

## UNETHICAL MINISTERIAL PRACTICES AMONG SOME GHANAIA PASTORS

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***Abstract:** In recent times, ministerial misconduct of Ghanaian pastors has become rampant in print, electronic and social media. How do we explain these acts of indecency perpetrated under the guise of freedom of religion by some ministers that identify with Christianity? What accounts for these behaviours? And what could be done to prevent such strange practices from escalating to disaster proportions? To answer these questions, data was collected from published literature and media reports. The study argues that the consistent unethical practices, activities, and utterances of some Ghanaian pastors negatively affect Christian ministry in Ghana. Focusing on some of the unethical ministerial practices and initiatives undertaken by these pastors, this article investigates the reasons responsible for their occurrences and proffers remedial suggestions. The study draws attention to uncaring shepherds, the seared conscience of some pastors, easily manipulated congregations, sleeping shepherds and the high demand for deliverance services by congregants as possible reasons that bring about these unethical ministerial practices. Finally, the article contends that to achieve a desired transformative Christian ministry in Ghana, the Church must pay attention to the religious practices of some pastors and if possible, find a way to regulate them.*

**Key Words:** Ghana, Ministry, Ministerial practice, Pastor, Unethical.

### Introduction

Christian ministry in contemporary Ghana seems to shift from Christ-centred ministry to human-centred traditions where everything revolves and involves hyper-spirituality, hyper-carnality and hyper-physicality and hyper-intellectuality.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of Christ for His church has been abandoned, and the church is exploited, corrupted, and enslaved by some people purported to be ministers of Christ and

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<sup>1</sup> Hyper-Spirituality is where everything is seen from the perspective of mystical, mysterious and myth. Hyper-Carnality is where everything is centered on individuality, selfishness and egoism. Hyper-Physicality is where everything is seen from fleshly and somatic perspective. Hyper-Intellectuality is where everything is from rational, reasonable and logical perspectives.

proclaimers of the gospel of peace (cf. Eph. 6:15). There is, therefore, a great gap existing between the ministry of the apostles and the Christian ministry today.

Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter in their book entitled *Ministerial Ethics: Being a Good Minister in a Not-So-Good World* observe that there is a “growing recognition of ethical dilemmas faced by ministers, concern for professional ethics in ministry has increased in all denominations.”<sup>2</sup> They further state that “in 2002, clergy sexual misconduct by Roman Catholic priests, coupled with an apparent cover-up by church officials, shocked a nation and captured the news. Lawsuits threatened to bankrupt several dioceses.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, a Baptist manual claims that the stories of fallen clergy are not hard to find. The report indicates that many of “these accounts focus on sexual misconduct, but other kinds of misconduct are well represented, including the misappropriation of funds and the misuse of power.”<sup>4</sup> It is said that these stories come to their attention through the media and other channels so regularly.<sup>5</sup> Clergy misconduct, they claim, is a crisis which demands immediate attention.<sup>6</sup> Dare Ojo Omonijo and others also investigate the proliferation of Churches and moral decadence in Nigeria with a special focus on Pentecostal Ministries. They observe several manifestations of immoral behaviour in Pentecostal Ministries despite their rapid expansion.<sup>7</sup>

While these scholars provide some insight into the unusual ministerial practices, moral decadence, and ethical misconduct within some Neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa, it is important to stress that ministerial impropriety is widespread even among some Historic Mission Churches in Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> “Christian Life Commission,” *Christian Life Commission | Texas Baptists*, 4. [Accessed October 5, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> “Christian Life,” 4.

<sup>6</sup> “Christian Life,” 4.

<sup>7</sup> Dare O. Omonijo et al., “The Proliferation of Churches and Moral Decadence in Nigeria: The Socio-economic and Religious Implications,” *Scholars Bulletin* 2, no. 11 (November 2016): 637-638.

The scale and rate at which some very influential Charismatic, Neo-Pentecostal and even Historic Mission Churches' leaders in Ghana engage in unethical Christian practices is alarming and demands critical academic evaluation and exposition. This study, therefore, investigates the unethical ministerial practices of some Ghanaian Pastors to identify the root causes of this menace and suggest some remedies.

## Understanding Christian Ministerial Ethics

Every institution has a code of ethics, standards of practices, rules, regulations, and manners that guide the conduct of people within that organization. According to Norman L. Geisler, "ethics deals with what is right and wrong morally."<sup>8</sup> Ethics largely involves standards of behaviour that influence how one should conduct oneself in a given situation.<sup>9</sup> From this general view or context of ethics, Christian ethics deals specifically with what is considered morally right and wrong for a Christian.<sup>10</sup> Christian ethics has a distinctive characteristic from other ethical philosophies. From the Christian perspective, ethics is absolute, prescriptive, and deontological which also finds expression in God's will and revelation.<sup>11</sup>

It appears some pastors are unable to distinguish between personal ethical values and social ethical values in ministry. Personal ethics is concerned with the individual's (pastor) obligation or duties.<sup>12</sup> In the West, for instance, this is largely influenced by the individual's expectations, desires, satisfactions, decisions and accomplishments as against the whole community. On the other hand, social ethics focuses on the community's morality and social values as well as the interpersonal relationships at the expense of the personal desires, decisions and achievements of an individual.<sup>13</sup> It can be argued that in Africa and for that matter Ghana, for example, social-ethical values are well encouraged than personal ethical values. Unfortunately to a larger extent, some pastors in Ghana in the discharge of their ministerial duties become self-centred or egoistic and are driven by personal gains or

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<sup>8</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options* (Grand Rapids: Baker publishing groups, 2010), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 15-18.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: Zondervan, 2008), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 15.

achievements in ministry to neglect the social and ethical expectations of the Ghanaian Christian community at large.

