“CHRIST IS THE ANSWER”: WHAT IS THE QUESTION?
A GHANA AIRWAYS PRAYER VIGIL AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGION, EVIL
AND PUBLIC SPACE

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ABSTRACT
Religion and life, both private and public, remain strongly linked in Africa. This was recently expressed in a prayer vigil organized by Ghana Airways when the staff and management invited a London-based Ghanaian evangelist, Lawrence Tetteh, to lead a ‘healing and deliverance’ service aimed at exorcizing evil spirits from the affairs of the airline and releasing it from its predicaments. The organization of a healing and deliverance session by a public corporation, it is argued, is symptomatic of the quick African resort to the sphere of religion in the search for solutions to life’s difficulties. Religious functionaries including Pentecostal/Charismatic pastors are important in Africa as purveyors of powerful prayers, potent medicines, and amulets for protection against evil. The Pentecostal ‘healing and deliverance’ ministry has become popular in African contexts like that of Ghana because it takes African worldviews of mystical causality seriously. This Christianity promises Christian alternatives to the search for security that drives people into the courts of other religious functionaries.

Introduction
This essay examines the incidence and significance of the encroachment of religion upon public space in contemporary Africa, using certain key events from Ghana’s politico-religious history to illustrate the phenomenon. The main incident inspiring the work is a ‘prayer vigil’ involving Ghana’s national airline that took place on the night of Friday 6 June 2003 in Accra. Ghana Airways was established in 1958, a year after Ghana’s independence, but has been troubled for most of its recent history. In a desperate search for solutions to its perennial problems, the corporate public organization resorted to the services of a Pentecostal pastor to spiritually ‘heal’ and ‘deliver’ the corporation from the evils
besetting it. That the Ghana Airways prayer service took place within a Pentecostal/Charismatic worship setting is instructive for our purposes in this essay. Pentecostalism has been identified as ‘the salient sector of African Christianity today’ (Gifford 1998: 33). The expressions ‘to heal’ and ‘to deliver’ are therefore deliberately borrowed from the religious repertoire of these new forms of Christian revivalism under way in much of Africa south of the Sahara. The airline’s head of public relations, in a news item on 3 April 2004, cited ‘managerial and attitudinal’ problems as accounting for the difficulties of Ghana Airways. In the light of such acknowledgement, resorting to supernaturalistic explanations and solutions in times of crisis, as the corporation did, may appear problematic to western rationalist worldviews. In the context of Africa’s seemingly incurable religiosity, however, seeking solutions to problems in the context of religion may not be an aberration. In fact it explains why in the foreseeable future Pentecostal spirituality, which takes indigenous religious worldviews of mystical causality seriously, may continue to be the representative face of Christianity on the continent.

In addition to the biblical basis often cited in support of such developments involving Ghana Airways by the new Christianities, my view is that, reducing the dichotomy between sacred and secular institutions also constitutes contemporary re-appropriations of traditional mindsets. In traditional African religions and culture, epidemics, droughts, ethnic wars, hunger, inexplicable deaths and bushfires have always provided occasions for consultations with priests and diviners for supernatural answers and interventions. In Ghana, traditional annual festivals like the Odwera (‘cleansing the soul of the nation state’) are not the glamorous crowning public durbars to which government functionaries are invited to make long speeches and promises of infrastructural development. These are mainly postcolonial developments. Rather, the ‘actual festivals’ are the deeply religious ceremonies of libation, feeding the ancestors, and animal sacrifices that take place in the royal mausoleums or ‘stool rooms’. These rituals are conducted to ‘cleanse the soul’ of the nation of ritual filth, to solicit the help of the ‘heavenly powers’ for longevity, health, children, plenty and communal harmony, and to curse the evil powers that stand in the way of progress (Busia 1954: 102). In African traditional spiritualities, with all their diversity, the underlying belief is that success and prosperity come from the supernatural or ‘heavenly realm’, the abode of the gods and ancestors. Historic western mission denominations, from the early years of their evangelization efforts, became agents of modernization and discounted belief
in witches and demons. The older churches—to some extent—have been forced to beat paths of retreat through internal reforms to accommodate indigenous expectations. That is one way to explain the current flexibility of church authorities towards the presence of Pentecostal renewal movements in these older churches. In the face of modernization, development and globalization, the African universe still remains a sacramental one that does not sharply dichotomize between the physical and the spiritual realms of existence. The physical thus acts as a vehicle for developments in the supernatural realm, a worldview that we constantly see being played out in African public space, as will be evidenced by the cases cited in this essay. The essay, it is hoped, will contribute to the recently resurrected debate on whether Africans could be described as ‘incurably religious’ (Platvoet and Rinsum 2003; Olabibimtam 2003). The response here does not argue only from written sources, but also examines how religions consistently act as instruments of survival in African hands.

**Religious functionaries**

Within the sacramental worldview in which the African generally lives, the services of ‘religious functionaries’ or ‘religious specialists’ are critical. These are people with a proven ability to read and interpret occurrences in the supernatural realm. Dislocations in the harmonious flow of life in traditional Africa are occasions for identifying the supernatural causes of problems through the activities of religious specialists and functionaries. For example, the Yoruba diviner is the *babalawo*, ‘father of secrets’. The intense religious experiences of the traditional priest, diviner, Muslim cleric, Indian guru or independent church prophet give such persons unique claims to direct access to the divine, and the authority ‘to act as a privileged channel of communication between man and the supernatural’ (Lewis 2003: 15). Since a person’s destiny is unknown, the task of the *babalawo* is ‘to reveal it at important times and explain how people may realize a favorable destiny or avoid an unfavorable one by means of ritual action’ (Ray 2000: 76). Among the Akan of Ghana, the operative principle in dealing with such sacred personalities is *abisa*, ‘to inquire’, a religious process by which people find out about their destinies from those capable of ‘seeing’ into the spiritual realm. Through the activities of Muslim clerics popularly called Mallams (corruption of the word *mu'ālim*, teacher), Christian prophets and traditional priests who ‘speak for the gods’, appropriate religious rituals are performed to diagnose the causes of problems and to restore
people and systems to proper functioning order. Similarly, in popular African Christian theology, Jesus has been received not simply as one who gives new life and eventually takes people to heaven, but also as the changer of destinies par excellence. As one Ghanaian gospel-life hit renders it: *Ewurade w’aye ade nyinaa foforo, me hyebere nyinaa w’asesa ama me* (The Lord has made all things new; my unfavorable destiny, he has turned around in my favor).

