

John Wesley's Pneumatology and its application to the contemporary Ghanaian public space

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Abstract: John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, made significant contribution to the subject of pneumatology. Wesley's pneumatological teachings and praxis addressed a myriad of societal issues in eighteenth-century England, including moral decay, economic disparities, discrimination, superficial religion, and oppression. Contemporary Ghana (the context of this research) is confronted with socio-religious and political issues comparable to those of Wesley's society. This situation has prompted this research which aims to apply relevant aspects of the socio-political ramifications of Wesley's pneumatology for addressing Ghana's socio-religious and political challenges. The research is a literature-based research that gathered data from such sources as books, journal articles and dissertations. A comparative approach was used, where parallels were drawn between the two contexts to facilitate a contextual application Wesley's pneumatology for the transformation of the Ghanaian public space. The central argument is that genuine Christian spirituality should extend beyond personal domains, actively engaging with and impacting the broader public sphere to yield a holistic societal transformation. Beyond its capacity to instigate ethical rejuvenation within Ghanaian society, this paper offers valuable insights into the subjects of Christian pneumatology and public theology.

Keywords: Ghana, Pneumatology, Spirituality, Public sphere, Wesley

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana has in the last few decades experienced significant growth in Christianity. The 2021 National Population and Housing Census recorded 71.3% of Ghanaians as adherents of Christianity (Ghana Statistical Services 2021). Ghana has a vibrant Christian community, with a significant presence of charismatic and Pentecostal churches. This is evident in the numerous Christian activities held across the length and breadth of the country, indicating a strong Christian presence in the country.

Nonetheless, Ghana continues to experience high rates of corruption, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and religious abuses, among other socio-political and religious challenges. This situation highlights a gap between the religious zeal in Ghana and the socio-political challenges confronting the country. Atiemo (2016) likens the situation to clouds gathering without yielding rain, suggesting that while the church zealously participates in many religious activities (especially revival meetings), the anticipated spiritual revival and transformation fail to materialize. The various Christian activities in the country fail to spiritually rejuvenate and empower attendees to lead victorious Christian lives. The church is physically alive and vibrant but spiritually unhealthy and unable to impact the sociopolitical space.

To some extent the Ghanaian situation reminisces 18th century England which was characterized by spiritual decline, moral laxity, and a sense of religious superficiality. Like the church in contemporary Ghana, the Church of England was superficial and failed to address the sociopolitical challenges that confronted England. Consequently, the English society showed marked inequality, injustice, poverty, discrimination and marginalization (Heitzenrater 2002). Amidst these sociopolitical challenges, God raised

John Wesley to challenge the status quo and to transform the society through preaching and practical strategies. Central to Wesley's sociopolitical theology and praxis was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. His theology of the Holy Spirit, which became a transformative force within his society, can equally serve to transform the contemporary Ghanaian society, when given a contextual application.

This paper, therefore, explores how relevant portions of the socio-political ramifications of Wesley's pneumatology for the transformation of the Ghanaian public space. The main argument is that authentic Christian spirituality must transcend private life to influence the public sphere with the effect of transforming every aspect of the society. The paper contributes to Christian pneumatology by demonstrating how the Holy Spirit, as understood within the Wesleyan tradition, can dynamically interact with contemporary societal contexts to bring about renewal and transformation. It also contributes to the field of public theology by advocating for the integration of Christian values and principles into public discourse.

Wesley's background and context

John Wesley (1703-1791) stands as a prominent figure of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. He was born and raised at the Epworth rectory, educated at Oxford and ordained as a priest in the Church of England (Boafo 2014). At Oxford, John Wesley, along with his brother Charles Wesley and a few close friends formed the Holy Club (or the "Methodist Club") to pursue spiritual discipline and growth through regular meetings, prayer, Bible study, and acts of charity. Wesley's leadership within the Holy Club, as well as his subsequent experiences and theological insights, played a significant role in shaping his understanding of Christianity and his approach to ministry.

