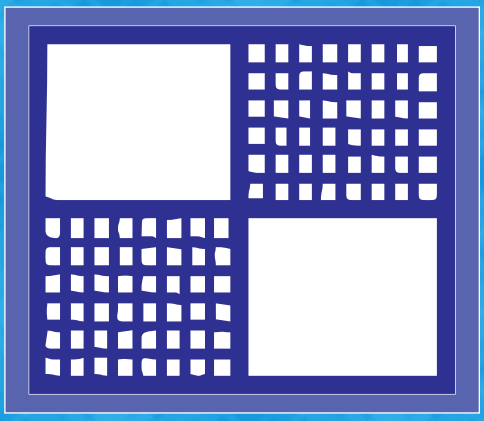
'KRONTI NE AKWAMU' SERIES
NO.19

Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Fourth Republic



Emeritus Prof. Jeffrey Haynes

Ghana Center for Democratic Development

Established in 1998, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) is an independent not-for-profit think-and-do-tank that works through research, policy engagement, thought leadership, and civic dialogue and partnerships to promote and strengthen democracy, good governance, and inclusive development in Ghana and the rest of Africa. A founding Core Partner (and Ghana National Partner) of Afrobarometer, CDD-Ghana is also the convenor and secretariat for the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON), and West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS).

The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board of Governors, officers, staff, orsponsors of the Center.

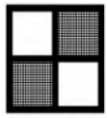
Kronti ne Akwamu Series No. 19

© Copyright 2025
CDD-Ghana

Material from this publication may be quoted with appropriate citation.

Email: info@cddgh.org
Website: www.cddgh.org

ABOUT 'KRONTI NE AKWAMU'



Meaning of the 'Kronti ne Akwamu' Symbol

'Kronti ne Akwamu' is the *adinkra** symbol for democracy, duality of the essence of life, and Interdependence.

** Symbols from Ghana that represent concepts or aphorisms*

The '*Kronti ne Akwamu*' (Democracy and Good Governance) public lecture is the Center's flagship annual event. It is one of the Center's initiatives aimed towards bridging the gap between reflection, research and analysis on one hand, and pro-democracy and good governance advocacy on the other.

Therefore, it is aimed at enriching the quality of public discourse on democratic and governance reforms. The lectures feature prominent scholars and/or activists of local and international repute whose work focus on democracy building and fostering good governance. Speakers are invited to share knowledge and insights on these issues, in the hope of stimulating vibrant public debate.

The lectures have been dubbed '*Kronti ne Akwamu*' after the Akan *adinkra* symbol that best represents democracy, duality of the essence of life, and interdependence. The symbol encapsulates a system of decentralized political authority with different branches of government complementing and also checking each other.

The *maiden* lecture was delivered in March 2005. It featured an internationally renowned scholar and activist of democratic development - Prof. Larry Diamond, a senior fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University (USA). He spoke on the topic: **Democracy and Development – A Case for Mutual Dependency**. The then Chief Justice of Ghana, His Lordship Justice George Kingsley Acquah was the chairman for that occasion.

The *second Kronti ne Akwamu* lecture was delivered by the distinguished Ghanaian lawyer, statesman and former Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana,

the Rt. Hon Peter Ala Adjetey. He spoke on the topic: **Reflections on the Effectiveness of the Parliament of the Fourth Republic of Ghana**. The distinguished chairman of that event was The Very Reverend Professor S. K. Adjepong, Chairman of the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council.

Professor Richard Joseph, a distinguished political scientist, former director of the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University (USA), and former head of Africa programs at the Carter Center, delivered the third 'Kronti ne Akwamu' lecture, the Golden Jubilee edition. "**Back to the Future for Ghana and Democratic Development in Africa"** was the topic. The event was chaired by the Honorable J. H. Mensah, who at the time was the Member of Parliament for Sunyani and the Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission.

The *fourth Kronti ne Akwamu* lecture was delivered by Dr. K.Y. Amoako, founder and president of the African Center for Economic Transformation on the topic: **The Future of Civil Society in Democratic Governance and Development in Africa**. The chairperson was Mrs. Mary Chinery Hesse, then chief advisor to the former President, John Agyekum Kufuor.

The *fifth* lecture was organized in partnership with KPMG-Ghana and was delivered by Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, then Chairman of the Electoral Commission on the topic: **The Challenges to Conducting Free and Fair Elections in Emerging African Democracies: The Case of Ghana**. His Lordship the late Justice V. C. R. A. C. Crabbe (Statute Law Revision Commissioner, Ministry of Justice) chaired the lecture.

Dr. Jendayi Frazer, a former assistant secretary of state for African affairs and distinguished service professor at Carnegie Mellon University in the United States, delivered the sixth lecture on the topic: **Enhancing the Conflict Prevention Role of Elections in Africa**. Archbishop Charles Gabriel A. N. O. Palmer-Buckle, Metropolitan Archbishop of Accra, served as the chairperson.

The *seventh* lecture was on the topic: **Democratization and Women in Africa – Progress, Stagnation or Retreat** and it was delivered by Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Executive Director of the Africa Women Development Fund (AWDF). The chairperson for the lecture was Justice Vida Akoto Banfo.

Justice Emile Francis Short, Ghana's first Commissioner of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), delivered the eighth lecture on **The Quest for Governmental Accountability and Responsiveness in Ghana:**

Achievements, Challenges, and the Way Forward. It was chaired by the former CEO of the Ghana Chamber of Mines, Rev. Dr. Joyce Aryee.