Conversely, the issue of ministerial ethics entails a wide range of relationships and deals with a variety of challenges or problems which confront the pastor or minister in the course of his ministerial duties.<sup>14</sup> Ethics, when applied to ministry, profession or a calling or a group of persons or individuals who are in the same discipline or profession is usually understood to mean the code of morals or standard of correct conduct which obtains in the profession or the calling or the group.<sup>15</sup> For Dannyboy, “ministerial ethics is the unique moral role of ministers and the ethical responsibilities clergy should assume in their personal and professional lives. It deals with family life, confidentiality, truth-telling, political involvement, working with committees, and relating to other church staff members.”<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Tandy argues that, in many disciplines or professions like law, medicine, teaching and others, there is significant progress in the development and enforcement of definite and formal codes of ethics against unethical procedure and behaviour.<sup>17</sup> He observes that while the Christian ministry is supposed to represent the highest ideals, there appears to be no general formal moral code of ethics among pastors.<sup>18</sup> The reason perhaps for this unfortunate situation may be a result of the uncontrollable manner in which churches and self-acclaimed pastors are springing up in the Christian religious landscape in Ghana. This phenomenon is also tied to the difficulty in enforcing and controlling unethical ministerial behaviour within some Ghanaian churches.

### **Occurrence of Unethical Practices among Ghanaian Pastors**

Many Ghanaians have had cause to question certain actions exhibited by some Ghanaian pastors which appear to be against the very ethics for which they have been called to practice as servants of God. Dela observes that “despite the concern for high moral standards set by Pentecostal church polity and ministerial ethical codes, reports of

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<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Tandy, “Ministerial Ethics,” *Review & Expositor* 22, no. 3 (July 1925): 287–93.

<sup>15</sup> Tandy, “Ministerial Ethics,” 287.

<sup>16</sup> Joe E. Trull and J. E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academia), 23; Tandy, “Ministerial Ethics,” 6.

Pentecostal ministerial misconduct appear regularly in the media”<sup>19</sup>. Often than not, social media is washed with all manner of viral videos including that of pastors or prophets who have fallen short of holding themselves up high in terms of keeping to the ethical codes they have signed themselves to. This appears to be a major concern for many Ghanaian Christians because, for every Pastor and properly so-called, the credibility and integrity of his person and ministry are as important as the message he preaches. For Tim, true Pastors are known by their Godly character, not skills and accomplishments.<sup>20</sup>

Dela again stresses the significant impact of Pentecostal ministries on Ghanaian Christianity and national development. He acknowledges the regular media reports on Pentecostal ministerial misconduct on instances of “promiscuity, power abuse, financial misappropriation, and superstition” as common unethical practices among some Pentecostal ministers in Ghana.<sup>21</sup> He reveals that these unethical ministerial practices include inadequate training, poor accountability, and a generally low level of ethical reflection.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, from the local media reports in Ghana, Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie and others have drawn attention to the recent trends of clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse in Ghana. They see sexual abuse and the diverse misconduct by the clergy as a global challenge and not as a current development. Their investigation showed that females between the ages of 10-19 were victims of such sexual abuse. The perpetrators they claim were all males (clergymen) who were found guilty of offences such as “lone rape, incest, defilement, indecent assault, sodomy, attempted rape, or gang rape.”<sup>23</sup> The reports of this phenomenon appear to be on the increase in the Ghanaian media landscape today. The following platforms further demonstrate moments

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<sup>19</sup> Dela Quampah, *Good Pastors, Bad Pastors: Pentecostal Ministerial Ethics in Ghana* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Tim Challies, “Why We Must Emphasize a Pastor’s Character Over His Skill,” August 30, 2017; <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/310671-must-emphasize-pastors-character-skill-tim-challies.html> [Accessed on January 10, 2022].

<sup>21</sup> Quampah, “Good Pastors, Bad Pastors: Pentecostal Ministerial Ethics in Ghana”, <https://www.christianbook.com/dela-quampah>, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Quampah, “Good Pastors.”

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Nii-Boye Quarshie et al, “Clergy-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse in Ghana: A Media Content Analysis of Survivors, Offenders, and Offence Characteristics,” *Journal of Religion and Health* (September 2021); <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01430-3>

where and how some Ghanaian pastors manifest unethical ministerial behaviour.

### **Deliverance and Counselling services**

In 2014, during deliverance service, Bishop Daniel Obinim stepped on a pregnant woman offending the sensibilities of Ghanaian citizens.<sup>24</sup> The bishop, during another church service, in the full glare of congregants, lay down (in the supine position) on top of a woman (also in the supine position).<sup>25</sup> This obnoxious and obscene imagery was ostensible to perform an exorcism. On live free-to-air television and his network, OBTv, he grabbed a man's genitals<sup>26</sup> in an attempt to heal the victim of impotence.