In the reinvention of Christianity in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, the leaders of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) registered their forceful presence in traditional religious space as prophets who could read the ‘signs of the times’, and prescribe appropriate remedies. Since then, the courts of indigenous Christian prophets have become alternatives to the traditional diviner’s court for Christians in the search for interpretations of their destinies. In his seminal work on the AICs, *Prophetism in Ghana*, Baëta noted perceptively that the phenomenon of relying on religious persons with the necessary spiritual abilities and pedigree to intercede between the physical and spiritual worlds was unlikely to go out of African religiosity. His thoughts on the matter are worth quoting in full:

Prophetism appears to me to be a perennial phenomenon of African life, and the basic operative element in it seems to be personal in character. Whether in relation to or independently of events or developments in society, the individual endowed with a striking personality and the ability to impose his will on others, believing himself, and believed by others to be a special agent of some supernatural being or force, will emerge from time to time and secure a following. Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, of revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectually, etc., will be attributed to him whether he claims them or not. . . . Such things . . . are facts of life and have their effects on African society (Baëta 1962: 6-7).

The older independent churches are gradually moving to the periphery of church life in sub-Saharan Africa. However, their emphasis on the centrality of the prophet and his ability to heal, underpinned by the African belief in mystical causality, has been sustained in the theology of new Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and movements now emerging on the continent. In indigenous re-appropriations of Christianity, the African worldview of mystical causality and the need to provide ritual contexts to deal with supernatural evil has led to the reinvention of African ‘prophetism’ and an increase in ‘healing camps’. In the new Christianities of Africa, as I illustrate with the case of Ghana, private individuals, politicians and public officers, as with tribal chiefs in the traditional set up, continually employ the services of such religious functionaries to help them make meaning out of the affairs of life. For
example, one Pentecostal ‘healing camp’, located at Edumfa in the Central Region of Ghana, has in addition to its normal hostel facilities a ‘VIP Quarters’ for prominent men and women who retreat there for prayer in times of crisis.

**Pentecostalism**

‘Pentecostalism’ may be defined as the stream of Christianity that believes in, affirms and actively promotes the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian life and worship. Its most distinctive element is Holy Spirit baptism, which, it is believed, must be manifested in ‘speaking in tongues’. The earliest Pentecostal movements settled down as major denominations. These classical Pentecostal churches, including the Assemblies of God and various apostolic churches, entered sub-Saharan Africa from the 1920s. Some of these, like Ghana’s Church of Pentecost, split from their foreign collaborations under local leadership and became indigenous. The Church of Pentecost has some of the largest healing camps in Ghana. The coterminal expression ‘Charismatic’ is normally used for Pentecostal renewal groups operating within historic mission denominations, and parachurch trans-denominational groupings like the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International. Charismatic movements are, on the whole, historically newer than the classical Pentecostal denominations. In addition to Holy Spirit baptism, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and movements also generally emphasize healing, prophecy, seeing visions and other such pneumatic phenomena. However, manifestations of spiritual gifts tend to be more democratized and lay-oriented in the Charismatic movements because of their non-denominational nature. In this study, the conjoined expression ‘Pentecostal/Charismatic’ is used to encompass Pentecostalism in its various streams and diversities. On occasion, the term ‘Pentecostal’ will be applied specifically to the historically older and more firmly established denominations, and ‘neo-Pentecostal’ to different streams that may be categorized as ‘Charismatic’.

**Healing and deliverance**

Paul Gifford precedes his study of Christianity in contemporary Africa with the chilling observation that, by the mid-1990s, independent Africa ‘was beyond a crisis; it was a tragedy’ (Gifford 1998: 14). In the context of the many problems bedeviling African nations, Pentecostal/Charismatic ‘healing and deliverance’, in the sense of dealing with the
effects of evil, becomes not just the removal of disease but also the search for divine intervention in national affairs. It is within the ambience of the neo-Pentecostal stream of Christianity with its theology of ‘healing and deliverance’ that the Ghana Airways service took place. The phenomenon is now a subculture within African Christianity as a whole. ‘Healing and deliverance’, as practised in the new Christianities of Africa, may be defined as:

The deployment of divine resources, that is, power and authority in the name or blood of Jesus—perceived in pneumatological terms as the intervention of the Holy Spirit—to provide release for demon-possessed, oppressed, broken, disturbed, and troubled persons, in order that victims may be restored to ‘proper functioning order’, that is, to ‘health and wholeness’; and being thus freed from demonic influences and curses, people may then enjoy God’s fullness of life understood to be available in Christ (Asamoah-Gyadu 2000: 235).

The religious landscape in Ghana has been quite volatile and people may even accommodate in their personal world as many resources of supernatural succor as they deem feasible. I will thus refer to other non-Christian religious functionaries and how their practices also encroach upon public space, but the focus will be mainly on the role of the new Pentecostal/Charismatic forms of religion in the issues of supernatural intervention.

