

# The Same Ship That Brought the Bible, Brought the Gun: An Analysis of the Rise of Christianity in Ghanaian Society

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**Abstract:** The virulent rise of Christianity in Ghana is a phenomenon deeply rooted in colonialism. Through the entrenchment of Christianity within Africa, colonialist rhetoric masquerading as Christian values precipitates the continuity of the colonial cycle; therefore, preventing the process of decolonization from being actualized. This paper examines how a newly introduced colonial religion managed to achieve such widespread consolidation and growing reverence in a region where the ravaging effects of colonialism are ever-present and outlines the structural mechanisms behind this process.

In a continent as ethnically diverse and geographically sweeping as Africa it is of no surprise that a plethora of religions and belief systems are practiced throughout the region. However, what serves as a conundrum for many and for the purposes of this paper functions as a topic of analysis is why Christianity, a Western religion, has become the most ardently followed and psychosocially accepted religion across the African continent. This phenomenon is qualitatively mystifying for several reasons. Yet from an analytic perspec-

tive what is most puzzling is that unlike other regions of the world where modernity is positively correlated with a societal shift towards secularism, in the African context the inverse is occurring. The 15th century ingress of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa is recent in comparison to the traditional polytheistic African traditional practice that predate Christianity by centuries (Omondi 2017). Moreover, in the Mediterranean Christianity started as a cult religion that was slowly imbued into the fabric of society through a natural process of integration (scholarblogs n.d). Comparatively speaking in the case of Africa, Christianity was exogenously imposed upon the region with an oppressive, colonial hand. When the

Christian missionaries descended upon Africa, they carried with them grandiose delusions of ‘the White Man’s Burden’, thinly cloaking their underlying exploitative and extractionist goals. Therein, European missionaries weaponized the Bible to subjugate Africans and in the same breath justify their subjugation. Under the guise of bringing ‘Western respect-ability’ to the ‘immoral and backwards’ continent of Africa, colonial powers eroded the culturally rich native African societies. This cultural genocide functioned as a catheter, enabling colonists to bleed African resources and supplant Western institutions through-out the region. Through the entrenchment of Christianity within Africa, colonialist rhetoric mas-

quering as Christian values precipitates the continuity of the colonial cycle; therefore, preventing the process of decolonization from being actualized. Taken together, this begs the question of how a newly introduced colonial religion managed to achieve such widespread consolation and growing reverence in a region where the ravaging effects of colonialism are ever-present? Relatedly, why then have Africans chosen to adopt Christianity over their own rich native traditions in light of the fact that it is nonindigenous to the region and arguably, nonreflective of African society? In order to create a holistic picture of this contemporary paradox, this paper outlines several possible answers to these questions.

As of this year, a meta-analysis of world religions ranked Africa as the 'global center of Christianity', with more Christians concentrated in the region than in any other continent in the world (Kazeem 2019). By the year 2060 the world population is expected to increase by 2.2 billion and half of this growth is projected to occur within the African continent (Kazeem 2019). What this means is that in just over forty years the population of Africa is expected to double. Critically, what is also projected in these studies is that this two-fold increase will covary with the distribution of African Christian populations within the region (Kazeem 2019). What this census also revealed was that while Christianity in Africa is projected

to rise exponent-tially, the secular shift within Europe will continue, setting rates of Western Christianity on a record decline (Kazeem 2019). The juxtaposition between the growth of religiosity in the South versus the shift towards secularism in West carries deep historical, psycho-social and economic significance. An ongoing site of contestation across time and space has been centered around the degree of division between Church and State. The extent to which a society necessitates the division of these two forces can be described as the degree of secularism of that society. Historically, this dyadic relationship has been more pronounced in certain places and in others less so. However, like any other institution,

the Church has its own set of interests that it seeks to protect, impose and advance on the society in which it operates. Religiosity and faith have always been deeply embedded in African culture; however, since the advent of colonialism in the region Africa has grown to embrace Christianity and its denominations, over its own traditional African religions. The growing devaluation of African traditions and hegemony of Christianity over all other belief systems, signifies a deep fracture in the core of African society. However, it must be underscored that it is not Christianity in its essence that is to blame for this fissure. Rather, any religion or belief system that is imposed upon a Peoples' by their oppre-

ssors should warrant the same degree of skepticism and historical analysis that will be devoted to the remainder of this paper.

