

The Political Economy of Heaven and Earth in Ghana, by Charles Prempeh, Bamenda, Cameroon, Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2023, 408pp, £46.20 (paperback), ISBN: 9789956553174

Christian nationalism in Ghana is a significant religious and political ideology. Many of its proponents are Pentecostals or Charismatics, who seek changes in public policy to build God's kingdom on earth, that is, a Christianised state. Critics believe this poses a serious threat to national cohesion as it involves vilifying those who have different religious or cultural beliefs, including the 20 per cent of Ghanaians who are Muslim, the 5 per cent of the population who are followers of African traditional religions, and Ghana's small and beleaguered LGBTQ+ community.

Ghana is not the only African country affected by Christian nationalism. For example, 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'. 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.

Charles Prempeh's book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the phenomenon of Christian nationalism in Ghana. Prempeh is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi-Ghana. He is a self-declared member of Ghana's largest Protestant church, the Church of Pentecost. He brings to the topic of Christian nationalism both an academic's sceptical eye and a believer's focus.

Generally, religious leaders in Ghana exhibit significant religious and social power when they are seen as being 'above politics'. They are also regarded as exhibiting a moral authority widely regarded as representative of the nation, fusing national and religious identity, and drawing on powerful myths about the nation's religious character. Ideas about a Christian nation are powerful in Ghana. It is not just the domain of the most devout sections of the population, it is widely viewed as integral to a national identity which must be maintained.

As in other African countries, religion in Ghana is not divorced from everyday experiences of economic and socio-political life, both personal and corporate. For many, maybe most, Ghanaians, 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 fail to prosper, as Ghana's is currently, Christian nationalists may believe that this is because the country is overrun with evil forces which need to be negated by prayer to request God's deliverance. Prempeh contends that Ghana's economic and political problems are not due to institutional weaknesses but to the failure of Christians to live up to the ideals of Christianity in their public and private lives.

Prempeh's book is divided into six lengthy chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the concerns of the book and identifies and examines Prempeh's personal and academic views about the phenomenon of Christian nationalism in Ghana. Chapter two – which weighs in at more than 150 pages – is concerned with 'state formation and the politics of Ghana's national cathedral'. Ghana's current president, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, announced his intention to build a national cathedral in March 2017. He stands down as president in January

2025 after two terms in office, as Ghana's constitution demands. Akufo-Addo's aim is to complete the building of a national cathedral during his presidential tenure, but the project is mired in corruption claims and not currently proceeding. Prempeh explains how the project has gone sour despite high initial hopes, especially among Ghana's community of Christian leaders.

Chapter three looks at the relationship of 'prophecies, prophets and politicians in Ghana'. Prempeh explains that in Ghana today a cadre of self-appointed prophets has emerged, people who seek to predict political outcomes, including election results. They are not often correct, however, and when they are many Ghanaians believe it is due more to guesswork than their enhanced spiritual capacities.

The fourth chapter looks at the issue of corruption. Prempeh explains that democracy is not working well for many Ghanaians for several reasons, including widespread perceptions of serious petty and state level corruption, pessimism about the direction of national development, and disbelief that successive governments have the capacity or will to deal with these problems. He bemoans the fact that many Christians, including prominent figures, are also guilty of corruption and explains that in his view this scourge can only be alleviated by the application of Christian principles to both private and public life. Chapter five continues with the theme of the relationship between Christianity and corruption in Ghana, and Prempeh employs copious biblical references to advance his argument that corruption will be a problem in Ghana until Christians learn to apply Christian principles to their lives. Chapter six is a brief concluding chapter, in which Prempeh summarises and concludes his arguments about Christian nationalism in Ghana.

The book is well-researched, argued passionately, and interesting. It will be of interest to anyone who finds the topic of religion and politics in Ghana, and more widely in Africa, of significance. On the downside, the book is very lengthy and sometimes verbose. It could be judiciously cut to make the arguments more focused and coherent. The author tends to go off on lengthy asides which do not necessarily add to the analytical value of the book. Chapter two, for example, which seeks to focus on the national cathedral issue is a case in point. The 150+-page chapter would greatly benefit from editing as the important argument that the author seeks to present is all but lost in the welter of asides and digressions.

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