Ghana Airways, the vigil, and the evangelist

The case of Ghana Airways resorting to the services of a ‘powerful’ Pentecostal/Charismatic pastor to reverse its dwindling fortunes is symptomatic of the almost inseparable connection that Africans generally make between religion and other areas of life. The African religious belief that people can enter into relationships with the benevolent spirit world, share in its powers and blessings and thereby receive protection from evil powers, reveals the profound attachment to transcendent sources as the realm of true life and practical salvation (Bediako 1995: 94). Shortly after Philip Owusu was appointed chief executive of Ghana Airways, one of his first public appearances was at the all-night prayer vigil seeking divine intervention for the airline’s problems. Owusu holds graduate degrees in electrical engineering and finance and had previously worked with the World Bank for a quarter of a century. He had also worked with the Ministry of Finance and acted as managing director of Ghana Telecom. The invitation to the prayer vigil, which was signed by the acting Head of Marketing, Doreen Owusu Fianko, said the prayer vigil was being ‘organized by the management and staff’ in
conjunction with the airline’s Christian fellowship.'

A London-based Ghanaian Charismatic evangelist, Dr Lawrence Tetteh, was flown in to lead the service. The all-night vigil, in typical neo-Pentecostal style, consisted mainly of singing popular gospel choruses with handclapping, words of exultation on God’s ability to deal with problematic situations, drumming and dancing, extempore intercessory prayers and specific ritual performances aimed directly at dealing with the problem at hand.

Evangelist Tetteh, who is in his late 40s, claims a Methodist background. He studied Economics in Budapest, Romania, but abandoned that profession after what he calls ‘a strong visitation from the Lord’ during a visit to Israel in 1992. Since then he has worked as an evangelist: ‘I have no seminary training’, he said in a personal interview with me in December 2001. ‘Anytime I visited a seminary, it means I am the one going to do the teaching.’ On how his ministry came to be associated with ‘signs and wonders’, Tetteh said, ‘The Lord assured me of his presence when he committed his gospel to me. The Lord assured me that he will give me access to people in “high places”, and that he was going to bless my ministry; through my ministry, the Lord said, the blind will see, and the cripples will walk.’ This ministry of miracles has since 1999 been mediated to a wider audience on Ghana’s Metro TV station, which hosts the ‘Lawrence Tetteh World Outreach’ programs transmitted from London on Saturday mornings. Evangelist Tetteh was not new to this area of ministry, which requires powerful pastors or prophets to deal with the supernatural forces impacting negatively on Ghanaian public life and institutions. During the 2002/03 academic year, the Student Representative Councils of the Universities of Ghana and Cape Coast had employed his services during similar prayer vigils held at the National Theatre in Accra to seek God’s intervention in the lives of state universities that were struggling to stay in business because of lack of funds and a brain drain of qualified lecturers. His ministry is widely acknowledged; in the period between 2001 and 2003, Tetteh was the main speaker for separate national evangelistic crusades hosted first by the Methodist and subsequently by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He also speaks in various Charismatic churches when he visits the country.

‘Christ is the answer’: What is the question?

Evangelist Tetteh was selected by Ghana Airways for his reputation as one with the requisite level of ‘the anointing’, as it is called in modern African Christianity. The ‘anointing’ is associated with ‘power’, and
in this context refers to the high level of grace that enables a person to perform signs and wonders in ministry. The Ghana Airways prayer vigil was themed ‘Christ is the Answer’. According to a Joy FM news bulletin, it was organized ‘to seek God’s intervention for the ailing airline’. There are still questions surrounding the morality of the program, how the round-trip of the evangelist from his London base was funded, and whether the original decision to hold a prayer service emanated from the management or the board of Ghana Airways. These are questions that may continue to agitate public minds for some time.\(^2\) However, they raise for us issues relating to an almost unbridled recourse to the supernatural in the search for answers, and some of these issues are what we explore in relation to the Ghana Airways event.

Whatever the facts are regarding how the prayer vigil came to be arranged, the bottom line is that the management and workers of Ghana Airways tacitly approved the program by patronizing it, and thereby giving it official blessing. In effect, management of Ghana Airways believed that, in view of the ‘mysterious’ nature of some of the problems of the airline, supernatural intervention was needed to put things back on track. When the program was shown during national television news in June 2003, Ghana Airways staff including expatriate consultants were seen with hands raised at the instance of the evangelist and, in ‘Pentecostalist’ style, asking ‘God in heaven’ to intervene. The declarations were aimed at nullifying the activities of evil powers against the airline. As part of the process of ‘healing and deliverance’ the staff participating in the vigil were instructed to raise their right hand and make the following declaration:

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\text{Lord, Lord, Lord, anything, anything, anything, that was brought into this company that has become a point of contact with principalities and powers, we nullify it, we nullify it by reason of the anointing; in Jesus’ name.}
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In both the African traditional and Pentecostal worldviews of mystical causality, the physical serves as a vehicle for the spiritual. So acts of commission and omission or even utterances that serve as ‘points of contact’ with evil powers and give them access into one’s life and endeavors are referred to as ‘demonic doorways’. In the Ghana Airways case, it could have been that someone, in an attempt to secure his own position or to edge out another through supernatural means, had performed certain traditional rituals. These are popularly called ‘African electronics’, and from a Pentecostal/Charismatic interpretative viewpoint opened the corporation to the assaults of demonic powers. The ancestors and deities that traditional Africans invoke into action in times
of crises have survived in the African Christian religious consciousness as demons, principalities and powers. These are what Evangelist Tetteh was leading the workers to attack by the declaration quoted above.

Ghana Airways was established to fly the flag of the nation as a symbol of national sovereignty and pride. Its logo, a huge black star set within a design of the national colors of red, yellow and green, distinguished the planes of Ghana Airways from those of neighboring nations. Forty-seven years after Ghana’s independence, Malaysia, which started life with independent Ghana, has become a middle-income economy with a flourishing national airline. In contrast, Ghana Airways has become a symbol of shame, highly indebted to various international aviation organizations and constantly running away from its creditors. Nana Frema Busia, a daughter of Ghana’s former Prime Minister, Kofi Abrefa Busia, is an investment and finance lawyer and one of a number of consultants engaged at various points by the government of Ghana to assess the viability of Ghana Airways. In an interview on Joy FM’s ‘Front Page’, she gave some insights into the nature of the airline’s problems:

If you read the report that came out of Ghana Airways and you are being truthful, you will have to liquidate that airline. The routes are very viable but the institution is not. It does not mean that we cannot have a national airline but Ghanair, as it is today, is not viable. Ghana Airways is highly indebted and lacks the necessary operational tools. The airline is leasing old aircrafts to ply its routes, resulting in further losses. Ghana Airways has bought, or rather leased DC 9’s, probably 26 years old, older than the ones we already have. They are not fuel-efficient; they do not do the job properly. There are reports that they are inefficient, so why are you today, 2002/03, investing in aircrafts that have given you problems and that have made you unproductive?