One event that shaped Wesley's understanding of the Holy Spirit is his conversion experience (often referred to as his "Aldersgate experience") which occurred on the evening of May 24, 1738, in London. Wesley had been experiencing a period of spiritual struggle and doubt despite his diligent pursuit of religious practices and ministry activities. That evening, he reluctantly attended a small group meeting on Aldersgate Street, where someone was reading from Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. As Wesley listened to the reading, he described feeling his heart "strangely warmed" and experiencing a profound sense of assurance regarding his faith in Christ. He felt a direct, personal assurance of his own salvation through faith in Christ alone, which ignited a newfound zeal for spreading the message of salvation to others. Following this evangelical religious experience, Wesley preached extensively on the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation process.

The eighteenth-century England in which Wesley lived and ministered grappled with the reverberations of numerous revolutions and reformations from the preceding era. The century began with a semblance of economic stability, yet as it progressed, the nation was engulfed by economic tumult. Traditionally, rural settlers held collective ownership of land for agricultural cultivation and animal grazing (Lethale 2023). However, with the passage of time, the wealthy in the society began exploiting the Enclosures Act—a series of laws that aimed at converting common lands into privately owned property—to purchase large swathes of land for their personal use and exclusive occupation (Lethale 2023). This led to the dispossession of many people of their agricultural lands, as these newly minted landowners seized control over virtually every acre of land in England (Lethale 2023; Boaf, 2014). They proceeded to fence off what

was once communal land, and this deprived the rural settlers and their livestock of resources such as water and grazing pastures (Lethale 2023). The influx of displaced individuals further compounded the nation's unemployment crisis, with many forced to eke out a living in burgeoning slums on the outskirts of cities (Marquardt, 1992). The inevitable outcome was stark disparities in both wealth and social standing between the privileged elite and the impoverished masses.

Wesley's society also exhibited a general moral decay. Gambling was widespread as most of the youth risked their livelihoods and financial stability in pursuit of fleeting fortunes (Boaf, 2014). There was commodification of relationships as marriages were conducted through barter systems, devoid of genuine affection or mutual respect. The era was also marked by the prevalence of illicit sexual behavior (Boaf, 2014). Human rights abuses were rampant, with marginalized communities subjected to exploitation and oppression by the rich (Boaf, 2014). Additionally, bribery and corruption plagued both public and private institutional structures. Alcoholism further exacerbated social discord, leading to broken families, violence, and economic instability.

The above brief contextual analysis provides a frame within which Wesley's theology and ministerial practices emerged. In the next section, I attempt to sketch relevant aspects of Wesley's teachings about the Holy Spirit.

Wesleyan pneumatology and salvation

At the core of Wesley's theological tradition are three fundamental processes/concepts: Sin and repentance (self-knowledge); justification and pardon (Assurance), and holiness of heart and life. In all these processes the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit—who Wesley considers as the infinite and eternal and perfectly holy

Spirit of God who is equal with the Father and the Son—is crucial, as without him, the Christian experience would be unattainable. To understand Wesley's pneumatology one has to examine these fundamental concepts.

Sin and repentance

As the concept of sin presupposes the existence of humanity, it is essential to commence with Wesley's anthropology—that is, his understanding of human nature and the human condition. Like many Christian theologians, Wesley affirmed the biblical teaching that humans are created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*; cf. Gen. 1:26-27) and therefore, all humans possess inherent dignity, worth, and moral responsibility by virtue of their relationship with their Creator. However, through the fall of Adam (Gen. 3:1ff.), this image became marred, leading to spiritual death and estrangement from God. The fall also made humanity inherit a sinful nature which makes them prone to sin and unable to save themselves (Wesley 2011; Wesley 2007; Bofo 2014). This sinful human nature manifests itself in various ways; including exploitation of the earth's resources for selfish gain, unjust treatment of others, cheating, and ingratitude towards God for his blessings (Mpere-Gyekye and Brodie 2019).

According to Wesley, salvation is the result of the restoration/renewal of the divine image in humanity. This requires God's gracious act by which he pardons the sinner and frees them from the guilt of their sins. The restoration process begins as God's own initiative by which he offers prevenient grace which enables the sinner to respond to the gospel. The renewal process involves the active participation of the Holy Spirit (Arnett 1974). The Spirit's works include convicting unbelievers of their sin, its gravity and how detestable it is before God (Arnett 1974). The Spirit then softens hearts and opens minds to

the truth of the gospel to pave the way for individuals to receive justification, marking the beginning of a new life in Christ. This critical issue is explored in greater detail in the following subsection.