The *ninth* lecture was delivered by the late Justice V. C. R. A. C. Crabbe, a Statute Law Revision Commissioner & Rtd. Supreme Court Judge. The topic was **Democratic Governance in Ghana: How Political Polarization may be Abated**. It was chaired by Mrs. Elizabeth Joyce Villars, Board Chairman, Camelot Ghana Ltd. & Former President, Association of Ghana Industries.

Prof. Kwame Karikari, former Executive Director of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), delivered the tenth 'Kronti ne Akwamu' lecture on the topic The Paradox of Voice without Accountability in Ghana. Mr. Nii Amanor Dodoo, Senior Partner, KPMG, Ghana, chaired this event.

The *eleventh* lecture was on the topic, **"Promoting Inclusion in African Democracies"**, it was delivered by Prof. Naomi Chazan, Former Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Israel. Prof. Atsu Aryee, Former Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of KwaZuluNatal, South Africa; and Former Rector, Mount Crest University College, Accra chaired this lecture.

The *twelfth* lecture was delivered by the late H.E. Busumuru Kofi Annan, Ghana's only Nobel Peace Prize laureate, a former Secretary-General of the United Nations and current chairman of the Kofi Annan Foundation, on "**Credible and Peaceful Elections: A Prerequisite for Africa's Progress**". This was chaired by H. E. Prof. Akua Kuenyehia, President of the Mountcrest University College in Accra & President of the Appeals Division of the International Criminal Court.

The *thirteenth* lecture was on the topic, "**The Search for Accountable Governance in the 4th Republic**". This was delivered by Mr. Abdul Malik Kweku Baako, Editor-in-Chief, New Crusading Guide. Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo, Dean, School of Information and Communication Studies, UG, chaired this lecture.

To mark the Center's 20th anniversary, Prof. Gyimah-Boadi, the Board Chair of the Afrobarometer Network and former Executive Director for CDD-Ghana delivered the fourteenth lecture on **"Making Democracy Work for the People: Reflections on Ghana's 25-year journey towards democratic development"**. Ms. Estelle Akofio-Sowah, Country Manager, CSquared Ghana chaired this 20th anniversary edition of the lecture.

The *fifteenth* lecture was delivered by Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh, now CDD-Ghana's

Senior Fellow and former Director, Social Development Policy Division, UN Economic Commission for Africa on the topic, "**Gender and Youth in Ghana's Democratic Consolidation**". The lecture was chaired by delivered by Mr. Kojo Yankah, Founder & Past President, African University College of Communications.

The *sixteenth* lecture was delivered by Mr. Bernard Avle, General Manager for Citi FM/Citi TV on: "**Radio, Rulers, and the Ruled in the 4th Republic: Observations On 25 Years Of An Evolving Relationship**". Miss Emma Morrison, media and communications consultant chaired the lecture.

Ms. Idayat Hassan, Director of the Center for Democracy and Development in Nigeria, delivered the seventeenth lecture on "**The Evolution of the Civic Space in Modern African Democracy**". Professor Kwame Karikari, Dean, Communications Studies, Wisconsin International University College chaired the lecture.

Marking the Center's Silver Jubilee, the *eighteenth* lecture was held in the spirit of reflection and evaluation, it was titled **'In Conversation with CDD-Ghana: 25 Years of Promoting Democracy, Good Governance and Inclusive Development**,' this anniversary lecture provided a platform for individuals who have helped and continue to support the growth of the Center to share their perspectives on the role of Center in promoting democratic governance over the years. Two members of the Center's Board - Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo of the School of Information and Communication Studies, University of Ghana, and Board Chair of the Center, Mr. Kweku Awotwi, former Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Tullow Oil plc (UK) and Tullow Ghana, a friend of the Center and colleague from the civil society space, Mr. Ibrahim Tanko, the Executive Director of the Star Ghana Foundation and former staff and Team Lead for Elections, Rhoda Osei-Afful, Research Assistant Coordinator of the Elite Africa Project and provided insights into the transformative 25-year journey of the Center. Prof. Baffour Agyeman-Duah, Co-Founder and CEO of the John Agyekum Kufuor Foundation (JAK Foundation) served as the main speaker.

LECTURE SYNOPSIS

In this lecture, I examine religion's impact on Ghana's liberal democracy during the Fourth Republic, that is, from 1992.

Religion and politics have long been intertwined in Ghana. For example, Kwame Nkrumah often likened himself to the 'Messiah' of Ghana's independence and used religious imagery to highlight his leadership role. Similarly, General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong presented himself as a divinely chosen leader to guide Ghana through challenging times. Acheampong sought the support and blessings of Christians, Muslim, and traditional religious leaders to bolster his position. Flt-Lt. Jerry John Rawlings sought support from the Afrikania Mission. During the 1980s, the Christian church was prominent in civil society efforts to encourage the PNDC to redemocratise. Following democratisation, Ghana experienced a significant growth in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; many were initially politically quietist, later becoming more politically vocal (Haynes 2024).

Many Ghanaians question the quality of Ghana's democracy after three decades of the Fourth Republic. Christian churches are heavily involved in public conversations about how to fix Ghana's perceived democratic weaknesses. All agree that to make Ghana's democracy work better, there needs to be more transparency and a significant reduction in corruption.

Religion has much political significance in Ghana today. The lecture addresses three questions:

(1) How does religion impact Ghana's secular constitution?

(2) How does religion impact Ghana's democracy?

(3) How does religion affect Ghana's liberal freedoms, including freedom of expression and association and the right to personal liberty?