### **Overview of Ghana**

Considered by many to be the “locus of Christianity” within Africa, 71.2% of Ghana’s 29 million population, identify as Christian (CIA 2019). Due to the fact that Christianity was introduced through colonial intervention and has since achieved hegemonic religious status in the region, Ghana serves as an informative case study to analyze how and why this phenomenon came to be. Employing a historical lens, this paper seeks to analyze the longstanding effects of the religious colonization

on Ghanaian society. The fact that Christianity is an imported colonial religion can hardly be understated in any analysis of its effects on Ghanaian society. Despite knowledge of critical role that Christian missionaries played in the colonial process and clear evidence of their corrosive influence within the region; rhetoric surrounding the prepotency of Christianity and demonization of African culture has become so deeply implanted in Ghanaian psyche that these colonial ideas have become internalized and self-producing. Through their extensive missionary projects, British colonizers utilized their divide and rule strategy to undergo a process of religious imperialism to secure their present and future control over

Ghana. The forceful implementation of Christianity in Ghana and creation of missionary schools fulfilled these colonialist aims by; eroding cultural traditions, instilling false divisions in society and exacerbating pre-existing internal tensions. Through the emergence of an elite class consisting of Christian Ghanaians (who were both indoctrinated by these colonial lessons and viewed embracing Christianity as a way to elevate their status) acceptance of the Christian faith was preached by the missionaries and 'enlightened' Ghanaians alike. In this, embracing Christianity was then widely viewed as the only way to bring modernity, reformation and 'civilization' to Ghanaian society. With ever-increasing intensity,

this fallacious line of thinking is evident within the present-day conceptualization and practice of Christianity in Ghanaian society. In contemporary times this misguided assumption that Christianity alone will bring prosperity is reified by the tendency of Christian Ghanaian towards 'blind faith'. Further, dissonance towards 'challenging' the word of God is bolstered by the fear of the social and spiritual ramifications of being perceived as acting against the Church. This religious phenomenon is demonstrated by a reluctance to question or in any way 'misrepresent' the words of the Bible. This aspect of religiosity in Ghanaian Christianity is negatively correlated with conceptions of agency and positively correlated with

underdevelopment. Further, Christianity as taught and practiced in Ghana is laden with iconography that ascribes to dominant narratives of Western-colonial superiority and the supposed racial inferiority of Africans. As a result of religious colonialism, what characterizes the current situation in Ghana is a loss of cultural identity and developmental stagnation that hinges on this lack of Pro-African sentiment; a principle that is severely lacking in the ways in which Christianity is embodied across the region. Since the late 1950's when forward thinking Ghanaian leaders like Kwame Nkrumah championed Pan-Africanism and necessitated the need for decolonization, much has been done to

ameliorate the influence of colonization on the region. Among the first in Africa to gain their independence, Ghana was forerunner in the independence movements that swept the region in the 1960's and provided a template for the restructuring of colonial institutions and redistribution of power within society. However, notably the most ubiquitous colonial institution in Ghana remained largely unscathed by this process. In Ghana, the Church has critically bypassed the decolonial project and as a result it still retains its original-colonial form. As such, Christianity continues to pose a formidable barrier to the continuation of the decolonial trajectory. The Eurocentric principles of Christianity are largely implicated in this process

and must be both labeled and proscribed in order to imbibe the pro-African sentiment that is currently absent from Ghanaian-Christian practice. Ghana was colonized by the British who in contrast to other colonial powers, exercised a more corrosive strategy of 'indirect rule' in their colonies. While the physical presence of British colonists was not necessarily overtly seen on a daily basis in the colonies; their influence was protracted through the use of *divide and rule* tactics that effectively created a bureaucratic African elite class through which the local people were governed. This tactic was an especially effective method of expansive control; as it enabled the British to instill false rivalries and capitalize

upon pre-existing internal divisions in society (Mamdani 2001).