Justification and pardon

As previously mentioned, salvation (from a Wesleyan perspective) has to do with the renewal of the divine image in humanity through God's redemptive work and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. This involves two key processes—namely, justification and sanctification—both of which require faith (Wesley 2011). Justification refers to the act by which God pardons people's sins and declares them to be righteous before him on the basis of Christ's righteousness and atoning sacrifice on the cross (Wesley 2011; Asante 2014). From this point, God sees the justified as a righteous person because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. This transaction also encompasses a divine work of grace within the sinner's heart and moral disposition, shaping them towards greater conformity to the image of Christ (Asante 2014). Wesley refers to this as "regeneration" or "new birth" which is the beginning of the process of the actual renewal/restoration of the divine image. Justification and regeneration are two results of the inflowing of divine grace. This makes one a born again.

The immediate effects of justification include experiencing the peace of God, rejoicing in hope of his glory, and being filled with a joy that defies description (Rom. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:8; Wesley 2011). Justification is a gift freely given by God, extended to humanity without any prerequisite of inherent holiness or merit on the part of the individual (Asante 2014, 90). Unlike human systems of merit or reward, divine justification operates on the basis of God's boundless love and mercy towards humanity (Asante 2014, 90).

From the Wesleyan perspective, salvation is not merely a legal transaction where sins are forgiven, but a relational and transformative journey where believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live holy and righteous lives. The next section considers this.

Sanctification

Upon justification, the process of sanctification begins instantly (Wesley 2011; Zivadinovic 2015). Thus, sanctification follows justification “in the ontological order of salvation” (Outler 1975). Sanctification has to do with the ongoing process by which believers are progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ, becoming increasingly holy and set apart for God’s purposes. It involves the work of the Holy Spirit within the life of a believer, enabling them “to put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13) and to grow in character development, and obedience to God’s will (Wesley 2011). This moment marks spiritual rebirth, initiated by God’s Spirit. The Spirit testifies concerning salvation in two ways—through an inner sense of assurance (referred to as the direct witness) and then, through the transformation in one’s life (known as the indirect witness).

Sanctification brings about renewal of the whole person—spirit, soul, and body—so that believers may reflect the holiness and righteousness of God in their thoughts, attitudes, and actions. This understanding of salvation invites reflection on the ongoing process of spiritual formation and the continual pursuit of personal and moral growth (Wesley 2011). The renewal of the divine image in humanity through salvation is a dynamic and ongoing process that involves the cooperation of believers with the work of the Holy Spirit. It encompasses the renewal of the mind, the transformation of desires, and the cultivation of virtues such as love, humility, and selflessness.

Wesley opines that the ultimate aim of sanctification is entire sanctification or Christian perfection. The following subsection explores this doctrine.

Entire sanctification or Christian perfection

Wesley taught that believers could experience a second work of grace subsequent to justification, whereby they are filled with the Holy Spirit in a deeper and more profound way (Yrigoyen 1996; Arnett 1974). As a preparation toward this experience, the Holy Spirit endeavors to instill within humans a profound awareness that they have not yet attained completeness; their hearts remain partially purified, harboring a residual “carnal mind” inherently hostile to God. While the power of sin has been weakened, it persists within humans, because it is not eradicated (Wesley cited in Arnett 1974; Outler 1975). Therefore, this experience—which Wesley refers to as Christian perfection or entire sanctification—does not imply freedom from ignorance, mistakes, or temptation, but rather signifies a heart purified by the greatest gift of the Spirit—love (Yrigoyen 1996). Wesley’s use of the term “perfection” aligns with the concept of *teleiosis*, which denotes the ongoing process of “perfecting” with continual horizons of love and deeper participation in God continually unfolding beyond any attained level of spiritual progress. It does not also mean that one has no need for growth (Asante 2014).