BACKGROUND

First, some background information about me. My relationship with Ghana goes back a long way, to the mid-1980s. I first visited Ghana in 1985, researching for a PhD on Flt-Lt. Jerry John Rawlings and the PNDC regime, successfully completed in 1988. I visited Ghana for further research in 1990 to see how the new, partly elected, District Assemblies were working. Following democratisation in 1992, I wrote peer-reviewed articles in international journals both on Ghana's politics and on the relationship between religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

Flt-Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, perhaps the most prominent political figure in Ghana since Kwame Nkrumah, passed away suddenly in November 2020. Following requests from Ghanaian colleagues to comment on Rawlings' death and political legacy, I updated my 1988 PhD, publishing the results in 2023 in a research monograph: ***Revolution and Democracy in Ghana: The Politics of Jerry John Rawlings*** (Haynes 2023a). In November 2024, Digibooks of Tema published an exclusive, Ghana-only, edition of the book.

I began to research for and write a research monograph on religion and politics in Ghana in mid-2022. I have visited Ghana six times in the last two years: in July and November 2022, April 2023, and February, June and November 2024. Why? I wanted to learn much more about the relationship of religion to politics in Ghana during the Fourth Republic.

I have benefitted immensely from around 50 personal interviews on the general topic of religion and politics in Ghana as well as on the specific one of religion and its relationship to liberal democracy. I am near completion of the resulting book, entitled: ***Christian Nationalism and Democracy in Ghana***, to be published by Routledge UK in 2025 in its book series, Routledge Studies on Religion in Africa and the Diaspora

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN GHANA DURING AND AFTER THE PROVISIONAL NATIONAL DEFENCE COUNCIL REGIME

Ghana's religious landscape has significantly changed during the Fourth Republic. During this time, as Professor Paul Gifford (2004), formerly of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, notes, the country has seen strong growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Initially, such churches were politically quietest, seeking to build numbers of followers rather than engaging in politics. Generally, however, opening up Ghana's political space after a decade of military role, encouraged religious people publicly to vocalize what they saw as Ghana's problems, ponder on Ghana's prospects, and suggest ways to improve things politically.

During the Fourth Republic, numbers of Muslims grew rapidly as did followers of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Converts to Pentecostalism came primarily from the older churches, such as the Catholic, mainline Protestant, and possibly also the older Evangelical churches. While the profound religious demographic shifts that took place in many African states, including Ghana, in the post-Cold War period remain understudied, evidence suggests that they were linked to the reintroduction of multiparty politics.

The late Dr. Kwame Bediako, Christian theologian and founder of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission and Culture, noted the central role of Christian leaders and organisations in Ghana's democratization. For Dr Bediako this was characteristic of a new public theology contesting the then existing tendency to vest political power with sacred authority (Bediako 2005: 117). Recounting the election in 2000 of a democratic challenger to succeed the then president, Jerry John Rawlings, Dr Bediako regarded the new public theology as having a central role in encouraging Ghana's political culture to advance in a genuinely democratic direction.

Moving the gravitational center of Christianity in Ghana from the historic mission churches to the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches increased the latter's public prominence, while catching the media's attention. It became newsworthy what leaders of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches had to say

about public issues; in turn, increased media attention helped build their dominance of Ghana's religious landscape. According to the late Pastor Dr Joseph Quayesi-Amakye of the Church of Pentecost, Ghana's Pentecostal churches became 'the heartland of the Christian faith' (Quayesi-Amakye 2015: 640). In addition, as the Most Reverend Professor J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Presiding Bishop of the Methodist of Ghana, notes, burgeoning Pentecostalism encouraged the advance of 'the Christian faith with a fervour that is increasingly shaping its national identity', characterized by 'ecstatic worship' and belief in 'a God of miracles' (Asamoah-Gyadu quoted in Bigg 2017).

The approach of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches differed significantly from that of the mainline Christian churches. According to Most Reverend Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, '[t]he 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' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014: 168).

The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches' approach was different, organizing 'periods of prayer and fasting' designed 'to deal with threats of violence' and political instability, including during election periods (Asamoah-Gyadu 2014: 170). In addition, leaders of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches use prayer and prophetic declarations and employ biblical passages to interpret and explain why Ghanaians are suffering now and what to do about it.

Between 1960 and 2021, the percentage of Christians in Ghana grew from 44% to 71%, that of Muslims increased from 11.96% to 19.9%, while that of ATRs fell from 43.96% to 3.2%. According to the 2021 census, 71.3% of Ghanaians identify as Christian, and 19.9% as Muslim. Just 3% are followers of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and 4.5% follow other religions, such as Hinduism. A mere 1.1% have no religious beliefs, that is, they are religious 'nones'.[1]

[1]"Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census: General Report Volume 3C," Ghana Statistical Service, November 2021, https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203C_Background%20Characteristics_181121.pdf

Table 1: Religious Affiliation in Ghana in 2021

Christianity	**71.3%**
Roman Catholic	10.0%
Mainline Protestant	17.4%
Pentecostal/Charismatic	31.6%
Other Christian	12.3%
Islam	**19.9%**
African Traditional Religions	**3.2%**
Other Religions	**4.5%**
No Religion	**1.1%**

Source: Ghana 2021 Census,https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh

Ghana's changing religious landscape finds expression in a close relationship between religious figures and politicians, especially at election times. Politics in the Fourth Republic is characterized by candidates for elected office regarding it as essential that they gain the public support of prominent religious figures, especially Christians and Muslims. For religious figures, a close public relationship between themselves and senior politicians confirms that they are important public figures, offers the possibility of influencing politicians to endorse policies they prefer, and increases the standing of their personal and institutional 'brands'.