These were hard questions being asked of Ghana Airways, and its approach to solving its present predicament. In the last three years alone, it has had more than four chief executives with several boards, but that reveals only part of the story of its ‘mysterious’ decline. Just as the public debate on the prayer service was dying down in January 2004, the management of Ghana Airways solicited the assistance of the recently appointed Ghanaian Roman Catholic Cardinal, His Eminence Peter Appiah Turkson, to help re-negotiate the indebtedness of Ghana Airways to Alitalia for aircraft servicing. The immediate reason for choosing Cardinal Turkson may have been the Catholic connection to Italy, the official owners of Alitalia. However, the special graces that a religious functionary brings into a crisis of this nature in African contexts must never be underestimated. These are moves indicative of the size of the problems and desperation on the part of the management
of the national carrier. Those who fly Ghana Airways know it as the only airline in which prayers may be said publicly before take-off. Yet, in addition to the issues raised by Ms Busia above, flyers have come to associate Ghana Airways with certain difficulties, including an inability to keep to a consistent flying schedule, arrogance of some check-in staff, serious security lapses and overbooking. The immediate past chief executive was appointed at the beginning of May 2003. That he has also been removed since the beginning of April 2004 underscores the seriousness of the situation. The recommendation by Ms Busia that the airline should be liquidated and rebuilt did not go down well with the staff of Ghana Airways. The suggestion also drew some anger from sections of the Ghanaian public who wanted the airline salvaged at all cost for what sentimental value it gives the nation. However, a year after that suggestion was made, the airline is in the process of being liquidated and handed over to a new USA-based consortium called Ghana International Airline for re-capitalization. The new airline is expected to start operating by November 2004.

Diagnosis through ‘patterns of failure’

At the time of the prayer vigil, Ghana Airways’ debt was $146 million and rising, so the airline was really on the brink of disaster. In Pentecostal/Charismatic ‘healing and deliverance’ diagnosis, when difficulties in life acquire a set pattern, it is a sign of the influences of evil powers at work. In such cases, you need one who could truly be called a ‘man of God’, that is one who has the anointing to deal with such supernatural interventions. The choice of Evangelist Lawrence Tetteh, as I have noted, was therefore strategic. Individuals visiting healing camps in Ghana are required to fill out a ‘healing and deliverance questionnaire’ that helps to identify ‘patterns of failure’ in a person’s life. Persistent child deaths in particular families or failure of its women to secure husbands, the presence of inherited disabilities and diseases, families with histories of mental problems, alcoholism, high rates of divorce and so on, may all be interpreted as signs of demonic possession and oppression. The problems may have been of natural causation, but malevolent powers, it is believed, may hijack the situation and worsen the plights of victims, sometimes even carrying it along the family line.

Similarly, in the case of Ghana Airways, structural problems were not discounted but the alarming negative pattern of its operations placed it within the context of ‘healing and deliverance’ as an institution plagued

Cutting the devil into pieces

The immediate implications of the declarations made at the prayer vigil were three-fold. First, that the solutions to the problems of Ghana Airways needed a divine dimension, second, that there may well have been human agents of supernatural powers who were causing the decline of the airline, and third, that the workers had to take their destiny into their own hands and, through the declarations made, cancel the effects of evil powers conspiring against the corporation. In African contexts like that of Ghana, health and wellbeing are both personal and communal. Anybody who does not work towards the total wellbeing of the community could therefore be what the Akan of Ghana describe as abonsam, devil. In the words of Birgit Meyer, speaking about the Ewe of southeastern Ghana, ‘if you are a witch you are a devil, and if you are a devil, you are a witch’, period (Meyer 1992). This was the world-view within which Evangelist Tetteh and the staff of Ghana Airways were operating. In Pentecostal/Charismatic hermeneutic, words and
actions could have performative effects. After the declarations that were meant to nullify and reverse the effects of evil, Tetteh handed the new chief executive a sword, which was supposed to symbolize a new power given to him by God to ‘cut down’ any supernatural powers holding back the fortunes of the airline. This is normal practice in the Pentecostal ‘healing and deliverance’ process. In one new Pentecostal church in Ghana, the King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry, members occasionally carry cane whips to church to symbolically whip Satan into submission. In other places the demons may be hooted at, stamped upon, cursed or even boxed, in the belief that those to whom they are directed in the spirit would feel these physical acts of ‘holy’ violence against them, and loosen their hold on victims.

Whatever structural and administrative difficulties accounted for the problems of Ghana Airways, the organization of a prayer vigil underscored the importance that Ghanaian Christians attach to the element of the supernatural in life. The underlying worldview of the declaration was clearly that certain principalities and powers had been given a foothold in the affairs of the once vibrant corporation and their presence and activities needed to be ‘nullified’ in order to put the company back on track. The choice of pastor here, we have noted, was also critical to the enterprise. To undertake such endeavors, the religious specialist must be seen as one who is more powerful than most. In the traditional context, being ‘powerful’ may connote having more potent medicines, but, in the Christian context, the ‘anointing’ comes from God, which enables the pastor to perform miracles, particularly when demons have to be dealt with. As one Charismatic pastor put it to me during a private conversation, when dealing with evil spirits and demons, ‘the hold of those powers on victims must be disengaged; they must be disarmed, and made vulnerable through prophetic prayer’. The disengagement process includes identifying and nullifying events and actions that gave the evil powers their foothold in the institution. Such powers include witchcraft, medicines obtained from shrines, or other occult sources, mostly by individuals who may have gone for them to secure their own positions in the company, to destroy others, or to gain quicker promotion. Recourse to such supernatural sources for progress and prosperity are common occurrences in competitive environments in Africa.
‘Healing and deliverance’ and prosperity