In his sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation”, Wesley (2011) defines entire sanctification as: “A full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief.” Referring to the expression “Go on to perfection” (Heb. 6:1 KJV). Wesley (2011) further states that the word “perfection” means “perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love ‘rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything

giving thanks” (1 Thess. 5:16–18 KJV). The state of perfection represents a state of perfect love, righteousness, and true holiness, achievable through deliverance from sin's dominion and the indwelling of God's transformative love. This state consists of loving God and neighbor with all one's heart, placing complete trust in Christ's merits for salvation, and living joyfully in the Spirit (Asante 2014). By defining perfection as “perfect love” Wesley underscores that this state precludes the presence of sin because sin and perfect love cannot coexist. Christian perfection is not an event but a process.

Wesley's unique contribution to Christian soteriology lies in his skillful synthesis of two seemingly divergent concepts: justification by faith alone and holy living (Asante 2014). While these ideas have often been presented as mutually exclusive, Wesley demonstrated their complementary nature within his theological framework. He emphasized the essential role of faith as the means by which individuals receive justification, affirming the Protestant doctrine of sola fide. However, he also underscores the inseparable connection between faith and works, asserting that genuine faith necessarily produces a life of holiness and obedience to God's commandments. For Wesley, justification by faith alone is not a license for passivity or complacency in Christian living. Instead, he believes that true faith inevitably leads to a transformed life characterized by love for God and neighbor. Wesley coined the term “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6) to describe this dynamic relationship between faith and works.

The foregoing discourse reveals the crucial role the Holy Spirit plays in all facets of salvation; including providing the prevent grace, justifying the repentant sinner and sanctifying them (entirely). Wesley emphasized the Spirit's role in bestowing believers with gifts for building up of the body of

Christ. This is considered in the next section.

Wesley and spiritual gifts

During Wesley's time spiritual gifts were rare in the church. Wesley maintained that the power of God to perform miracles and impart spiritual gifts was not confined to the early Christian era but remained accessible to believers in subsequent ages (Zivadinovic 2015). He argued that the reason for the diminishing of spiritual gifts (after the early centuries of the church's existence) was due waning love and lack of genuine spirituality in the church (Wesley 2007; Liardon 2006). As a remedy to the situation, Wesley encouraged a resurgence of authentic love and sincere devotion in the church. Wesley placed significant emphasis on the *charismata* (spiritual gifts) within the Christian community. He wrote about the gifts, experienced them, defended them and led others to experience them (Liardon 2006). The early Methodists witnessed tangible pneumatological experiences such as supernatural healings, visions, dreams, spiritual impressions, and empowerment for evangelism, among other extraordinary occurrences (Zivadinovic 2015). Wesley himself demonstrated spiritual gifts, especially in healing, as he recounted instances of individuals being healed through preaching and prayer. He combined faith in divine healing with practical measures like medicine and confronted issues of demonic possession through the Holy Spirit. While Wesley is not known to have spoken in tongues, he affirmed its legitimacy (Zivadinovic 2015).

In his reflections on 1 Corinthians 12, Wesley highlights that God generously bestows these gifts upon his church. His view about divine giftings contrasts the mere intellectual pursuits of Greek philosophers. For Wesley, these gifts are available to all who earnestly seek them and maintain a genuine connection with

God. He categorizes the gifts into two groups—ordinary gifts (such as musical talent, preaching, teaching, love, hospitality, and service) and extraordinary gifts (including healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues) (Zivadinovic 2015). The classification of spiritual gifts as ordinary and extraordinary did not imply a hierarchy of importance. Wesley's classification is based on their frequency of occurrence and their role in the ongoing life of the church. Ordinary gifts, according to Wesley, are those that were commonly found among believers and are essential for the everyday functioning of the Christian community. Extraordinary gifts, on the other hand, are those that are less common and often manifest in specific situations or periods of history. While Wesley acknowledges the validity of extraordinary gifts, he also cautions against seeking after them excessively or placing undue emphasis on them. In his view, the ordinary gifts are sufficient for the ongoing work of the church and that extraordinary gifts should be sought only as needed and always in accordance with biblical principles.