The eight presidential and parliamentary elections held during the Fourth Republic illustrate the intertwining of religion and politics in Ghana. During election periods, politicians vying for political power – well aware of the pervasive popular influence of religion – seek to use religious fora and leaders to win influence to help them in their election campaigns.

The central role of religion in Ghanaian politics is reflected in various ways, including 'gospel' songs, campaign massages, and Christian music celebrities appearing on campaign platforms of political parties. In addition, the conjunction of religion and politics in Ghana is heightened during elections because some politicians attempt to create discord between their supporters and opponents by stressing their own religious credentials and denigrating those of their rivals.

During the first post-PNDC democratic elections in 1992, presidential candidates invoked religion to encourage voters to elect as president a 'God-fearing man', and this religious rhetoric was a contentious issue.

During the 1996 elections, religion was again referenced to try to ascertain truth and falsehood. Some candidates used traditional religion oracles to divine whether people who received gifts from politicians and who promised to vote for them had fulfilled their part of the deal and to determine whether accusations levelled against politicians were true or false. The 2000 elections, where the main issue was whether the political parties with Christian presidential candidates should have Muslim running mates, was seen as a direct intervention from God, with angels said to be coming to vote for the main opposition party, the New Patriotic Party. Overall, as the late Reverend Professor Elom Dovlo noted in 2005, presidential and parliamentary elections in the 1990s and early 2000s demonstrated the consistent influence of religious beliefs on national elections, making plain the heightened connection in Ghana between religion and politics especially during elections. (Dovlo 2005).

Since Reverend Professor Dovlo's analysis 20 years ago, the connections, the intertwining, of religion and politics has only grown. In both 2016 and 2020, the New Patriotic Party made overt allusions to Christianity in its electoral slogan: 'For the battle is the Lord's'. In 2024, on the other hand, the NPP's slogan is 'It's possible', apparently downplaying the religious focus of its political appeal.

The New Democratic Congress's presidential flagbearer, John Atta Mills proclaimed in the run up to the 2012 elections, that 'with God holding the banner, we shall succeed'. In 2016, the NDC went with 'Changing Lives! Transforming Ghana!', in 2020, 'Ghana is Hard', and in 2024, 'Unity, Stability, and Development'.

The 2024 presidential election is the first where the candidate from one of the main parties is a Muslim, while that of the other is a Christian. Both the NPP and NDC presidential candidates have made great efforts to ingratiate themselves with Ghana's religious communities.

Dr Anima Adjepong, Assistant Professor of Women's Gender and Sexualities Studies at the University of Cincinnati and a member of Silent Majority Ghana, asserts that Christians hold 'sway over the government', while the latter 'strategically use Christianity' to court powerful Christians 'who, in

turn, incite their congregations to vote' for a certain presidential and/or party candidate. According to Dr Adjepong, this serves to entrench 'fundamentalist Christian ideas in the state's operations and curtail opportunities for the advancement of [a] progressive social agenda' (Adjepong 2021). Writing in the Daily Graphic on 14 March 2024, Ahumah Ocansey (2024), an Accra-based lawyer, claimed that in Ghana today constitutional law is challenged by biblical law.

The relationship between prominent religious figures, both Christian and Muslim, and senior politicians is, however, just one strategy to expand religious, social and political influence. For example, the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana's largest church with approaching four million members in December 2023, [2] seeks, quite legitimately, to influence politics and policy making in various ways. They include both frequent lobbying of members of the government and parliamentarians and a high-profile annual event, the 'National Politicians' Conference'. It brings together politicians from Ghana's major political parties, including the NPP and NDC, as well as faith-based civil society organizations, such as Advocates for Christ.[3]

The purpose of the conference is to promote what the CoP perceives as fundamental Christian values, derived from the word of God as presented in the Bible, in all sectors of national life including government, education, and business. The NPP's General Secretary, Lawyer Justin Kodua Frimpong, commented in relation to the 2023 National Politicians' Conference: 'This is a godly conference, and we will not turn our back on God. We support the National Politicians' Conference, and we shall fully come on board' *(https://thecophq.org/npp-to-participate-in-national-politicians-conference/).*

[2]'As of December 2023, the church, which is one of the leading classical Pentecostal churches in the world, has a total membership of 3,864,355 in Ghana alone, representing a growth of 7.4% of the previous figure, resulting in a total membership of 4,534,644 worldwide.' (https://thecophq.org/the-church-of-pentecost-membership-constitutes-11-3-of-ghanas-total-population/#:~:text=As%20of%20December%202023%2C%20the,total%20membership%20of%204%2C534%2C644%20worldwide)

[3]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' <https://www.advocates4christgh.com/> (Accessed 31 May 2023).

The lecture set out to address three specific questions:

(1) How does religion impact Ghana's secular constitution?

(2) How does religion impact Ghana's democracy?

(3) How does religion affect Ghana's liberal freedoms, including freedom of expression and association and the right to personal liberty?

To these questions I now turn.

Researching into the relationship of religion and politics in Ghana, I have become aware of what I call Christian Nationalism which, I suggest, is impacting on Ghana's politics and the nature of its democracy. In my forthcoming book, *Christian Nationalism and Democracy in Ghana*, I examine the political significance of Christian nationalism in Ghana.

What is Christian Nationalism in Ghana? Not everyone in the audience will be familiar with the term and I'd like to spend a little time explaining what I mean by it.

To define Christian nationalism in Ghana, it is useful to combine two separate terms, 'Christian' and 'nationalist'. Organisations, groups and individuals I refer to as 'Christian nationalist' have the following attributes: first, they are Christian-orientated, informed by an understanding that the Bible is factually true, the word of God. Christian nationalists believe that God wants people to obey bible 'teachings', including in relation to social mores and values, and to pursue these on earth via the authority and guidance of Christian leaders.