The Head Pastor of the Mega Word Chapel International at Enchi in the Western Region, Kenneth Mensah was also reported to have told a female nurse during counselling to present an amount of Ghs 40,000 for spiritual cleansing.<sup>27</sup> After the lady paid the money, she received a concoction of herbs to drink for her desires to be granted. When she drank the medicine, she fell and woke up later to find her room on fire. But for the intervention of neighbours who heard her screaming, she would have been burnt to ashes.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from medicines for drinking and bathing, some pastors request their clients to drink anointing oil. Roland Owusu Ansah has observed that many Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Ghana ask their followers to drink olive oil mixed with garlic to cure their internal malady.<sup>29</sup> According to Ansah, the sale of oils at exorbitant prices is a fundraising strategy by these pastors since there is no biblical basis to justify it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mohammed Awal, "Arrest Obinim immediately: Amnesty International demands," August 18, 2016; <https://www.modernghana.com/amp/news/712908/arrest-obinim-immediately-amnesty-intl-demands.html> [Accessed August 24, 2016].

<sup>25</sup> Awal, "Arrest Obinim."

<sup>26</sup> BBC, "The men who claim to be Africa's 'miracle workers,'" 27 November 2016; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-38063882> [Accessed March 18, 2019].

<sup>27</sup> Delali Adaglo-Bessa, "Police Pursue Pastor for Duping Woman of GHS40K, and Attempting to Set her Ablaze," January 17, 2022; <https://citinewsroom.com/2022/01/police-pursue-pastor-for-duping-woman-of-ghs40k-and-attempting-to-set-her-ablaze/> [Accessed on February 20, 2022].

<sup>28</sup> Adaglo-Bessa, "Police Pursue Pastor."

<sup>29</sup> Roland Owusu Ansah, "The Usage of Anointing Oil in some Charismatic and Neo-Prophetic Churches in Kumasi in the Context of Leviticus 8:1-12 and James 5:14-15" (Mphil Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2011), 147.

<sup>30</sup> Ansah, "The Usage of Anointing Oil," 146-147.

Such unusual practices often happen within the deliverance and counselling sections organized by these pastors for people to seek God's intervention.

Some Ghanaian pastors charge consultation or counselling fees as it is done in profit-making organizations or entities. The consultation fees depend on the urgency of the situation. Others also invoke and consult the dead as traditional fetish priests do.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, several Ghanaian pastors have come under scrutiny, bashing and criticism concerning behaviour. The frequent appearance of these misconducts brings the pastoral ministry into disrepute.

### **Phone in calls/Facebook/TV**

Another area of unethical pastoral misconduct is insults amongst some Ghanaian Pastors on Facebook, TV, and other social media outlets. Rev. Owusu Bempah, a famous prophet who is noted for giving prophecies on high profiled individuals and every general election was engaged with another famous prophet Kofi Oduro in the exchange of insults.<sup>32</sup> In another news report, Rev. Bempah together with some of his Pastors attacked a supposedly converted popular fetish priest Patricia Asiedua, popularly known as Nana Agradaa, in a viral video, threatening to beat her up. This pastor and some of his colleague pastors were later arrested and charged by the police.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the Ghanaian Chronicle Newspaper reported how Rev. Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom, popularly known as "Prophet One", insulted his fellow preacher Evangelist Akwasi Awuah for allegedly tagging him as an occultist.<sup>34</sup>

According to Francis Benyah, the proliferation of mass media and the use of the radio for religious broadcasting in Ghana has given the time

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<sup>31</sup> Shirley Quaicoo, "Magic Words: Ghanaian Churches Confront Fake Pastors," May 12, 2021; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/may/magicwords.html> [Accessed January 5, 2022].

<sup>32</sup> Selorm Tali, "Rev. Owusu Bempah and Armed Thugs Stormed Nana Agradaa's Home Over Social Media Beef," September 12, 2021; <https://www.pulse.com.gh/entertainment/celebrities/owusu-bempah-and-armed-thugs-stormed-nana-agradaa-home-over-social-media-beef-video/1t9n1kt> [Accessed February 20, 2022].

<sup>33</sup> Tali, "Rev. Owusu Bempah and Armed Thugs. »

<sup>34</sup> Issah Alhassan, "Prophet One Goes Bananas: I'm Even Going to Insult More," May 9, 2012; <https://www.modernghana.com/news/394238/prophet-one-goes-bananas-im-even-going-to.html> [Accessed February 17, 2022].

and space for listeners to phone in and testify to what God has done in their lives.<sup>35</sup> Listeners are allowed to confirm or testify what God has done for them through a particular “man of God” or a pastor-prophet.<sup>36</sup> He claims that the over-emphasis on this phenomenon has led to an unnecessary competition among some neo-Pentecostal churches and pastors such that much relevance is placed on the “hour of testimonies” instead of God and the gospel.<sup>37</sup> Without contradiction, such media culture seeks to elevate or promote these pastors as “important religious leaders and “spiritual chiefs” but more and more as celebrities seeking attention in the public sphere”.<sup>38</sup> In light of this unhealthy competition, it is worth noting that some testimonies are somehow organized or pre-arranged with some of the people who testify on the radio.