Wesley underscores the importance of utilizing these gifts for the common good, echoing the apostle Peter's exhortation to steward the gifts received from God (1 Pet. 4:10). By drawing attention to this biblical principle, Wesley highlights the responsibility of Christians to employ their talents, abilities, and spiritual endowments not for personal gain or recognition but for the betterment of others and the advancement of God's kingdom on earth (Zivadinovic 2015). In Wesley's view, the proper utilization of spiritual gifts was essential for fostering unity, promoting love and service, and fulfilling the mission of the Church in proclaiming the Gospel and meeting the needs of humanity.

Based on his experiences, Wesley acknowledged that genuine spiritual revival would often coincide with outbreaks of fanaticism—that is, an

excessive zeal or enthusiasm detached from sound doctrine and rationality (Zivadinovic 2015). He also recognized the dangers of fanaticism, particularly its potential to lead individuals astray from orthodox Christianity and disrupt the order of society. Therefore, he was critical of those who engaged in extreme emotionalism, pursued unorthodox doctrines, or exhibited erratic behavior under the guise of religious fervor (Zivadinovic 2015). To navigate the fine line between genuine spiritual fervor and dangerous fanaticism, Wesley emphasized the importance of balance and discernment and encouraged believers to test all experiences against the standard of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Putting this into practice, he provided pastoral oversight within the Methodist societies to ensure that enthusiasm was kept in check and that sound doctrine was upheld. For Wesley, even though fanaticism needs to be corrected, the approach should be characterized by love and gentleness (Zivadinovic 2015). This approach highlights the delicate balance between maintaining doctrinal purity and avoiding harsh judgment that could alienate sincere believers.

Wesley's theology of the Spirit is closely linked to his theology of societal transformation. In the next section, I will explain and illustrate the transformative effect of Wesley's pneumatology.

WESLEYAN PNEUMATOLOGY AND SOCIOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

At the core of Wesley's pneumatology is his doctrine of holiness. He taught that Christian holiness has two inseparable dimensions: inward or personal holiness, and outward or social holiness (Yrigoyen 1996). Inward holiness involves a complete dedication to God, focusing one's life entirely on God's will and purpose. This commitment includes trusting in, worshiping, and obeying God, while continually relying on God's grace and developing spiritual gifts (Yrigoyen 1996). The outward or social

dimension of Christian holiness pertains to the believer's interactions with other humans and the natural environment. This means Christianity is inherently communal; one's relationship with God should directly influence how they treat others and engage with their surroundings. Wesley (cited in Oord and Akkerman 2015, p. 455) writes: "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection." This means the Gospel of Christ transcends mere personal piety; it encompasses social engagement and transformation (Oord and Akkerman 2015). To manifest outward holiness, individuals must actively avoid unwholesome thoughts and behaviors, such as envy, pride, and injustice, while cultivating virtuous habits like patience, kindness, and selflessness (Yrigoyen 1996).

Wesley took many practical steps to demonstrate the intersection between spiritual renewal (social holiness) and sociopolitical transformation. Some of his efforts at ensuring sociopolitical transformation are noted and outlined briefly below. Wesleyan spirituality implies solidarizing with, caring for the needy and speaking on their behalf. Drawing from Luke 16:2, Wesley argued that a faithful steward is one who utilizes all resources to honor God and demonstrate love for both God and one's neighbors. He, therefore, urged the wealthy to share their resources with those in need in line with the biblical principle of equitable distribution (Acts 2:44-45; 2 Cor. 8:15; Asante 1999). The principle of equitable distribution in this sense is not aimed at making all have the same amount of wealth but to make all have their basic needs addressed (Asante 1999). This was necessary not only to reduce the plight of the needy but also to safeguard the rich from the pitfalls of greed and materialism (Lethale 2023). In line with this principle, he cared for the poor and the

marginalized in his society by visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked (Marquardt 1992; Boafo 2014; Barry 2003). He encouraged the unemployed to find something doing and then provided a number of people with jobs and financial aid to start their own businesses in order to earn their living. He also provided medical care and education to the poor free of charge. He visited prisoners, preached to them and provided material assistance to them.