Second, Christian nationalists in Ghana are 'nationalist', for two reasons. First, Christian nationalists recognise that Ghana is a majority Christian nation, with 71% of Ghanaians professing to be Christians. Second, they are nationalists because they regard disapproval from Western governments, such as that of the USA, Western advocacy groups, such as Amnesty International, and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, in relation to, for example, the proposed 'anti-gay' law, as an example

of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism which, they believe, is against Ghana's national interests. That is, Ghana's Christian Nationalists strongly defend Ghana's national integrity, asserting that the country has no need of external advice when choosing its national trajectory. Finally, because many Ghanaian Christians regard 'Christianity in the West as being perverted or corrupted by Western culture, many may regard "Christian Nationalist" as a badge of honour (Haynes 2023b).

Christian nationalism in Ghana reflects the country's religious, cultural and political history. Ghana is a religiously plural country with a constitution stating the country's adherence to religious freedom, with no religion officially favoured over others. Like many other African countries, however, religious actors, mainly Christian, are consistently politically engaged in Ghana and there is considerable overlap between religious and other spheres of life.

We can make a distinction between Christian nationalism and other categories of religious involvement in Ghana's politics. First, it is important to distinguish between Christian nationalism and Ghanaian civil religion that, similar to American civil religion, speaks broadly to the importance of God but does not seek to situate the nation strategically in the Christian story or to privilege Christian forms in public life. Second, we can make a distinction between general Christian political engagement from Christian nationalism as such. The former might open the door for the latter, but they are not exactly the same. Finally, there is an important difference between a Christian nation, the result of an explicit political intervention – that is, a nation made Christian – and a Christian nation that expresses a demographic fact.

A 'Christian nation' and a 'nation of Christians' are different things, although Christian nationalists may slip between the two as a political strategy. This can be seen in President Akufo-Addo's February 2024 claim that Ghana is 'practically' a Christian nation, implying that his pet Christian nationalist project – the uncompleted national cathedral – is a natural expression of demographic fact (and by extension presumed democratic will). Naomi Haynes (2021) has written about these two models as they play out in different Zambian Christian communities and there are parallels between Zambia and Ghana in this respect. As in Zambia, Christian nationalism in Ghana is a prominent political ideology, informed by spiritual and biblical

dimensions, which draws on both domestic and external influences.

Christian nationalism in Ghana has developed at the same time that Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has become of great demographic and religious importance in Ghana, the country's fastest growing religious strand. Professor Ebenezer Babatunde Obadare (2018), Douglas Dillon senior fellow for Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, USA, claims that Nigeria is undergoing 'Pentecostalization of governance', and some Ghanaian scholars have queried whether a similar process is taking place in Ghana. They note the significant political influence of senior Pentecostals in Ghana during the two-term presidency of Nana Dankwa Akufo-Addo. Some point to the controversial national cathedral project as a manifestation of Christian Nationalism. Critics claim that state financial support for the national cathedral challenges the non-religious nature of Ghana's democratic governance as enshrined in the 1992 constitution. A concern is that Christian Nationalist political influence may encourage governance aligned with normatively undemocratic Christian conservative doctrines rather than liberal democratic principles, potentially alienating not only non-religious and minority groups but also 'dissenting' Christians. This is a particular concern for Ghana, a country with a long record of inter-faith harmony, including between Christians and Muslims.

RELIGION AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Christian nationalism can be considered in the light of the historical and cultural backgrounds of Ghana, a country with an enviable record of continuous democracy for more than three decades.

Does Christian nationalism contribute to the re-negotiation and re-definition of democracy or is it anti-democratic, even theocratic in its approach to governance and public policy?

According to International IDEA's Global State of Democracy initiative, Ghana performs in the mid-range across all four categories of the Global State of Democracy framework ***(https://www.idea.int/gsod/gsod)***. Although it is among the world's top 25 per cent of countries with regard to several factors of democracy, it has experienced notable declines in Credible Elections, Access to Justice, and Freedom of Association and Assembly in the last five years.

I understand liberal democracy as having six key components:

- Elections between or among multiple, distinct political parties,
- Separation of powers into different arms of government,
- Rule of law in everyday life as part of an open society,
- Market economy with private property,
- Universal suffrage,
- Equal protection for all citizens of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties and political freedoms.

After three decades of democracy, during which Ghana has been celebrated internationally as one of Africa's continuous democracies, many Ghanaians are dissatisfied with the quality of the country's democracy. The V-Dem Institute, which studies the qualities of government, was founded by Professor Staffan I. Lindberg in 2014, and is based at the department of

political science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. V-Dem categorised Ghana as a liberal democracy in 2003-2014, an electoral democracy in 2015-23, and an 'autocratizer' in 2024, indicating significant democratic decline (V-Dem 2024: 21, 41). According to V-Dem, an autocratizer is an incumbent regime which manages 'to bypass or weaken democratic institutional constraints such as an impartial administration, vertical and horizontal accountability, as well as free and open media. This may apply both to an autocratizer's legal rise to power and autocratizing behavior in office'.

According to Ghanaian scholars, Emmanuel Graham, Ransford Gyampo, Pamphilious Faanu and Eric Yobo (2017), Ghana's democratic strengths include a viable multi-party system; electoral reforms to improve the structure and process of elections; a lively civil society and independent media; and widespread acknowledgement of the importance of democratic norms by both the mass of ordinary Ghanaian citizens and political elites, behaviorally, attitudinaly and constitutionally.

