Zoom, 25 July 2022.
D. Academic, theologian and priest, Accra, via Zoom, 4 May 2023.
E. Executive Director, Research Institute, Accra, 21 April 2023.
F. Political Activist, Accra, 25 April 2023.
G. Political Scientist, Accra, 18 April 2023.
H. Former political party leader and legal scholar, Accra, via Zoom, 30 May 2023.
I. Managing Editor, business news website, Accra, 25 April, 2023.
J. Political Scientist, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
K. Political Scientist, Accra, 21 April 2023.
L. Representative of the National Cathedral, Accra, 26 April 2023.
M. Political Scientist, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
N. Sociologist, Kumasi, via Zoom, 12 May 2023.
O. Research Fellow, Religious Studies Institute, Accra, 24 April 2023.
P. Sociologist, Accra, via Zoom, 9 May 2023.
Q. University Research Fellow, Kumasi, 1 November 2022.
R. Executive Director, Democracy Non-Governmental Organization, Accra, 30 May 2023.
S. Legal Scholar, Accra, via Zoom, 6 May 2023.
T. Anthropologist, New York, USA, via Zoom, 2 September 2022.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: I conducted the fieldwork for this article, including the interviews, as an emeritus professor of London Metropolitan University during 2022–23. No ethical approval was required and the project was self-funded.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Quotation from Matthew 6:10. Duncan-Williams founded Dominion University in 2012, aiming to 'raise a new crop of cultured and industry relevant graduates and leaders with a Christian worldview' and 'a new generation in excellence and ethical leadership for ministry, government, and business'. Availabe online: https://duc.edu.gh/ (accessed on 14 September 2023).

[2] A list of interviewees who contributed to the research is included at the end of the paper. Interviews were semi-structured. A list of interviewees' questions can be found at the end of the paper. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 min, depending on interviewees' replies. Interviewees' information is anonymised at their request.

[3] 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, is regarded as grey literature. Such sources of information are often useful in helping find out current information on emerging areas of research, enabling us to learn from a more diverse range of voices. As such information is not peer reviewed, the quality of information may be variable. Available online: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1110/resource_guides/7/grey_literature (accessed on 1 June 2023).

[4] The qualitative research for this article comprised personal interviews and archival research; both are time consuming and labour-intensive, and it can never be ascertained if all relevant sources of information have been included. Finally, as qualitative research is not statistically representative, there is the possibility that findings are relevant only to a relatively limited research area, in this case, present day Ghana.

[5] Asamoah-Gyadu discusses the work of prominent Ghanaian scholars of religion, including John S. Pobee, Ebenezer Obiri-Addo and Elom Dovlo.

[6] Dr Hilla Limann is a possible exception:. Some Ghanaians contend that he was a Muslim, while others assert he was Christian.

[7] "Zongo" emanates from the Hausa word zango, which means "a temporary settlement," a "temporary sojourn, or "traveller's stop-over".

[8] Limann's brief time in office coincided with two important developments in the context of the growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana: Nicholas Duncan-Williams founds the first Ghanaian charismatic church, the Christian Action Faith Chapel International, and American evangelist Oral Roberts starts broadcast on Ghana Television (See Heuser 2020).

[9] Jerry John Rawlings was popularly elected president in 1992 and 1996, and left office in 2000 after two presidential terms in accordance with the 1992 constitution.

[10] The total membership of The Church of Pentecost in Ghana was at December 2021, 3,333,654, over 10% of Ghana's total population of 30,832,019, as indicated in the 2021 Population and Housing Census Report by the Ghana Statistical Service. The Church of Pentecost alone constitutes approximately 15.2% of the total Christian population in Ghana, and 34.3% of the Pentecostal and Charismatic community in Ghana. Available online: https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/the-church-of-pentecost-membership-hits-over-3-3-million.html (accessed on 14 September 2023).

[11] These words are said to have been uttered by David confronting Goliath in their well-known biblical combat.

[12] Advocates for Christ Ghana organises an annual 'National Christian Forum'. The general theme of the August 2022 'National Christian Forum' was 'Ghana @65: Assessing the role of the 3 Arms of Government and the Church in Promoting Good Governance'. Available online: https://www.advocates4christgh.com/ (accessed on 14 September 2023).

[13] Frimpong-Manso retired as Head of the Assemblies of God in 2022, and is no longer president of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council.

[14] Work on the cathedral was suspended in August 2022 and had not restarted at the time of writing (September 2023).

[15] The Interfaith Diversity Network of West Africa works to 'build bridges across all religions or faiths' with the 'ultimate aim of changing attitudes towards LGBT people'. Available online: https://itdnowa.org/about/ (accessed on 14 September 2023).

[16] I am very grateful to an anonymous reviewer of the paper for this point.

[17] Author personal email communication with Holger Weiss, Professor of General History at Åbo Akademi University, Finland, and author of many works on Islam in Ghana.

[18] 'Job 38: 31–32 Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? Or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?' Video quoting these words from Duncan-Williams at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4RPGrwfRhg (accessed on 1 June 2023).

[19] Available online: https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=dag%20heward-mills (accessed on 31 May 2023).

[20] Available online: https://www.facebook.com/daghewardmills.org/posts/10153549805918623/ and https://www.daghewardmills.org/new/daily-devotional-14th-june-speak-up/ (accessed on 31 May 2023).

[21] The two events were Duncan-Williams' 'Africa Business and Kingdom Leadership Summit', September 2017, and Mensa Otabil's annual 'Greater Works' conference under the banner: 'Raising Leaders, Shaping Vision and Influencing Society through Christ'. See Heuser (2020, pp. 246–49, 252–56).

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