While colonization first began in the 19th century, the first contact that the West made with Africa occurred four centuries prior for purposes of trade and Western exploration. The Portuguese, who first arrived on Ghana's Gold Coast in 1471 were of Christian faith; however, Christianity did not take hold of the region until the British missionaries descended upon Ghana in the 18th century (Thompson 2002, 9). It was at this time that Christianity became systematically weaponized as a mechanism of colonial rule in Ghana coupled under the auspices of bringing 'civility and morality' to the 'uncouth Africans'. The

Gold Coast was the first point of entry for Western powers into Ghana. It later served as a slave-holding port for the abhorrent Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that ravaged the continent for four centuries (Thompson 2002, 9). Britain's impetus to abolish the slave trade in the 19th century was neither an act of repentance for their wrongdoings nor an act of good faith that can be linked to the 'moral Christian values' that they heavily enforced upon the region. The rationale behind the abolishment of the slave trade was located in the fact that the British were aware that in order for them to permeate the interior and gain access to Ghana's wealth of resources, it was necessary to foster a semblance of a

relationship with the Ghanaian people (Thompson 2002, 9). In other words, the British colonizers realized that in order to continue their colonization of Ghanaian land and open exploitation of its resources, they would have to somehow justify their presence and restructure their image in the Ghanaian mind. This was done through the mission-aries' role in the diffusion of Western-Christian principles and their polemical rhetoric surrounding the 'backwardness' of African traditional practices. In this, the British Missionary Project was a crucial advancement in colonist agenda, targeted at two goals: the "negation of Africanity" and consolidation of colonial institutions in Ghana (Thompson 2002,

1). Despite its relatively short introduction to the region, Ghana is ranked as one of the most devout Christian countries in the world and the influence of Christianity is seen in every aspect of Ghanaian society and daily life (Omondi 2017).

### **Literature Review**

As previously stated in the above sections, this paper seeks to achieve two interconnected aims through historical analysis of the rise of Christianity within Ghana. The first aim is to broadly identify how Christianity came to achieve and continues to maintain religious preponderance within Ghana. Secondly, this paper seeks to understand why the majority of Ghanaian society has

chosen to embrace the imported religious belief system over their own religious traditions?

### *Christianity as a Unifier*

Of those who view the rise of Christianity as a positive force within Ghana, many also interpret the missionary project as the sometimes unsavory but largely necessary process in order to disseminate the word of God across the African continent and unite Africans under the common umbrella of the Christian church (Nunn 2010). This line of argument follows the commentaries surrounding *'The White Man's Burden'*. These narratives underscore the 'duty' of white Christian missionaries to 'reform the African people' by

bringing civilization and modernity to their 'backwards societies' (Nunn 2010). In line with this view, one scholar argues that "missionaries were also in a crucial bridging position. Indigenous people had little power in the colonizing state and...this group commissioned a worldwide investigation of "what measures ought to be adopted with respect to the Native Inhabitants of Countries where British Settlements are made...in order to secure them the due observation of justice and the protection of their rights, ... and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion" (Nunn 2010). According to this account, the introduction of British missionaries was seen as having multiple benefits for African society. This

perspective argues that these prosocial advancements are that; 1) the missionaries brought education to Africans, 2) those educated by missionaries in turn developed favorable attitudes towards Western formal education 3) missionaries created the written form of oral languages, and imported the first printing technology that began mass printing of Bibles (Nunn 2010).

*A Noble Mission:  
Instilling Morality and  
Civility in Society*

Another group in support of the merits of the Western missions in Ghana was comprised by former slaves turned Christian preachers. In line with the previous argument, Afri-

can missionaries taken abroad and ordained, came to believe that Christianity was ‘God’s gift’ to Ghanaians. This group saw Christianity as a tool that spearheaded development and brought economic prosperity to devout Christians who strictly adhered to the Bible (Thompson 2002, 12). However, ironically, while Christianity has continued to grow in Africa; its stronghold is waning in the very source of its inception. This has brought forth the rise in the phenomenon coined “reverse missionary projects”, where-by Africans travel to Western countries in an attempt to re-vitalize Christianity in these regions (Kuo 2017). Girma Bishaw, an Ethiopian British pastor and self-proclaimed ‘reverse missionary’ argues for the necessity

of this role given that “Britain brought the gospel to us in the past. Now, by God’s providence we are here when Christianity is very much challenged and the UK churches are really declining...It’s not just coincidence we’re here...for me, it became a passion to mobilize the diaspora to mission and consider Britain as our own country,” (Kuo 2017). While the prevalence of Ghanaian Christian preachers has increased over time, the phenomenon of indigenous Ghanaians staunchly preaching bible teachings, dates back to the Slave Trade. Fante born Kweku (later known as priest Philip Quaake) born in Ghana in 1717 was the embodiment of this concept. Taken to England and trained as a priest, Kweku was given

a new name (Philip Quaque) and became the first African to be ordained by the Church of England. (Thompson 2002, 12) When he returned to Ghana, he founded a school that by many accounts espoused an even more staunch doctrine of evangelization than the white missionaries had imposed themselves! (Thompson 2002, 12) Notably, Kweku/Quaque held and widely diffused to his young followers, the viewpoint that “the slave trade had been beneficial to the African, teaching them trade and bringing wealth that they had not known before” (Thompson 2002, 12).