Regarding democratic weaknesses, the same scholars identify 'electoral processes [that] continue to be saddled with monumental flaws that undermine the integrity of elections and pose a threat of democratic relapse'; executive presidency with wide, some claim excessive, powers; ethnically or tribally-based politics potentially undermining political stability; periodic post-election violence, and limited policy influence for civil society (Graham, Gyampo, Faanu and Yobo, 2017).

Finally, according to the US non-governmental organization, Freedom House, weaknesses in Ghana's liberal democracy include 'discrimination against women and LGBT+ people', 'weaknesses in judicial independence and the rule of law, corruption and public service delivery present challenges to government performance, political violence as well as illegal mining causing destruction to water bodies' (Freedom House 2023).

There is no consensus on how to improve democracy in Ghana, although many would agree to make democracy work better requires rejuvenation and refocusing of the main political institutions: the presidency, parliament, and judiciary. It is also essential to have an accountable and transparent government, where ordinary people's concerns are not only listened to but also purposively addressed by those in power, as well as minimisation of state-level corruption.

Recent Afrobarometer data indicate that democracy is not working well for Ghanaians for several reasons, including perceptions of increased petty and state level corruption, as well as pessimism about the direction of national development and lack of belief that government has the capacity to deal with these problems. Afrobarometer's Round 9 (2023) discovered that '77 % of Ghanaians say the level of corruption in the country increased during the previous year' and '87 % of citizens think Ghana is heading in the wrong direction'.

In Round 9, Afrobarometer asked respondents: 'How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say' in relation to 'fighting corruption in government?' The response was: Very badly: 33.5% Fairly badly: 21.0%

Professor Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, a former Executive Director of CDD-Ghana, reported in October 2024, that 'Ghanaians' support for democracy remains high at 75 per cent but there's a worrying trend … Rejection of military rule has dropped sharply by 20 per cent over the past decade and Ghana is among countries where citizens are increasingly open to military intervention if leaders abuse power'***(https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ghana-news-prof-gyimah-boadi-calls-for-peaceful-clean-election.html#google_vignette)***. This implies that for most Ghanaians democracy per se is not the problem. It is that democracy is not working well for them.

When Ghanaians express concern about Ghana's democratic weaknesses they frequently refer to concerns with politicians' morality and integrity. This is evidenced in burgeoning corruption, which not only sets back national development but also, as Professor Gyimah-Boadi recently noted, reduces faith in democracy as the best available system of government.

The December 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections focus attention both on democratic quality and on how Ghana's religious institutions can contribute to democratic renewal. Many Ghanaians believe that Ghana lacks is conscientious political leadership, capable of delivering a progressive democratic and moral vision for the country and fulfil development aspirations. Sadly, many Ghanaians regard much of the country's political leadership as conspicuous by what it lacks: patriotic loyalty, faithfulness, selfless service, integrity, fearlessness and honesty.

Writing recently in the Daily Graphic, George Bernard Shaw, a Ghana-based lawyer, referred to the country as 'a hot cauldron of human rights issues', with significant problems with freedom of expression and association, and the right to personal liberty. George Bernard Shaw was specifically referring to the brouhaha generated by the recent three-day protest, organized by Democracy Hub, drawing attention to the devastating effects of galamsey — illegal small-scale mining — and calling on the government to act swiftly and ban the act *(https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/ghana-news-human-rights-protests.html).*

What, more generally, of liberal dimension of Ghana's democracy, including freedom of expression and association and the right to personal liberty? Regarding freedom of expression, in 2022 Ghana fell from 30th to 60th on Reporters Without Borders' Worldwide Press Freedom Index *(https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-ranked-60th-on-press-freedom-index.html).* This was a consequence of increasing cases of abuse of journalists. Examples of attacks include investigative journalist Manasseh Azure Awuni receiving multiple death threats and unsuccessful defamation suits, an armed attack on local radio station Benya FM for covering sensitive subjects such as the government's mismanagement of the fishing industry, and supporters of the Naw Patriotic Party attacking a Ghana News Agency reporter, accusing him of being a member of the National Democratic Congress.

Protests are of course a vital element of democratic governance, and the right to engage in them is guaranteed in international human rights treaties and also in most modern constitutions, including Ghana's 1992 Constitution. Protests are not only an important avenue for citizens to register their concerns on important national issues but also assists government in gauging the collective mood of the citizenry relative to its performance or policies.

Protests bring public attention to an issue or problem but do not on their own necessarily lead to meaningful changes. What is also required is that those with political power, that is, notably the president and parliament, devise and implement necessary measures to deal with the issues that popular protests identify.

Religious organizations in Ghana have recently been involved in protests. For example, the Accra Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church organised a

protest dubbed 'Environmental Prayer Walk' against galamsey in the streets of Accra on Friday, October 11, 2024. The 'Environmental Prayer Walk' focused attention on the galamsey controversy, a crucially important issue which many Ghanaians believe the government is not doing enough to tackle.