The Ghana Airways event helps us to appreciate the close connection in Pentecostal/Charismatic theology between the removal of supernatural evil and its gospel of prosperity. Simply put, the ‘prosperity gospel’ teaches that God meets all the needs of the born-again in the ‘passion of Christ’. Christians are therefore expected to share in the victory that Christ has made available to them not just by overcoming sin, but also sickness and poverty. This ‘prosperity gospel’, so widespread in African Christianity today (Gifford 1998: 39), is a theory that is also found in traditional religiosity. On the presence of prosperity worldviews within African religious traditions, Mbiti wrote as follows:

In the prayers for wealth, success, and prosperity, African peoples indicate their conviction that man’s physical welfare ultimately depends upon the spiritual realm of God and the departed. Man has to solicit spiritual help to make his physical life harmonize with the spiritual realities surrounding him. Human abilities are limited, and at this point of their finitude, God, the spiritual realm, and the living dead take over. . . . People are not hesitant to ask for physical riches and prosperity, which in a sense becomes a measure of favor or blessings from God and the departed where applicable (Mbiti 1975: 56).

In the case of Ghana Airways, what could ordinarily have been construed and articulated as very practical problems needing pragmatic and bold decisions were in effect ‘spiritualized’ and placed within the religious domain. Pentecostalism with its very forceful interventionist theology became the choice. In the search for solutions to crises and protection within the African Christian context, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity with its theological emphasis on the immediacy of God’s presence has become very popular because its interventionist and expressive spirituality resonates with traditional religious piety. Religions, particularly in their experiential form such as the Pentecostal/Charismatic streams of Christianity, are alive and active on the continent because of indigenous familiarity with the keen relationship that they maintain with the transcendent realm and the power associated with that realm. For the Christian, the supernatural realm is where God the Holy Spirit, the resurrected Christ and the angels are; and for African traditional religious practitioners it is the abode of the gods and ancestors. Thus in religious terms, the transcendent realm is a realm of active power, interventions and refuge.

The older classical Pentecostal denominations tend to have a holiness outlook and preach against ‘worldliness’. In the neo-Pentecostal movements, translating the word of God into practical everyday action is more than living a life of holiness. In neo-Pentecostal thought, the
believer, as a result of the ‘break with the past’, is expected to experience what Maxwell has referred to as a ‘redemptive uplift’ in life. This entails a ‘re-socialization’ of new believers evidenced through a new lifestyle embracing smartness in appearance, trustworthiness, marital fidelity and hard work which then contributes to making previously ‘wasting lives’ employable (Maxwell 1998: 354). For the neo-Pentecostals the embrace of a modern lifestyle through the ability to acquire modern goods like television, video, new clothes and so on helps to underscore the new image that new life in Christ has the potential to bring. Those who believe in God, it is thought, must have something to show for it because God promises prosperity to his children and not poverty.

Nicholas Duncan-Williams, who in December 2003 was installed by his church as an archbishop, is the founder of the Christian Action Faith Ministry based in Accra. His first book, Destined to Succeed, espouses the ‘prosperity gospel’, teaching that not only should the Charismatic leader be an embodiment of prosperity, but if members play their part by exercising faith, confessing positive things, paying their tithes and so on, then God will surely prosper them with ‘health and wealth’ (Duncan-Williams 1990). The prosperity gospel relies very heavily on proof-texts to ‘prove’ the point that if they do the right things believers can trust God to bless their endeavors. The Charismatic theology of ‘pain and suffering’ is very weak. It is thought that negative things in life ‘must be refused’ through positive assertions or they are seen as ‘obstacles that could be overcome’ by doing God’s will.

However, in an African context of corruption, poverty, deprivation, squalor, highly volatile business environment, inter-tribal and internecine ethnic conflicts, lack of opportunity and the like, the prosperity message does not always work. Where they are presumed to have worked, the so-called prosperity gains may either have an uncertain security, or they simply may not last. In many cases the only concrete evidence of the prosperity message are the lives of those who preach it themselves. The ministry of dealing with demons in life, although biblically interpreted, also helps to make up for the shortfalls in the prosperity message. If things are not going well in spite of one doing everything that the Bible demands, for example confession of sins and payments of tithes and offerings, then the lack may be explicable in terms of demonic activity. This explains why the exercise of ‘healing and deliverance’, through which Ghana Airways had to be taken, has become institutionalized in African Christianity. The definition of ‘healing and deliverance’ offered earlier refers to how the phenomenon operates in individual lives. In practice the element of deliverance, which deals with
the exorcist aspects of the process, has a spatial element. Institutions like Ghana Airways and places like haunted homes where evil powers may be perceived to be exercising some influence can all be ‘exorcized’ of any spirits operating within them. Pentecostal ‘healing and deliverance’ ministries provide the ritual contexts within which these powers are publicly disarmed in order to set people, structures and institutions free. Private homes, office buildings, means of transport, school premises or any property could be anointed with blessed olive oil in order to break curses upon them, protect them from evil powers, or simply heal their users of any ailments contracted during the use of such things.

Evil spirit powers, it is believed, could even hijack a country’s sovereignty, so Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries specifically dedicated to ‘territorial warfare’ have sprung up in African Christianity to map out geographical territories in order to disengage the powers from their hold over nations. In the words of a principal architect of Christian territorial warfare and member of Intercessors for Africa, the Nigerian Pentecostal, Emeka Nwankpa:

Satan expanded his hold over the earth by deploying his principalities to cause and spread spiritual wickedness in this world. People were deceived into worshiping idols, gods and Satan by building altars, offering sacrifices, creating groves and high places. Thus Satan strengthened his hold over families, communities, cities and nations. . . . But Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, not only to save man but to redeem everything (Nwankpa 1994: 9).