*Christianity: A Blessing or a Curse?*

In a much different vein,

others have taken up a much more disparaging view towards the influence of Christianity within Africa. To differing degrees, several Ghanaian scholars are amongst the opinion that Christianity was used as a weapon of destruction and subjugation to fulfill both short term colonialist goals and their long-term objectives of instilling shallow Western values that implicitly fostered reverence towards former colonial oppressors. As a counter to the argument that Christianity brought unity and civility to Africa; it can be argued that especially in the case of Ghana, colonial missionaries eroded the cultural foundation of Ghanaian society and supplanted Western ideals meant to disempower the African people and to

perpetuate their structural subjugation.

This viewpoint is encompassed in the term '*rule by the bible*', which holds that Christianity was weaponized as a colonial tool. One that was used to infiltrate and indoctrinate the Ghanaian mind and soul for generations to come through the supplantation of Western principles over traditional African values. This internal dissonance created a legacy of rejection and demonization of all that is considered traditionally African. As aforementioned, British colonists knew they needed to appease African people in order to get them to accept colonial presence on the ground and they achieved this through their missionary projects. Under the guise of

bringing "morality" to "immoral and backwards African society" missionaries distilled a sense of superiority of whites and the West by exposing Ghanaians to capitalist and materialist ideals. (Thompson 2002, 23) As aforementioned, it was important for the colonial powers to be able to maintain power and control over the population and resources in places where they were a minority. By transferring power to the colonial evangelists, the British were able to create an elite class within Ghana that furthered the rhetoric of a 'civilized' us vs. an 'inferior' them. By strategically employing a 'divide and conquer strategy', the British were successful in creating false divisions amongst Ghanaians. As part of this strategy, the

British, instilled and exacerbated internal tension with the hope that this would detract attention from their real objective to conquer and control. Whilst Africans were busy assigning blame amongst themselves, for the problems in the region, the British colonizers could gain further allies by aligning themselves with one side or the other. In the present day, Christianity vitiates each and every aspect of Ghanaian life. Across time, there has been a salient shift away from traditional African belief systems that attributed blame and retribution across the community; towards Christian ones which reoriented the arrow of retribution for wrongdoings at the individual level. In this way, Ghanaian society suffer-

ed a formidable blow to its traditional communal societal organizational structures by the missionaries as the communal sense of responsibility for societal functioning was replaced by individualistic attribution of blame and responsibility. In Ghana, the paucity of secularism has resulted in the omnipotence of Christianity. This has fostered an environment of tongue in cheek apprehension of going against the Christian tide; as anyone who dares speak out the Church it is at risk of suffering great psychosocial, political and economic costs. Thus, the Church dictates public policy; wielding more behind-the-scenes power than any other group in society. As such, Ghanaians are compelled to give generously, and

act prudently out of fear of retribution spiritually or to avoid being labeled as castigating the Christian religion (Mamdani 2001).

### *Christianity: The Arm of Colonialism*

In order to keep the roots of colonialism alive, colonialists knew that they would have to instate a regulatory body that included some Africans in order to maintain access to Africa's resources. The rationale underpinning this decision was that the British knew that it would be much more difficult to placate the rest of the population and protract their influence, if the face of colonialism was directly linked to the former colonial country. In the case of Ghana,

British colonists were able to maintain control over Ghana with the help of a group of "African elite" that were given special privileges in exchange for helping the British maintain their administrative rule over the region. Native religions which were polytheistic were denigrated and considered uncivilized. This conscious production of an intermediary elite group more ideologically aligned with the colonial ruling power than with their fellow Ghanaians, left a lasting, structural impact on the country. (Mamdani 2001).