Furthermore, apart from the above instances of ministerial misconduct among these Ghanaian pastors, Christian Kwabena Andrews known as Osofo Kyiri Abosom, made a shocking assertion in an interview that “there is no power in the Bible”.<sup>39</sup> According to him, the Bible can at best be recognized as a historical book for reference. He claims further that the Bible guides this generation and proves the existence of God but the message it contains is not the word of God as perceived by many people”.<sup>40</sup> He further denied the deity (the theological claim that Jesus is God) of Jesus Christ, heaven and hell as believed by true professing Christians.<sup>41</sup> Many Ghanaian Christians are surprised by the turn of events concerning the current ministerial practices and claims of this pastor and have even questioned the

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<sup>35</sup> Francis Benyah, “Selling God”: Contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity in the Marketplace”, *The Journal of World Christianity* 10, no. 2(2020): 180.

<sup>36</sup> Benyah, “Selling God,” 180.

<sup>37</sup> Benyah, “Selling God,” 183.

<sup>38</sup> Benyah, “Selling God,” 182.

<sup>39</sup> Ghanaweb, “There’s No Power in the Bible: Osofo Kyiri Abosom Makes Shocking Statement,” February 2, 2020; <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/There-s-no-power-in-the-Bible-Osofo-Kyiri-Abosom-makes-shocking-statement-854689> [Accessed January 26, 2022].

<sup>40</sup> Ghanaweb, “There’s No Power.”

<sup>41</sup> Linda Ikeji, “There’s no Heaven and Hell. Jesus Christ Is Just a Messenger,” March 7, 2022; <https://www.lindaikojisblog.com/2022/3/theres-no-heaven-and-hell-jesus-christ-is-just-a-messenger-and-not-god-pastor-osof-kyiri-abosom-says-as-he-abandons-his-christian-faith.html> [Accessed January 26, 2022].

<sup>41</sup> Olatundun Abosede Oderinde, “Ethical Misconduct among Nigerian Church Leaders in the Context of 1 Timothy 3:1–7,” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 17, no. 4 (2014): 30.



authenticity or genuineness of his call as a pastor and his theological training.

## Church Services

Some Ghanaian pastors also demonstrate their notoriety and stubborn behaviour in the way they organize and conduct church services in Ghana. Focusing on Bishop Daniel Obinim for example, sources indicate his strange unethical ministerial acts or practices are manifold.<sup>42</sup> Recently, Bishop Daniel Obinim was seen in a video donned in a woman's wig during church service; the bishop ought to have an idea of the biblical injunction on propriety in the adornment of apparel (Deut. 22:5).<sup>43</sup> Again, he appeared in church dressed as an imam, prostrating and shouting, "Allahu Akbar" as Muslims do. It is true that "God is Great", but coming in this fashion from a Christian clergyman was strikingly strange.<sup>44</sup> He claimed to have been elevated to the status of an angel by God Himself and to aggravate the blasphemy, was seen in a video claiming to have ascended to heaven to rebuke Angel Gabriel.<sup>45</sup> He publicly assaulted two teenage lovebirds in the church leading to a public outcry following which he was subsequently arrested.<sup>46</sup> Angel Obinim claims he can transform himself into objects and animals<sup>47</sup> and that he visits his desperate clients in their dreams in diverse forms as a lunatic, a dog, and so on.<sup>48</sup>

Again, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2020, Citi FM reported that an Anglican Priest "Rev. Father Balthazar Obeng Larbi, the Chaplain and lawyer of an all-female teacher trainee institution was seen in a viral video fully dressed in his cassock, force-kissing three students in turns, in

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<sup>42</sup> Quame Benedict, "Must Read: 5 Most Controversial Things Angel Obinim Has Done in 2018," May 8, 2018; <https://www.ghpage.com/read-5-controversial-things-angel-obinim-2018/46469/> [Accessed March 10, 2022].

<sup>43</sup> Benedict, "Must Read."

<sup>44</sup> Benedict, "Must Read."

<sup>45</sup> Benedict, "Must Read."

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Oye-Lithur-reports-Obinim-to-DOVVSU-463559>, accessed 10th March, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> "Turn into a snake on TV and let's see - British High Commissioner dares Obinim," [www.myjoyonline.com](http://www.myjoyonline.com), retrieved 24th August, 2016, accessed 4th March, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> David Kwadwo Okai, "Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry on Some Television Stations in the 21st Century: A Study of Prophetic Ministry in Ghana," *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, 18, no. 20 (May 2017):12.

the full glare of a cheering audience”.<sup>49</sup> This incident took place in the full glare of all the congregants while he was conducting church service. Even though Father Obeng was later relieved of his services, Reverend Anyani Boadum, executive member of the Ghana Pentecostal Council, asserted that the situation where some ministers of the Gospel take advantage of their members, particularly women who seek their services by fondling and bathing them in the name of working for Christ were unethical and must not be entertained.<sup>50</sup>

The situation is such that in virtually less than a month there is one report or another concerning ethical misconduct of pastors in the pastoral fold. Some of these pastors do not even have respect for rules and regulations. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020 the APA news reported that a defiant pastor and two others who organized church service during the COVID restrictions were jailed for four years each by the Kpando Circuit Court in the Volta Region of Ghana.<sup>51</sup> Within the same period, the General Overseer of the Church of Pure Christ, in the person of Apostle Sampson Agakpe was also arrested by policemen for holding a church service with over 50 people which was an obvious violation of the ban on social gathering to prevent COVID 19.<sup>52</sup>