More generally, Ghana's Christian organizations, including the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, and major churches, including the Church of Pentecost, are involved in public conversations about how to fix Ghana's perceived democratic weaknesses, including how to tackle galamsey. Dr James Yeboah-Kwarteng, Assistant Professor of Christianity in the African Diaspora in Canada at the Department for the Study of Religion at St Mary's University, Nova Scotia, Canada, notes that Christian 'leaders in Ghana participate in national democratic governance by taking up leadership positions at the state and institutional levels. They 'draw on their religious backgrounds, while serving at state and civil society institutions. They employ religion in democratic electoral processes such as campaigning for peace, preventing and resolving conflicts, and declaring electoral prophecies.' (Yeboah-Kwarteng 2022: 915)

While not all would agree that the consistent political involvement of prominent Christians is democratically appropriate, what is not disputed is that Christian churches are today central to both public and political spheres. According to Dr Yeboah-Kwarteng, they aim not only to defend the church 'against marginalization and privatization, but also to re-define and to re-negotiate modernity's dominant principles and institutions, notably, a secular democratic nation-state.' (Yeboah-Kwarteng, 2022: 915).

This is the context where Christian nationalism in Ghana has developed: as a response to perceived Western-derived, secular attacks on the country's traditional – Christian – culture and values.

Ghana's Christian entities do not advocate jettisoning democracy and replacing it with undemocratic rule. This reflects a general feeling among Ghanaians that democracy is the preferred system of governance. In addition, seeking to build the 'Kingdom of God' in Ghana and getting practising Christians into positions of power, Christian churches do not necessarily advocate for a political regime with an institutionalized position for religion. Churches in Ghana do not wish to see a theocracy in Ghana or

even to have a country which, like Zambia, is constitutionally and publicly a 'Christian nation'.

A democratic political regime in Ghana has two fundamental characteristics: democratically accountable institutions, including a popularly elected president and legislature, and democratic principles, involving popular control of the government and citizens' political equality. Reflecting adhesion to liberal democratic values, Ghana's current political regime can be characterized by its preferred adhesion to the American political scientist, Robert Dahl's (1971), seven tenets of polyarchy, widely regarded as a synonym for a liberal democratic regime: (1) free and fair elections (2) elected officials (3) inclusive suffrage (4) the right to run for office (5) freedom of expression (6) alternative sources of information to those disseminated by the state, and (7) associational autonomy.

How do religion generally and religious leaders in particular evince liberal democratic characteristics, which Ghana has strongly embraced during the three decades of the Fourth Republic? Many Ghanaians might believe that some religious leaders and institutions should have more prominent, perhaps formalized, positions of public authority and power. The logic is that because elected politicians are often seen to lack both morality and integrity, then those with positions of political power and authority should be selected from a wider range of personnel, including people with strong religious beliefs and convictions, exhibiting high levels of morality and integrity.

What might religious people in positions of power and authority imply for several important dimensions of Ghana's liberal democracy, including freedom of association, the right to personal liberty, freedom of expression, sources of information, and associational autonomy?

To examine this issue, it is useful to refer to Article 12(2) of Ghana's 1992 Constitution, which provides that:

> ***Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, color, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest.***

What does this mean in practice and what has religion got to do with it? To answer these questions, I want to make the following points referring to liberal democracy in Ghana: First, liberal democracy implies religious pluralism and a rejection of dominance or capture of the state or politics by any one religious belief or theology. Second, to practice liberal democracy successfully, the state must not be subject to or submit to religious or theological control.

Third, although secularism in Ghana is not irreligious or non-religious, it does work from the premise that, at the minimum, the state is both nondenominational and inclusive in its relationship with communities of faith. This is a view of secularism which is akin to how countries like India regard the concept and practice; that is, no religion is treated favourably by the state, even when there is a clear majority religion in the country. In India, Hinduism is the majority religion practiced by 80% of Indians, while Islam is the second largest, followed by 14% of the population. Although the political dominance of the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, is said to threaten the principle of secularism in India, currently the Indian constitution does not state a national preference for Hinduism over other religions. Hinduism remains primus inter pares (first among equals), without formal preferential treatment by the state.

If India is demographically a 'nation of Hindus', then Ghana is 'a nation of Christians', with more than 70% of Ghanaians followers of that faith. Yet, the country is not a Christian nation according to Naomi Haynes' model, that is, where the state is controlled by Christians. This is because Ghana is not (yet) in political thrall to prominent Christians or (clearly) undergoing a process of Christianisation. Yet, governments in Ghana are fully cognisant of the power and appeal of religion to millions of Ghanaians and may as a result follow policies which they believe will be approved by Ghana's powerful Christian organizations.

Pressure on the state from religious organizations, notably Christianity, is apparent in relation characteristics of liberal democracy noted above: freedom of association, the right to personal liberty, freedom of expression, sources of information, and associational autonomy.

The issue recently came to head. In February 2024, Ghana's parliament unanimously approved the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and

Ghanaian Family Values – aka the 'anti-gay' - Bill. As I write these words (13 November 2024), the 'anti-gay' bill awaits signature by President Akufo-Addo, pending decisions of the Supreme Court on two outstanding court cases challenging the legality of the bill. The aim of the bill/law is further to criminalize Ghana's sexual minorities, seriously damaging the liberal freedoms noted above. The bill (law) is the outcome of more than three years of mainly religious pressure on the government, from Christians, Muslim and African Traditional Religions. Note that strictures against Ghana's sexual minorities are already on the statute book and have been since the era of British colonialism. But the proposed new law takes things much further, seeking to introduce new and very severe penalties for a wide range of offences linked to Ghana's sexual minorities.

Critics of the bill/law regard it as an important example of Ghana's liberal democratic decline. Many Ghanaians acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people suffer widespread discrimination and abuse both in public and in family settings in Ghana. Yet, this did not stop Ghana's parliamentarians, under pressure from a range of religious entities, from unanimously voting for the bill/law, which critics argue is both draconian and fundamentally contrary to the spirit and letter of Ghana's liberal democracy, as expressed in the 1992 constitution.