It is notable that these views are held not only at the popular level, but also by some leading academics who identify with certain strands of neo-Pentecostal belief. One such person is Nigerian theologian Chris Oshun. He argues that Nigeria’s present difficulties, and indeed those of African nations generally, can be explained in terms of the activities of evil powers. Oshun thus strongly advocates what he calls a ‘power-approach’ to resolving the socio-economic problems of Nigeria. This means that Nigeria may receive the needed healing only by countering ‘the powers and principalities’ through the power of the gospel and the employment of such ‘spiritual ammunition’ as fasting and prayer (Oshun 1998: 32-52). Such over-spiritualization of Africa’s problems often blinds its advocates to the very structural factors accounting for the misery of the continent.

Religion and African public space: contesting causalities

To resolve the perennial problems of Ghana Airways, the government had taken various measures including dissolving and reconstituting
the Board of Directors several times, and changing its chief executives. Honorable Kwasi Osei Prempeh, MP and chairman, Constitutional, Parliamentary, and Legal Affairs Committee of Ghana’s parliament, appeared not to have been convinced by the Ghana Airways’ move into the religious arena. He was reported to have told the *Ghanaian Chronicle* newspaper that ‘prayer is not the panacea to the woes of Ghana Airways.’ With a reconstituted board, and the appointment of a new chief executive officer at the time, Prempeh advised the workers of the airline to galvanize themselves for practical action by changing their attitudes towards work, ‘rather than expect miracles from prayer’. The MP further noted that the culture of the country was so inclined towards religion that people tended to seek solutions from God whenever something went wrong to the neglect of practical steps. In other words, the MP was contesting the causal explanation that led to the organization of the prayer vigil at Ghana Airways. I do not think that the organizers of the program were unaware that many of the problems that had bedeviled Ghana Airways had been caused by mismanagement, corruption, over-issuance of complimentary tickets and a general politicization of airline affairs by government. The observations of the MP, though, were well founded if considered against the backdrop of the use of religion in Ghana’s political history. Resorting to super-naturalistic interpretations and the services of religious functionaries in times of crisis are not new developments in Africa. From our discussions of the Ghana Airways event, a number of issues arise regarding the role that religion in general, and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in particular, plays in African public life, and to a few of these we now turn.

**Religion: a survival strategy**

First, the Ghana Airways event we have described provides one example of the view that religion serves as a survival strategy in Africa. Within the public realm, politicians and officials may attribute their successes in life, security of office and protection of wealth to potent medicines obtained from traditional priests, diviners or various types of medicine men and women (Peel 2000: 80-85). For example, Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of independent Zambia, has been accused of compromising his Christian faith by fraternizing with neo-Hindu functionaries in the search for security (Phiri 2003: 402). The ability to survive in power for long periods by Togo’s Gnassingbe Eyadema and the late president of the DR Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko, are in
the popular African imagination attributable to their dependence on the work of powerful medicine men. When Ghana’s President John A. Kufuor took over from Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings after the 2000 elections, his first official trip was to Togo. A subsequent visit raised eyebrows and generated lengthy debates in the media, including the BBC, about his consulting Eyadema for ‘voodoo’ powers to protect himself and his government. A lot of the human rights abuses involving the shedding of human blood caused by the late Ugandan military dictator, Idi Amin, were also understood as part of prescribed shrine rituals needed to sustain his power and influence. Commenting on a general suspicion that even African coup plotters consult Islamic medicine men or Mallams for auspicious dates to overthrow governments, a popular Ghanaian satirist, Professor Kwesi Yankah of the University of Ghana wrote on the Ghanaian political history of coups as follows:

I don’t know what went into Jerry’s choice of May 15th and June 4th. It is said the choice of dates is often the prerogative of a Mallam, who has a coup calendar. The June 4th Mallam was a reasonable one, and so were the Mallams for 24th February, January 13th, etc. As for the Mallam who chose December 31st, I am not convinced he had the interest of the people at heart! His date falls right in the middle of economic chaos and worsens the confusion and congestion on our celebrations calendar (Yankah 1990: 90-91).

At the time, ‘Woes of a Kwatroit’ as Yankah’s weekly column in the Mirror was called, was commenting on the economic difficulties that people faced between the paydays of December and January because of the high levels of expenditure over Christmas. All the dates mentioned are days on which military coups had taken place in Ghana. The ex-President of Ghana, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, had led three of the coups and he had been successful in two, 4 June 1979 and 31 December 1981. His first attempt, on 15 May 1979 failed. ‘Kwatroit’ suggested that he had to consult more powerful Mallams in order to succeed in his subsequent coups after the 15 May fiasco.

In the Christian context, pastors and powerful prophets are also consulted for similar purposes. Rt Revd Dr Charles Agyin Asare, founder of the Word Miracle Church International based in Accra, used to make much of the fact that he held weekly prayer sessions with the ex-vice-president of Ghana, Professor John E.A. Mills, at the Osu Castle, the seat of government. President Kufuor, the current president, is a practising Roman Catholic and this is well known throughout the country; during his second year in office, he also made a high profile visit to Pastor Mensa Otabil’s International Central Gospel Church in Accra, where prayers were said for him and his government. The mere
accusation that Kufuor may also be straying into ‘voodooism’ through contacts with President Eyadema is thus very instructive. The popular belief is that it is not uncommon for Africans searching for solutions and protection to go for a combination of religious options, a sort of ‘multiple religious insurance’. As the Ga of Ghana say, ‘plenty of fish does not spoil the soup, it enriches it.’