Unethical Christian practices are worrying and disturbing. A church is a place where moral values are expected to be inculcated.<sup>53</sup> The situation is becoming more alarming to the extent that the Parliament of Ghana attempted to enact laws to regulate the activities of Pastors. The Christian Council of Ghana and other Christian organizations have also expressed disapproval of many unethical behaviours of some of these pastors which they point out are gradually derailing the

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<sup>49</sup> Nii Larte Lartey, Anglican Priest Who Kissed Students in Viral Video Relieved of His Duties. Published on August 17, 2021. <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/08/anglican-priest-who-kissed-students-in-viral-video-relieved-of-his-duties/> accessed on 1st February, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Nii Larte, Anglican Priest Who Kissed Students in Viral Video Relieved of his Duties

<sup>51</sup> APA-Ho (Ghana), Covid-19: Ghana Pastor Jailed for Defying Ban. Published on 18th April, 2022 <http://apanews.net/en/news/covid-19-ghana-pastor-jailed-for-defying-ban-2> accessed on 5th January, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> APA-Ho (Ghana), Covid-19: Ghana Pastor Jailed for Defying Ban. Published on 18th April, 2022 <http://apanews.net/en/news/covid-19-ghana-pastor-jailed-for-defying-ban-2> accessed on 5th January, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Ghanaian Times, Charismatic churches oppose Parliament's proposed regulated law. Published on <https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/charismatic-churches-oppose-parliaments-proposed-regulated-law/> accessed on 30th January, 2022

gains made by credible Christian churches over the years in the country.<sup>54</sup>

## Reasons for Unethical Ministerial Practices

Some scholars have pointed out and discussed psychological,<sup>55</sup> socio-economic,<sup>56</sup> theological, inadequate training, poor accountability, and general low level of ethical reflection<sup>57</sup> as reasons that lead to these unhealthy church practices in some Neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa.

Psychologically, prayer uplifts the spirit of the congregation. Some Christians fall victim to these pastors because of what they want to hear. Some of the pastors capitalizing on the gullibility of these women and men, go into autopilot, mesmerizing and hypnotizing them.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, the unethical pastors do not have the professional competence to restore them to normalcy after tickling them into hypnosis.<sup>59</sup> The second angle to the psychological factor is the psychiatric state of the bizarre pastors. Most of them are violent. Some are on a suicide mission. Mention must be made of Jim Warren Jones, who exterminated about 900 church members in Jonestown in 1978.<sup>60</sup> Some are maverick and erratic and act emotionally immature, obsessively and compulsively. “Emotionally immature people,” according to Bill Hybels, “do foolish things, and no one can stop them.”<sup>61</sup> This, probably, is the condition of some of these Ghanaian pastors. It appears no one can stop them; or stop their propensity to violent conduct!

The claim that the majority of persons living on the African continent are poor, is no longer news. Professor Julius Ofori Kwasi, in a recent

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<sup>54</sup> Ghanaian Chronicle, Prophet One goes Bananas: I’m even going to insult more

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Moore, *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 143.

<sup>56</sup> Quampah, *Good Pastors*.

<sup>57</sup> Quampah, *Good Pastors*.

<sup>58</sup> S. J. Lynn et al., “Grounding Hypnosis in Science: The ‘New’ APA Division 30 Definition of Hypnosis as a Step Backward,” *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 57, no. 4 (2015): 396.

<sup>59</sup> K. T. Resane, “‘And They Shall Make You Eat Grass Like Oxen’ (Daniel 4: 24): Reflections on Recent Practices in Some New Charismatic Churches,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98, No. 3 (2016): 9.

<sup>60</sup> Rebecca Moore, *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 143.

<sup>61</sup> Bill Hybels, *Christians in a Sex-crazed Culture* (Illinois: SP Publications, 1989), 48.

study, opined that behind some of the causes of abject poverty on the continent, lies culture<sup>62</sup> and that majority of black Africa suffers from poverty with families living on less than two dollars daily. Our culture can enslave us. Poverty is the order of the day. Socio-economic factors drive people to church. This is true for Africa. Some Prophets and pastors capitalize on socio-economic factors and baits the less privileged, unemployed and poor by donating large amounts to alleviate their plights<sup>63</sup> only to dehumanize them under the guise of healing and miracles. Khanyile asserts that churches manned by bizarre pastors are the havens of deliverance(s) for persons socially and financially challenged.<sup>64</sup> The Ghanaian situation is consistent with the preceding ones and can be better captured from a view expressed in the nation's prime newspaper, the Daily Graphic:

Clearly, those self-styled men of God may not know much while the others have made a veritable buffoonery of the gospel of Christ. The trouble is that people are not hungry for the good news anymore; they want prosperity, miracles and profitable business contacts from the church. The poor man who has been ejected by his landlord would appreciate lotto numbers from some so-called Angel than an intelligent analysis of poverty by Pastor Otabil.<sup>65</sup>

Some ministers or pastors are in a ministerial dilemma or limbo.<sup>66</sup> Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter argue that ministerial ethics today can no longer be assumed among ministers because some pastors have been arrested for drug smuggling.<sup>67</sup> Other pastors are obsessed with wealth, power, sex and status.<sup>68</sup>

There appears to be an unhealthy competition among Ghanaian Pastors, Prophets, Apostles, Bishops and General Overseers for the struggle for power, miracles, authority and wealth in the religious air space and media. Abosede has observed that "there seems to be quiet competition among pastors and General Overseers for wealth, fame and

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<sup>62</sup> Julius Ofori Kwasi, "Why Most African Countries are Poor," *Arts and Social Sciences Journal* 9, no.1 (2018): 1.