At the same time, the British missionaries set up schools to indoctrinate the youth and imbibe them with Eurocentric values. Through formal education administered

directly by the missionaries, youth were taught to associate Africanity with incivility, and following a colonist curriculum that ascribed to the *white = right* narrative. Many of these colonial institutions and missionary schools are still standing and in use today. Ghanaian youth continue to be taught to revere white Jesus above all else and to reject any other gods; further distancing them from Ghanaian spirituality and its communal values. Then and now, in most Ghanaian schools, English is the lingua franca and children are taught to reject their African heritage and forced to assimilate by changing their names and adjusting their values to fit to the Western-imposed model. By my father's own recount, he was given the

Christian name of Francis on his first day of attending school in his local village school in Oyoko, Ghana. Thereafter, he was called Francis instead of Kwabena. Like my father, many are forced to adopt Christian names and are punished for speaking their indigenous languages, dressing in traditional ways or practicing African religions. As University of South African professors Obaji M Agbiji and Ignatius Stewart noted, "the existence of endemic poverty and corruption in Africa is sustained in part by religious complacency on the part of religious practitioners and by the instrumentalization of religion by African leaders ...which sustains and enhances the structural entrenchment of poverty and corruption

in African societies” (Agbiji and Stewart, 2015). In the later stages of colonization, it was largely not the white British who were doing preaching of the merit’s Western values over African customs. Rather, the successful usurpation of Christianity on African Traditional Religion and African Christian religiosity was in part realized through “the evangelization of Africans by returnee African Christian slaves and Christian missionaries from the West” and came hand in hand with formal education and the creation of missionary schools (Thompson 2002, 11). Further, the missionaries further encouraged this cultural genocide when they refused to teach or print books in traditional Ghanaian languages fur-

thering the notion that “all things African were inferior and evil” (Thompson 2002, 14). When Ghana gained its independence in 1957, the Nkrumah administration assumed control over the schooling system, subsidizing it and making it compulsory but critically, did not change the administrative structure of these institutions. In Ghana "moral education" starts from kindergarten and children from a young age are taught to ardently follow yet *never question* the word of god. When scholar, Ty Thompson was conducting her field work in Ghana, she asked several grade school and secondary school children “what values, or lack thereof, they found in religious and moral training.” the children’s answers reflected a very

troubling pattern. Thompson describes each student as giving more or less the same response to this probe “Christ and morals help. Why? Because you cannot be moral without Christ. Why? *Because the church says so.*” (Thompson 2002, 14). As Thompson illuminates, due to the fact that students are taught in a Eurocentric way and exposed to images that do not reflect their lived conditions “[students’] own cultural development comes to a standstill (Thompson 2002, 20). As she notes, “the values, skills, habits, and attitudes transmitted by the modern school in Africa differ in respects from those of traditional societies and in effect reproduce the subculture of the dominant societal interest group” (Thomp-

son 2002, 20). This acts to instill a sense of dissonance in what pupils are being taught and what the current reality of their society is; such that the West is put on a pedestal whilst Ghanaian society is viewed as second class. This blind faith in the Bible is at the core of what is deeply wrong with the way that Christianity is being taught and imbibed within Ghana. Despite the rise of several different denominations of Christianity that have swept the region; the rigidity of the way in which Christianity is being practiced in Ghana has meant that religious teachings have largely remained steeped with colonialist ideology. Whilst, Christianity was brought to Africa, by the colonizing powers, their religious imperialism is

maintained now, by indigenous Africans.

### *Towards Blind Faith*

It is no coincidence that the most devout regions in the world are also the most deeply unequal as studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between religious devotion and economic growth. Due to the lack of separation between Church and State, the Church effectively exercises a stranglehold over all systems. In these places, citizens are compelled to devote extensive efforts to support the Church, diverting time, energy and resources from other areas of development. It is a well-documented phenomenon “people are more likely to attend church in the world’s

most unequal countries than they are in the most equal ones” (Kazeem 2019). This begs the question “if African societies are very religious but at the same time very poor and corrupt, to what extent does religion contribute to poverty and corruption on the continent? If religion is crucial to Africans, how could its resources and actors be mobilized to liberate African societies from poverty and corruption?” (Agbiji and Stewart, 2015). Although Ghana has achieved relatively higher levels of economic development than other countries in the region it can be reasonably postulated that the lack of secularism in Ghanaian society may be preventing the nation from reaching its full potential. As a frustrated