At various times in the history of Ghana, independent church prophets have also been called upon to exorcize the seat of government, the Osu Castle. Such Pentecostal prayers were meant to render impotent any diabolical rituals that may have been performed there to jeopardize the fortunes of an incoming government by an outgoing one (Fernandez 1970: 228). In Zambia, Chiluba undertook a cleansing ceremony of the state house using the services of powerful Charismatic pastors in order to counter the effects of Kaunda’s alleged occult activities in the seat of government, all in a bid to survive practical and spiritual evil (Phiri 2003: 405). In an African universe that is alive with spirit powers, it is easy to see how this leads to a worldview in which belief in the influence of witches, demons and evil spirits has been unyielding in the face of scientific development and denials by historic Western mission denominations. Pentecostal Christianity comes down strongly against those who resort to non-Christian religious sources for answers to life’s puzzles, and promises that the power of Christ is able to take away all concerns. Protection from evil supernatural sources is considered paramount for survival in a precarious African environment of jealousy, envy and hatred. In African countries like Ghana, it is expected that religion will respond to practical everyday problems, so when a Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity stresses the reality of demons or witchcraft in such a context, Gifford explains, it quite naturally evokes a powerful response from people with an ‘enchanted’ worldview. In his words, ‘Pentecostal Christianity is answering needs left entirely unaddressed by mainline Christianity’ (Gifford 1998: 329).

*Popular religion*

The second implication of our discussion is the role that popular religion has acquired as the medium for expressing super-naturalistic worldviews. Because ’popular religion’ caters to the real needs of the people, Gifford has described ‘popular Christianity’ as the creative response of ordinary people to the destabilizing effects of modernization (Gifford 1998: 25). In keeping with the popular expressions of African super-naturalistic orientation to life in modern contexts, it is...
for instance not uncommon to find in the streets of Accra car bumper stickers and small-scale commercial ventures with cryptic religious writings like: ‘My miracle is on the way’, ‘No Jesus no life’, ‘I am a winner’, ‘No weapon fashioned against me will prosper’, ‘Angels on guard, keep off!’ There are also ‘Anointed Hands Hairdressing Saloon’, ‘Jesus Is the Answer Carpentry Shop’, ‘God Is My Protector Upholstery Shop’, ‘I am Under the Blood [of Jesus]’ Restaurant, etc. Even sellers of alcoholic beverages employ Christian sayings like ‘God Will Show the Way Akpeteshie Bar’. Western secularization theories question the capacity of religious values to influence the conduct of individuals and the policies of the institutions and organizations that effectively control public life. The advocates of the strong versions of the secularization concept, Beckford explains, ‘still insist that religion is losing, or has already lost, this capacity to shape and control societal development’ (Beckford 2003: 59). In the West, this is largely because the viability of the supernatural, a non-negotiable element for Africans as far as religion is concerned, has been nudged out of life by modernity and the human capacity to achieve monumental greatness.

In Africa however, the almost inseparable link between religion and public life is played out constantly in public space. When President Kufuor declared Ghana a ‘Highly Indebted Poor Country’ (HIPC) three years ago, Pentecostal Christians felt scandalized and preached against this move. As many of its preachers who are driven by a ‘gospel of prosperity’ theology contend, ‘our God is not a God of poverty, but one of wealth and substance’. Popular religion also appears during electioneering campaigns in Ghana. In the run-up to the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections, the then opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), virtually adopted and electrified its rallies with the Ghanaian gospel-life hit at the time, ‘Ewurade Kasa’ (‘Lord Speak’) by gospel-life maestro Cindy Thompson. ‘Asee ho’ (‘down there’) also became a popular slogan for the NPP as they sought to draw public attention to the candidate, now President John A. Kufuor, whose picture appeared at the bottom of the ballot. In response, the then ruling government, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), went for the slogan ‘esoro ho’ (‘up there’), because their candidate John E.A. Mills, was located on top of the ballot. The explanation given by the NDC for choosing ‘esoro ho’ to counter the dramatic effects of the opposition’s ‘a see ho’ was intriguing. The NDC was requesting people to vote for the ‘esoro ho’ candidate because ‘down there’ evoked thoughts of profanity but ‘up there’ is where all good things came from. After all, were we not always addressing God at school and in church, ‘Father who
art in heaven?’ In effect the NDC was exploiting the religious paradigm to counter the slogan of the main opposition party. For good measure the status of Mills as a born-again Christian was used to embellish the references to the ‘up there’ position. Heaven or the transcendent realm is the symbolic dwelling of God and other supernatural powers, and that realm also includes ancestors and saints. This complex notion is attractive to Africans as a people with a religious orientation to life.

**Natural causality**

Thirdly, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that in the midst of supernaturalist orientations, Africans also believe in natural causality (Wyllie 1994). Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, a clear distinction is made between *sunsum yadee* (spiritual sickness) and *hunam ani yadee* (physical sickness). Naturalistic etiologies give way to super-naturalistic ones when sicknesses persist and defy treatment (Wyllie 1994: 237-238). In other words, in the traditional setting, the cause of the sickness determines the choice of therapy. However, from the Pentecostal/Charismatic viewpoint generally, even when practical steps could be taken to deal with ‘natural’ situations, it is believed that if God is not in something it comes to nothing. Thus people do not have to be in crisis to look for God, they know that his presence is needed for life, security and communal harmony. In the Pentecostal/Charismatic theology of giving, for example, if an endeavor was failing, it was because the Christian was not fulfilling his or her financial obligations to God. In those circumstances, it is taught, God removes ‘his covering’ and the victim is exposed to the machinations of the enemy. Giving has thus become reciprocal in African Pentecostalism. People give very expensive and luxurious gifts to the men and women of God in the belief the ‘anointing’ of those people will mediate to them protection and blessings (Asamoah-Gyadu 2003). It is also a very common occurrence in Ghana for people appointed to public office to go to church, organize special thanksgiving services at which they are specifically prayed for and anointed, and where they also reciprocate with ‘special thanksgiving-offering’, to be protected from evil. In Pentecostal/Charismatic rhetoric, God eventually uncovers plots in which he is sidelined, he then removes his protection, and such people are brought to a sad end.