<sup>63</sup> Innocent Okonkwo, "TB Joshua Makes Case For The Needy," *All Africa* (June, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> S. B. Khanyile, "The Virtualization of the Church: New Media Representations of Neo-Pentecostal" (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2016), 26.

<sup>65</sup> "No Theology Degree, no church," *Daily Graphic* 20692 (Monday, May 28, 2018), 53.

<sup>66</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 13.

popularity while the country's citizenry and even Parishioners languish in poverty.”<sup>69</sup> This new trend of ministerial ethical misconduct has gained ground among Ghanaian pastors. The phenomenon among others contributes to bizarre utterances, insults, quarrelling, fighting, and disrespect to the laws of the land and the Ghanaian authorities. This attitude has caused a lot of unrest in many churches in Ghana today. Without a doubt, from the public perspective, there is a loss of respect, confidence, and lack of integrity for some Ghanaian pastors and prophets because of this recent attitude. As demonstrated in this study above, some Ghanaian pastors have been arrested and imprisoned with some facing various degrees of charges, sanctions from the courts, their churches and public ridicule for their bad utterances and public misconduct.

Furthermore, reports by Shirly Quaicoo from Cape Coast on May 12, 2021, in an article entitled “*Magic Words: Ghanaian Churches Confront Fake Pastors*” also indicates that the increase in the number of churches in Ghana has left some denominations struggling to keep out pastors who want to take advantage of God's flock.<sup>70</sup> The author observes that in Ghana, many denominations are now vigilant as they tighten and limit their pulpit space against some group of pastors with “dubious credentials, many of whom mix Christianity with the practice of traditional fetish priests.”<sup>71</sup> It is clear that “people with ulterior motives are entering the ministry ... as a way to get rich quick.”<sup>72</sup> Religious freedom to some extent provides a cover-up which prevents the Ghanaian church leadership from dealing with such unscrupulous pastors “unless their activities are proven to be criminal.”<sup>73</sup>

This syncretic or superstitious approach to Christian ministerial practices has moved Christianity to another perspective in Ghana and “left many Ghanaian Christians to wonder whether the source of power in these churches is of God, juju or traditional African religion.”<sup>74</sup> Below

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<sup>69</sup> Omonijo et al., “The Proliferation of Churches,” 641.

<sup>70</sup> Quaicoo, “Magic Words.”

<sup>70</sup> Quaicoo, “Magic Words.”

<sup>71</sup> Quaicoo, “Magic Words.”

<sup>72</sup> Quaicoo, “Magic Words.”

<sup>74</sup> Quaicoo, “Magic Words.”

are some of the currently identified reasons for the uncontrolled unethical ministerial practices in Ghana.

### *Uncaring shepherds*

The Bible is emphatic that God is a Good Shepherd. The compassionate attitude was overtly encouraged (cf. Proverbs 31: 20; Matthew 19: 21; Galatians 2: 10) and insensitivity was condemned (cf. Matthew 9: 36). When shepherds care for the poor, it is synonymous with announcing the good news.<sup>75</sup> The Psalmist (82: 1 - 5) decries unjust treatment of the afflicted and the needy while persuading religious leaders to defend and care for these categories of persons. But, some Ghanaian pastors have failed to care for the flock. In place of care, they bring burden and pain to the poor and needy. Ministers of the gospel who are deeply into unethical practices in the name of Christ are oblivious of the scriptural injunction that the gospel of Christ should comfort and quicken, rather than cause pain, disdain and dehumanize. Indeed, the Gospel releases us from bondage, allowing us to come into our true element.<sup>76</sup>

### *Seared Conscience of some Pastors*

Are their consciences dead or alive? Conscience is the part of the mind that tells individuals whether their actions are right or wrong.<sup>77</sup> In his letter to Timothy, Paul was concerned about the conscience of the Christian leader in his overt stance to the effect that church leaders with such unethical attitudes are hypocritical liars with seared consciences. (See 1 Timothy 4: 2). Conscience is key, whatever one engages in. A *Puritan Theology* hits the nail right on the head when it alluded, *inter alia*, that conscience without scriptural coordinates is disastrous with misleading output.<sup>78</sup> This is, sadly, true of some pastors in Ghana who justify what they do as

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<sup>75</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2008), 162.

<sup>76</sup> Reinhard Bonnke, *Evangelism by Fire: Keys for Effectively Reaching to Others with the Gospel* (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2011), 73.

<sup>77</sup> Albert Sydney Hornby, ed., *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>78</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 920.

coming from the Lord and stubbornly vocalize that they are acting on ‘thus saith the Lord!’