citizen anonymously on a widely used web forum, “Ghana is the only country in the world where church services are conducted Monday-Monday, 24 hours. People don’t go to farm anymore. They would rather go to church with the hope that God will provide food” (Kazeem 2016). There are many detrimental effects related to Ghanaians’ unwillingness to critique or challenge the omnipotent role of the church. One of these being that this has left Ghanaians vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by preachers. The Ghanaian population at large does not seem to view the church as a business with its own vested interests, as the Church has managed to convince people that even being alive is by the

grace of god and has equated withholding payments to the Church to "stealing from god". Unsurprisingly, in Ghanaian society preachers are among the richest in society and as it stands have been afforded unfettered access to their ‘consumers’. Relatedly, many ‘entrepreneurs’ have capitalized on the blind religious fervency that has swept Ghana, preying on worshippers through elaborate religious-based fraud schemes. Pentecostal Christianity is a Christian denomination that boasts an especially ardent Ghanaian following and in recent years religious based fraud targeting parishioners, has swept the country (myjoyonline 2014). Some concerned members of the church have even taken efforts to advocate to the govern-

ment to instate the formation of “quasi-formal regulatory bodies” to crack down on religious fraud and put an end to the rampant ‘charlatan malpractice’ preying on Ghanaian minds and resources (myjoyonline 2014). However, within the church the impetus for this crackdown ignores the core issues at play. The crux of the issue in the eyes of these advocates lies in the fact that due to this “proliferation of independent pastors and churches [that are exploiting the society] ...Ghanaians are becoming disillusioned with Christianity and religion” (myjoyonline 2014). In other words, many Ghanaian religious leaders view this corruption unacceptable not because members of their com-

munity are being exploited due to the manipulation of their unshakeable faith. Nor do they seem to find issue in that what is undergirding this manipulation is a perceived inability to challenge anyone that presents themselves as a religious leader. Rather, what has them up in arms is that *their clientele is being usurped* by these religious ‘independent entrepreneurs’ (myjoyonline 2014).

### *Christianity: A Testament to Learned Helplessness*

Relatedly, this over-reliance on the ‘god to solve all problems’ has fostered a limiting perception of personal agency which has had a detrimental effect on Ghanaian society. This idea that one can ‘close

their eyes and pray all their problems away' is taken literally among many Ghanaian Christians. For example, certain Christian denominations have taken to radical interpretations of the Bible to advocate against the use of life saving protections such as the use of contraception or "blood transfusions" because this is seen as against 'acting against God's natural will' (Lindley 2010). This is a double-edged sword because whilst negative things are attributed as 'punishment by god', positive advancements in society are associated with 'gods rewards to his disciples for their devotion'. As Agbiji and Stewart remark "in the face of socio-political and economic challenges on the continent, instead of

Africans rising to the challenge, they resort to prayer" (Agbiji and Stewart, 2015). This argument especially rings true in the context of Ghanaian society. For example studies have shown that many believe that there is a direct link between personal health and religious beliefs such that "illness [is seen as] "a punishment from God", or that HIV/AIDS [occurs because] one had not "followed the Word of God" (Lindley 2010). It is also another widely documented phenomenon whereby the presence of natural disasters increases levels of religiosity due to the fact that many use religious coping in the face of "unbearable and unpredictable life events" (Bentzen 2019). Many devout believers are of the view that it is not climate change

causing changes in weather patterns, rather take this as a sign that God is angry and that unstoppable calamities coming, which in turn, this serves as a catalyst to intensify their religiosity (Bentzen 2019). Although this phenomenon is not unique to Africa, this effect is magnified in the region due to higher baseline religiosity as compared to other regions and is further mediated by the fact the global South is disproportionately affected by climate change. Critically, a by-product of this effect is a weakened sense of personal agency and blunted locus of control. This is related to the fact that control over ones' outcome is conceptualized as being entirely in the hands of God or some outside force. In Africa speci-

ally, this has led Christian believers to effectively put all of their eggs in 'Heaven's everlasting basket'. This colonial Christian idea was strategically enforced upon Africans to propagate the notion that 'one's reward is in heaven' and so there was effectively no need to fight back on earth. This rhetoric continues into present day, as the Church continues to imbue Christians with the idea that 'suffering is only temporary, and one will be rewarded for their servitude on earth in heaven' (Corinthians 4:17). In other words, what has become internalized is the 'divinity of meekness' which acts as a cognitive barrier to religious individuals and dis-sways them from demanding better of their circum-