In a recent stimulating presentation on ‘Islam and Sharia in Nigerian Pentecostal Rhetoric’, a Nigerian professor of Church History, Ogbu Kalu, referred to daily religious rituals involving the burial of live rams at the seat of government in Abuja during the Sanni Abacha regime.
The rituals were aimed at sustaining the power and influence of the government. The late General Kutu Acheampong who ruled Ghana from 1972 to 1978 constantly called for weeks of ‘national prayer and repentance’ so that God would intervene in the problems of the country. Certain local and foreign prophets openly supported him in those endeavors. Acheampong also owed allegiance to several religious sources including the neo-Hindu movement, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba organization. He personally contacted the Indian God-man to help him remain in power, and solve Ghana’s problems (Asamoah-Gyadu 2002). There were severe droughts in those times causing bushfires that led to bad harvests and shortage of foreign exchange making the importation of basic necessities difficult. But it was also public knowledge that the major problems of the country were not due only to natural factors like droughts and bushfires. Professional bodies in Ghana like the Ghana Medical Association and Institution of Engineers had unanimously indicted Acheampong as incompetent by withdrawing their services until he stepped down as Head of State. Corruption and immorality in high places in government were at an all time high. Women paraded the corridors of power in what became known as ‘buttocks power’, offering sexual favors in exchange for economic favors, including endorsed chits for procuring essentials like rice, flour, sugar, milk and soap. *Kalabule*, a word with unclear provenance and meaning (perhaps ‘clear bully’) crept into popular discourse for describing hoarding and profiteering. In those days many people, some without formal education but with the right ‘connections’, became road contractors overnight whilst military-men-turned-politicians also stashed the financial resources of the country away in foreign banks at the expense of the development of the country.

Religion was then used as a cover up to attribute the problems of the country to faceless witches and demons. The Christian community in Ghana, led by the Pentecostal/Charismatic stream, realized that the problems of the nation were getting out of hand and called prayer meetings across the country to ‘fast and pray’ for a ‘Moses’ to deliver God’s people. The reference text of the times was II Chronicles 7:14,

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\text{If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.}
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From the Pentecostal viewpoint in particular, once the moral temper of a nation begins to sink and governments begin to consult with non-Christian religious powers, such behaviors serve as ‘demonic doorways’
because God’s protective covering is removed. In both the Nigerian and Ghanaian cases, the politicians involved, it is believed, came to ruin because God punishes such ‘occult’ behavior.

**Conclusion: ‘Healing and deliverance, salvation and public space’**

In *An Interpretation of Religion*, John Hick uses the hybrid term salvation/liberation to describe ‘the transformation of our human situation from a state of alienation from the true structure of reality to a radically better state in harmony with reality’ (Hick 1989: 10). What constitutes ‘alienation’ and ‘transformation’ depends not only on the theological presuppositions of the religions concerned, but also on the religio-cultural contexts of religious practitioners and devotees. Irrespective of the variegated nature of religious contexts in which salvation may be used, Hick proposes that ‘soteriological goals’ offer the basic criteria by which to assess particular religious phenomena as totalities’ (Hick 1989: 14). Looking at the Christianity of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, salvation is seen as something to be experienced. Their key ‘soteriological goals’ therefore include the realization of ‘transformation and empowerment’, ‘healing and deliverance’ and ‘prosperity and success’ in the lives of believers. Birgit Meyer who has done extensive work on modern Ghanaian Christianity makes the following submission on how she became interested in her topic: ‘as a matter of fact, people alluded to evil spirits and the Devil so frequently that I was drawn to deal with this apparently pivotal topic in the lives of many Christians as a main focus of my research’ (Meyer 1999: xvii). One of the main observations of Meyer’s research is that the ability of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches to deal with the influence of evil in the lives of African Christians determined the attraction they had for people.

The belief in a sacramental universe means that in dealing with personal or public decisions on life, economics, health or politics, religion may be employed in Africa for purposes expressed by Robin Horton as: ‘explanation, prediction, and control’ (Horton 1993: 5, 166). In traditional Africa, as we have noted, prayer, sacrifice and offerings, in fact religious ritual in general, often aims to achieve the practical ends of success, prosperity and general wellbeing. In Ghana as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians are acknowledged to have been able to develop ‘an elaborate discourse on demons as well as a number of rituals to deal with them’ (Meyer 1999: xvii). In the context of removing evil and paving the way for blessings, suc-
cess and prosperity, in African Christian discourse, Ephesians 1:3 is much loved for its reference to what is available in the transcendent realm: ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ’ (italics mine for emphasis). The ‘powers of heaven’ will continue to be called upon in all situations to help deal with problems that often appear to be beyond human wisdom and ability in Africa. But the seemingly problematic destiny of the country should not always be explained in terms of the activities of evil powers when there are very practical things to do to move our democracies and development forward as a people. The problems of Africa are real, and life remains incomplete and meaningless without the complement of the transcendent. Always to cast human problems in super-naturalistic terms, however, also runs the risk of blinding people to their responsibility to remove the causes of disease, and allowing those in power to avoid accountability for decisions made or how public resources are handled.

REFERENCES


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NOTES


2. In separate submissions on various FM radio stations, both the chief executive of Ghana Airways explained that the program was planned before he assumed office, and the evangelist explained that the trip was privately funded.

3. The program was held on Friday 29 August 2003.


5. At a seminar on "Health in Africa’s Cities" in April 2004, at which I made reference to this paper, Professor Allan Hill of the Harvard School of Public Health confirmed that he had flown Ghana Airways within the last three months and prayers were said before take-off.


7. Out of about sixty-four news items on Ghana Airways sampled from newspapers posted on the Internet, only about four sounded positive and even these had to do either with the appointment of a new chief executive, a new board, or some positive steps being taken to recover debts.


10. *Akpeteshi* is a cheap but very strong local gin brewed from sugarcane. It is so strong that in the colonial days it used to be treated as a ‘hard drug’.