### *Easily Manipulated Congregations*

The congregation will not be absolved of blame, either. In his letter to the Church of Ephesus, Paul admonished the congregation to behave like mature people and be steadfast in good and sound teaching. He also cautioned them not to fall prey to leaders whose activities are treacherous and tricky and who have mastered the art of fraud and deception (cf. Ephesians 4: 14). According to Maluleke, high levels of ignorance, illiteracy, penury, spiritual bondage and immaturity constitute some of the reasons why the African falls for this skulduggery perpetrated in the name of religion.<sup>79</sup> Some of the congregants, defend the activities and utterances of these unethical pastors, without considering the imminent fatal harm the bizarre practices pose.<sup>80</sup>

### *Sleeping Shepherds*

African Christian ministers have been appointed as watchmen (cf. Ezekiel 3: 17) over the faithful on the continent. But it appears the watchmen have gone to sleep; they have slumbered. What is the natural expectation when the shepherd slumbers? Nothing short of what the Bible says in Matthew chapter 13 will happen. In verse 25, the parable of the tares had it that while the farmer was asleep, the enemy sneaked in and planted the weeds. The story did not end there. As expected, the Lord urged the servants not to tamper with the tares until harvest time. But Christians cannot afford to wait for these unethical pastors to annihilate the flock before solutions are proffered. Medicine is useless to a dead person!

It is common knowledge that Africans cherish communal living. The activities of leaders described above affect other Christians elsewhere as one body. Among the Akans of Ghana, when a child commits multiple crimes, he is punished for some, and the rest are pardoned as a

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<sup>79</sup> T. S. Maluleke, “Between Pretoria and George Goch Hostel: God in South Africa in 2015,” *New Agenda* 59 (2015): 39.

<sup>80</sup> IOL, “MEC lashes grass and petrol pastor,” September 29, 2014; <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/mec-slams-petrol-pastor-1757206> [Accessed March 10, 2019].

share of his /her community.<sup>81</sup> The Ibos of Nigeria also allude to the fact that the brothers of a thief feel shame, not the thief himself.<sup>82</sup> Men and women of God called to watch over the flock may have forgotten that they need to be each other's keepers in addition to watching over the flock of God whom the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (Acts 20: 28). The overseers have reneged in their duties.<sup>83</sup> The effect, logically, is that the enemy becomes empowered to prowl like a wounded lion, seeking innocent, gullible, easily manipulated and poverty-stricken men and women to devour (cf. 1 Peter 5: 8).

### *Demand for Deliverance Services by Congregants.*

The emphasis on prophetic deliverance is not a new phenomenon within the churches in Ghana. However, the situation and the approach have changed in some churches recently. For some congregants, they are never satisfied to have been prayed for at church service if the pastor did not lay his hand or touch them, cast out a demon and for better still give them something to drink, bath or apply to their body. Deliverance is approached by many Pentecostals and Charismatics and even HMCs from different perspectives ranging from the use of anointed substances like soap, “soobolo” (the blood of Jesus) pomade, water, oil (including shea butter), bracelets, handkerchiefs, stickers, and so on. The high demand for deliverance in recent times in many African churches suggests that many Christians suffer possession. From personal observation, it seems the rise in this phenomenon in some churches has resulted in the unconventional and unethical approaches to deliverances by some pastors to demonstrate their ego and spiritual powers. Arguably, the high demand for spiritual deliverance by congregants in some churches in Ghana has fuelled these unethical ministerial practices among some Ghanaian pastors.

## **Effects of Unethical Practices of Pastors on Pastoral Ministry**

### *Unfaithful Christian Witness*

As a result of the emphasis on prosperity by these bizarre pastors, spiritual doctrine and holy living seem to have been sacrificed.

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<sup>81</sup> Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998), 16.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2008), 24.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Wommack, *Excellence: How to Pursue an Excellent Spirit* (Tulsa Oklahoma: Harrison House, 2017), 83 - 84.



Without a doubt, these dubious pastors have a very large following. When many congregants “follow their depraved conduct, this will bring the way of truth into disrepute” (2 Peter 2: 2, N.I.V). Some Christians are, thus, embarrassed and are no longer interested in the religion because of what they see and hear about some pastors underscoring the biblical consequential allusion suggested, in Matthew chapter 24 verse 12, that because of the scale of iniquity, people’s love in godly ventures will wax cold. If Christians are to comply with the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19) and win souls for Christ, these souls may be discouraged by these unethical practices in Christianity, making the converts not continue in the good that they have learnt (cf. 2 Timothy 3: 11); the consequences on soul-winning, moral living and salvation will be gargantuan.

### *Promotion of Social Evils*

Some of the activities of these pastors breed laziness.<sup>84</sup> Bishop Daniel Obinim encourages nudity, gambling, ritual money-making (sakawa), internet fraud (popularly known locally as scamming) and spiritually ‘steals’ money from banks for the benefit of his poor congregants who receive spiritual deposits in their physical bank accounts! But, when these pastors encourage these anti-social acts, they are directly and indirectly endorsing fraud and deception, breeding laziness, undermining industry and hard work, encouraging corruption, abetting kidnapping of women and children for ritual purposes and devaluation of the currency. In effect, these unethical Christian practices provide comfort zones for societal ills and moral decay.<sup>85</sup>

### *Health Risks*

There are severe health risks to the practices of some Ghanaian pastors. Bishop Daniel Obinim’s activities resulted in assault<sup>86</sup> and

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Addai, “The Whispers of Doom Prophecies in Ghana, Part 2, January 10, 2019; <https://www.modernghana.com/news/908532/the-whispers-of-doom-prophecies-in-ghana-part-2.html> [Accessed March 15, 2019].