stances. Thus, in line with the colonial teachings of the bible that present a demure and white-washed mage of Jesus, “good Christians” are seen as those who are compliant, pious, and above all do not question the Church or the ‘word of God’. Upon reading what I had initially thought was a seemingly unrelated article about North America’s overconfidence in the (flawed) yet dominant paradigm that unfettered and deregulated technological advancements will lead to equality; I had a revelation. The passage that jumped out to me read: “technology not only serves to “pacify the poor (the “losers”)” in the interim with the promise of better, less complicated tomorrows; it further empowers those in power (the “winners”)

today” (Lloyd 2006, 205). If one replaces the word “technology” with ‘Christianity’ in the above passage, in the context of African religiosity and particularly, in the case of Ghana, this dominant utopian view rings loud and clear. The way in which Christianity is championed in the global South can be likened to the misguided faith held in North America, that technological advancement will solve all of our problems. In both cases, the complacency embodied in such attitudes towards change and tendencies towards inaction, serve as bulwarks to structural development in these two respective arenas. The perceived need for stringent adherence to the scripture in order to satisfy the impossibly hefty demand

of being a 'good Christian' on earth in order to reap ones' bounty in heaven, has been designed to keep the oppressed placated; whilst simultaneously casting their oppressors in a forgiving, if not sympathetic light. As scholars Agbiji and Stewart note: "religion is instrument-al" to sustain and enhance the systemic inequality in African societies (Agbiji and Stewart 2015).

### *Idealization of Western Colonial Ideology and its Effects on Ghanaian Self-Image*

Arguably, one of the most pernicious of long-term effects of colonialism has been the impact that colonial teachings of Christianity have had on the Ghanaian self-image

and sense of self.

When one thinks of Christians, this image is rarely associated with Black Africans. Why then is it that in Africa, the contemporary hub of Christianity and a continent dominated by Black Africans, does the face of Christianity, of Jesus Christ himself, continue to be portrayed as White?

Although Christianity was imposed upon Africa by white European missionaries under the guise of uniting, 'all races and creeds' under the umbrella of God, this was never the objective and rather the long-standing divisions between "black Christians" and "white Christians" has only deepened through time. I would argue that if asked what the

most practiced religion within Africa is -most Christians in the West would be slow to label the region as a majority Christian one. Why is this the case? As outlined above, there is much evidence to demonstrate that Christianity was weaponized against African population in several ways to keep them in a position of subordination. As Thompson notes: “when the missionaries told the Ghanaian that they had been formally uncivilized he believed him because he had been trained not to see himself as he was, but to see what the white man saw in him—simplicity and barbarity” (Thompson 2002, 14). Since the advent of colonialism, Ghanaians have been fed the lie that white Jesus holds the keys to modernization

and enlightenment. Further, Christianity was viewed as ‘liberation and salvation’ from their immoral and ‘backwards’ past. This cultivated idealization of the West and preoccupation with the colonial teachings of Christianity is extremely detrimental to the Ghanaian psyche. Through compulsory formal education programs that were shaped by the British missionaries, Ghanaians are indoctrinated with the ‘merits’ of Christianity. A religion that serves to elevate whiteness on one hand and on the other demonize all that is black. Due to the omnipotence of Christianity, these principles have been passed down to younger generations in church, school and society at large. Youth are inundated with

images of a White Jesus; whereas images depicting a Black Jesus are very rarely shown. Thus, black Ghanaian children grow up in a society that teaches them to revere and never question their White savior. Naturally this has done much to further ideas of racial superiority of colonizing powers and simultaneously the supposed racial inferiority of the black population. As Thompson details, in Ghana teaching materials are laden with this harmful iconography. For example, in Ghanaian textbooks, the descent of the three wise men is taught to school children through images that portray the message that “God (a white light from the top corner of the picture) loves them so much he has sent three white men to impart upon

them the proper knowledge on how to live their lives” (Thompson 2002, 14).

Christianity has been and continues to be, conflated with modernity and forward movement; although, in actuality it is what has arguably anchored Ghana’s development. Thus, what Ghanaian Christians have been led to believe will bring them salvation is the very thing that is maintaining their social disempowerment. In the Western world this understanding has long been realized in regard to the development of their own societies. As Agbiji and Stewart note; “secular modernism has succeeded in distancing religion from the socio-economic and political spheres in the developed world (Clarke &

Jennings 2008:1). However, despite the influence of secular modernism in Africa, such separation has not left a lasting imprint on African societies, where religion continues to play an important role in socio-economic and political life.” (Agbiji and Stewart, 2015).