Some Ghanaian civil society organizations have publicly called for an end to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Ghana's religious and traditional leaders, plus the country's parliamentarians, with the support of elements of the US Christian Right, urge President Akuffo-Addo promptly to sign the bill into law.

CONCLUSION

Working on the premise that religion has much political significance in Ghana today, I began this lecture with three questions:

(1) How does religion impact Ghana's secular constitution?

(2) How does religion impact Ghana's democracy?

(3) How does religion affect Ghana's liberal freedoms, including freedom of expression and association and the right to personal liberty?

Regarding the first question, Ghana's secular constitution is unclear on the political role of religion and, following the Supreme Court's ruling that state funding of the national cathedral is lawful, we must conclude that religion does not currently undermine the secular premises of the 1992 constitution.

To answer the second question, we can note that religion impacts on Ghana's democracy in several ways. Some would say that Ghana's democracy would be enhanced if religious people, with high levels of morality and integrity, had positions of authority. Whether this would be the case remains, however, a matter of speculation at the current time.

Third, liberal dimensions of democracy in Ghana would be seriously damaged if the anti-gay bill becomes law. Open hostility towards Ghana's gay communities from religious entities indicates not only religion's increased political influence but also amounts to a very significant threat to a range of liberal freedoms which Ghana has cherished during the three decades of the Fourth Republic.

REFERENCES

Adjepong, Anima. 2021. 'The Battle Is the Lord's: Christian Nationalism and the Fight for Gender and Sexual Justice.' The University of North Carolina Press Blog. *https://uncpressblog.com/2021/11/02/the-battle-is-the-lords-christian-nationalism-and-the-fight-for-gender-and-sexual-justice/ Accessed 16 September 2022.*

Afrobarometer. 2023. 'Summary of results. Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey in Ghana, 2022'. *https://www.afrobarometer.org/countries/ghana/ Accessed 16 August 2023.*

Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. 2014. '"God Bless our Homeland Ghana": Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State'. In Cephas N. Omenyo and Eric B. Anum (eds.), *Trajectories of Religion in Africa. Essays in Honour of John S. Pobee*. Leiden: Brill, 165–183.

Bediako, Kwame. 2005. '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, 117–132.

Bigg, Matthew Mboke. 2017. 'Faith puts Ghana at heart of global Christianity'. *https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ghana-church-idUSKBN1670UP Accessed 23 September 2022.*

Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: participation and opposition*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

Dovlo, Elom. 2005. 'Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities in Ghanaian Lawmaking, 1989-2004', *BYU Law Review* 3: 629-660.

Freedom House. 2023. 'Freedom in the World: Ghana'. *https://freedom house.org Z/country/ghana/freedom-world/2023* Accessed November 13, 2024.

Gifford, Paul. 2004. *Ghana's New Christianity, New Edition: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Graham, Emmanuel, Ransford Gyampo, Pamphilious Faanu and Eric Yobo. 2017. 'The Third Peaceful Transfer of Power and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana'. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies,* 10 (5), 99-127.

Haynes, Jeffrey. 2023a. *Revolution and Democracy in Ghana: The Politics of Jerry John Rawlings*. London: Routledge.

Haynes, Jeffrey. 2023b. 'Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana'. Religions 14(9), 1202; *https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091202*

Haynes, Jeffrey. 2024. *Revolution and Democracy in Ghana: The Politics of Jerry Rawlings*. Tema: Digibooks.

Haynes, Naomi. 2021. 'Taking Dominion in a Christian nation: North American political theology in an African context'. *Pneuma* 43 (2), 214-232

Kwateng-Yeboah, James. 2022. African Pentecostalism in a changing economic ad democratic global order'. In Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba and Toyin Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa and the Changing Global Order*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 911-929.

Obadare, Ebenezer. 2018. *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*. London: Zed Books

Ocansey, Ahumah. 2024. 'Opinion: Mr President: LGBTQ needs attention', *The Daily Graphic*, 14 March.

Quayesi-Amakye, Joseph. 2015. 'Pentecostals and contemporary church-state relations in Ghana'. *Journal of Church and State* 57, 640–657.

V-Dem. 2024. 'Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot' *https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/* Accessed November 14, 2024.

CDD-GHANA



ABOUT SPEAKER:
EMERITUS PROF. JEFFREY HAYNES

Jeffrey Haynes is Emeritus Professor of Politics at London Metropolitan University, UK. He is the co-editor-in-chief of the international, peer-reviewed journal, Democratization and book series editor of Routledge Studies in Religion & Politics, which has published more than 50 books since 2011. Jeffrey Haynes, a regular contributor to the Daily Graphic and Daily Statesman newspapers, was the recipient of the Distinguished Scholar Award from the International Studies Association's Religion and International Relations Section in 2016. Haynes is the author or editor of more than 60 books, the most recent of which are the Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics (3rd ed., 2024) and Revolution and Democracy in Ghana: The Politics of Jerry John Rawlings, 2023.

He is Co-editor-in-chief, Democratization, Associate editor, Society and Politics (Religion), Book series editor, Routledge Studies in Religion & Politics and a columnist for the Daily Graphic (Ghana's leading daily newspaper and Daily Statesman (Ghana's oldest newspaper).

One of his recent books include; Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics (3rd ed.), Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2023. His recent peer-reviewed journal articles include 'Problems and Prospects of Developing Covenantal Pluralism in Zambia, a "Christian Nation"', The Review of Faith & International Affairs, published online 7 July 2024.

'Religion, Morality, and Democracy in Ghana', Journal of Religion in Africa (published online ahead of print 2024).

'Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana'. Religions. 2023, 14(9):1202.