<sup>85</sup> Omonijo, et al, “The Proliferation of Churches,” 641.

<sup>86</sup> Emmanuel E. Hawkson, “Court fines Obinim and 2 pastors Gh¢12,000 for assaulting teenagers,” *Daily Graphic*, September 26, 2018; <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/court-fines-obinim-and-2-pastors-gh-12-000-for-assaulting-teenagers.html> [Accessed March 20, 2019]

grievous bodily harm to fornicating teenagers and pregnant women. His stomping of the belly of a pregnant woman could predispose the unborn child to congenital abnormalities. Drinking oils or other prescribed liquids can affect the heart, pose danger to the heart and produce similar effects as a drug of abuse.

## **Suggested remedies**

### *Formation Programs*

Vincent Djokoto posits that education is the primary instrument of change.<sup>87</sup> His position is very germane to the present discourse. Education seems to be the answer to a responsible Christian ministry. Holistic theological education should be the rule and not the exception. Holistic education incorporates African and Ghanaian norms, social ethics and culture. Apart from Bible Knowledge, African cultural values and norms should be taught in schools starting from kindergarten through to the tertiary levels to reinforce good morals in the individual, pastors and laymen and women alike.<sup>88</sup>

### *Adequate Training of Pastors*

Before entering the formal ministry of the church, it is suggested that formal training be duly carried out. Because it is sad to note that many persons who claim to be called of God as ministers of the gospel are deficient in the operations of the 'trade'. In Rwanda, over 700 churches were proscribed and their pastors were required to take up courses in theology.<sup>89</sup> In that country, the new mantra is, 'no theology, no church.' Some people may see this as a clamp down on religious freedom; but the argument can be advanced that if full-time Christian ministry is a profession, then it is justified that only those professionally trained, who have qualified and are certified should be the rightful practitioners imbued with the requisite professional ethics to see bizarre occurrences as deviations from the norm.

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<sup>87</sup> Vincent Djokoto, "The Pioneer," *Ghanaian Newspaper*, 79, no. 0071 (February 27, 2019), 7.

<sup>88</sup> Peter K. Sarpong, "Aspects of Akan Ethics in Ghana," *Bulletin of Theology* 4, no. 3 (1972): 47.

<sup>89</sup> BBC, "Rwanda Closes 700 Unsafe, Noisy Churches," February 28, 2018; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43225067> [Accessed March 22, 2019].

### *Christian Council Oversight Role*

The absence a regulatory body that monitors the behaviour and practice of pastors is part of the problem. The bizarre practices are signs of anti-institutionalism. Many Christian ministries are non-denominational and have no established links with mainline Christian church organizations.<sup>90</sup> To correct this situation, registration, affiliation, and subsequent supervision by identifiable Christian bodies must become pre-requisite to operating a church in Ghana. If the religious bodies continue to mentor, re-align, and provide continuing professional education for member churches, bizarre actions can be averted. The various national identifiable religious bodies must inculcate in the leadership of their member churches the need for *integrity*, a value which every member of the clergy must embrace dearly.<sup>91</sup> But for the persistently deviant church leaders, the respective Christian Councils should openly denounce the bizarre brethren and their exploitative, dehumanizing ministries. Such an action will create awareness about their nefarious deeds.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Unethical ministerial practices exist among some pastors in Ghana. These practices predispose others to health risks, promote social evils and affect Christian witnessing among many Ghanaian Christians. Many reasons fuel these practices including psychological, socio-economic, uncaring shepherds, the seared conscience of some pastors, easily manipulated congregation, and the high demand for deliverance services by congregants, organizational and personal. These pastors capitalize mainly on these reasons to perpetuate the oddity. When veritable, remedial measures are put in place by the relevant bodies, the strange practices can be checked.

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<sup>90</sup> K. T. Resane, “‘And They Shall Make You Eat Grass like Oxen’ (Dn 4: 24): Reflections on Recent Practices in Some New Charismatic Churches,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98, no. 3 (2016): 3.

<sup>91</sup> Richard J. Gehman, *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa* (New Delhi: Oasis International, 2008), 170.

<sup>92</sup> David K. Okai, “Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry on Some Television Stations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Study of Prophetic Ministry in Ghana,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 18, no.20 (May 2017): 14.

The umbrella Christian Councils in Ghana should be empowered to play their watchdog roles adequately in addition to continuous education of the laity. Peer mentoring and continuing education are necessary to this effect. To curb the phenomenon of unusual practices in Ghanaian Christian ministry, the statutory registration before the commencement of operation of church organization should be made mandatory, at least to identify the minister in-charge and document their backgrounds and educational training. Concerning the Law, it is relevant that theological institutions introduce seminars and courses on Religion and the Law as part of their effort to ensure and equip ministers of the gospel on the fundamentals of the Laws and ethical standards of the state.

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