In trying to embody Eurocentric values as an effort to assimilate into a Western colonial world-system that was structured to keep Africans relegated to the periphery Ghana has become embroiled in a self-maintaining model of subjugation. The decolonial project, development of Ghana and the needs of Ghanaian youth are all deferred by Ghana’s preoccupation with Christianity because as black feminist activist

Audre Lorde famously stated, “the masters tools will never dismantle the masters house” (Lorde 1997).

## **Conclusions**

As human rights activist and anti-apartheid leader Desmond Tutu famously decreed, “when the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land” (Unknown).

While the virulence of Ghanaian Christianity can be conceptualized through several different lenses, each intersects with Ghana’s colonial history in important ways. Having analyzed

the aforementioned arguments, to answer these interrelated questions of how and why Christianity achieved such great prominence in Africa, this paper concludes that the religious colonialism of Ghana and structural reformation of Ghanaian institutions by the British missionaries promoted the lack of secularism in society, that to date has enabled the Church to escape the ongoing decolonial project in Ghana. Thus, it can be argued that latter view towards the pervasive influence of Christianity holds a more compelling thesis than the colonial rhetoric, that Christianity 'saved' or brought civility and morality to the 'backwards' Ghanaian people. Arguably, what should be highlighted are the ways in which religious colo-

onialism violently infiltrated Ghanaian society and how the British missionaries utilized Christianity as a tool to instigate a cultural genocide. As a result of the pervasive indoctrination by Christian missionaries and their extensive divide and rule tactics, Ghanaians were separated from their communal traditions and instead developed a sense of blind faith in Jesus. As such, British colonists were able to institute self-serving hierarchies of power within Ghanaian society. This enabled them to achieve their goals of implementing an extractionist system through which even in the postcolonial period, afforded them protracted access to the resource-laden veins of Ghana. The Global phenomenon of religio-

sity as a coping mechanism has been linked in several critical ways to societal stagnation and underdevelopment globally. In the context of Ghana, due to the omnipotence Christianity as characterized by the lack of secularism in Ghanaian society, this effect is magnified, and Ghanaian Christians are especially exposed to abuse and exploitation by the Church. Additionally, this overreliance on God to solve all of life's problems and conviction in the principle of 'meekness' has normalized the idea that the payoffs of devotion on earth will *only* be experienced in heaven. Which in turn, has bred a culture of acceptance in the face of oppression and loss of personal agency in Ghanaian

society. Lastly, this paper argues is the most pernicious impact that religious colonialism has exerted is its effect on the Ghanaian psyche. As practiced in Ghana, Christianity teaches its followers to idealize Eurocentric values. Through the maintenance of Western-colonial ideology, Ghanaian Christians are taught to demonize all things African and revere all things Western. This is demonstrated by the lack of Black Christian iconography and preponderance of the white-washed image of Jesus disseminated in Ghanaian society. Arguably, this has led to a sense of societal dissonance, because although Christian Ghanaians are among the most devout followers of this religion, they are annexed in an impossible position. As a majority

black population, Ghanaian Christians are unable to fully assimilate or find representation in this colonial religion imposed upon them *because* to be Black and African is inherently antithetical to the values that Christianity preaches. In the long term this internalized colonial mentality has delivered the deepest, and most lethal cuts to African society as it enabled the cycle of colonialism to keep perpetuating. Thus, the growing fervency of the Christian wave that has swept the nation, has arguably hindered Ghana from reaching its full potential. However, as mentioned, Ghana is home to a young and resourceful population. There is hope that as the youth in Ghanaian

society become more introspective and begin to question the status quo, this may catalyze a more extensive process of decolonization. This is arguably the most crucial step to restore a strong, pro-African self-view. In order to move forward we must grow to see the value and beauty of our own land and of ourselves and begin to reject the insidious falsehoods preached by a Christian legacy targeted at protracting the colonial project in Ghana. Thus, in order to see sustained transformation and reclamation in the process of decolonization, we must now focus on the decolonization of the Ghanaian mind through the decolonization of Christianity.

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