Wesley's spirituality also manifested in his advocacy role. He spoke against activities of unscrupulous distillers who exploited vulnerable communities, particularly the poor, for profit (Barry 2003). He engaged in campaigns against distillers, not solely to condemn alcohol, but to address the exploitation and injustice underlying their practices. He advocated for government intervention in increasing job opportunities. Wesley was also an outspoken abolitionist, vehemently opposing the institution of slavery and actively participating in the abolitionist movement. He condemned the slave trade and called on Christians to take a stand against the oppression of enslaved individuals, advocating for their freedom and dignity. He addressed those who were directly involved in the slave trade—including ship captains, merchants, and plantation owners—and preached to them about the inherent dignity of every human. Furthermore, Wesley also advocated for fair labor practices and spoke out against exploitation in the workplace. He believed that employers had a moral obligation to provide fair wages and safe working conditions. Wesley's reason for aiding the needy materially and advocating for their wellbeing was not to merely provide them temporal happiness but to promote mutual respect and restore their self-esteem which they had lost due to their socioeconomic status in the society. This means that his ministry was also meant

to provide psychological healing and stability for the needy.

Wesley also took an uncompromising stance against corruption and social injustices. He unequivocally condemned a spectrum of corrupt practices, ranging from the insidious nature of bribery to the deceitfulness of dishonest dealings, and the exploitation of the vulnerable. He regarded such practices as antithetical to the principles of Christian virtue and detrimental to the fabric of society as a whole. He urged Christians to uphold honesty, fairness, and accountability in their personal and public lives. From the Wesleyan perspective, true spirituality should manifest in actions that promote the common good and combat social injustices. Wesleyan spirituality, therefore, encourages the culture of transparency, fairness, and ethical conduct in all interactions, whether in business transactions, political engagements, or social relationships. Furthermore, Wesley championed education as a means of empowerment and social upliftment. He established schools, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, recognizing education as a pathway to opportunity and socio-economic mobility (Marquardt 1992). He also emphasized the importance of promoting health and well-being (Boafo 2014). He advocated for preventive healthcare measures and encouraged individuals to care for their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

The above and other actions taken by Wesley continue to inspire Methodists and many other Christians, and remind Christians of the profound connection between evangelical awakening, social holiness, and sociopolitical transformation. For Wesley, a holistic approach to ministry addressed not only the spiritual needs but also the physical and emotional well-being of individuals and communities. How might Wesley's spirituality and praxis be applied to the contemporary Ghanaian context? The next section considers this question.

THE GHANAIAN RELIGIOUS AND SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The main purpose of the paper is to apply relevant portions of Wesley's concept of Christian spirituality/holiness to addressing sociopolitical and religious challenges facing contemporary Ghana. In undertaking this task, I will first outline some sociopolitical and religious challenges facing Ghana and then formulate a contextual application of Wesley's pneumatology to addressing these issues. It must be admitted that Wesley's context differs considerably from the contemporary Ghanaian context. However, there are remarkable similarities between the two contexts which make it possible to apply Wesley's tradition to contemporary Ghana. Attention will be given to the areas of convergence.

Ghana's religious context

Ghana is a religiously pluralistic country with the presence of such religions as Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and adherents of various syncretic religious movements. However, Christianity is the most dominant religion in Ghana with more than 70% of the populace professing this faith. Even though all strands of Christianity have in recent times experienced growth, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches attract more adherents with their emphasis on spiritual gifts, healing, and deliverance. On the one hand, Christianity in Ghana can be considered as flourishing. From urban centers to remote rural villages, churches of various sizes and denominations can be found, serving as centers of worship, community engagement, and social outreach. The presence of these churches provides opportunities for spiritual growth, fellowship, and service for believers across different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. The growth of Christianity in Ghana is evident in the proliferation of Christian

media outlets, including radio and television stations, and online platforms for the propagation of the gospel. Furthermore, the construction of large chapels and churches reflects the commitment of Ghanaian Christians to invest in their faith and to create spaces that facilitate meaningful encounters with God and one another.

Yet, the religious landscape of Ghana has some downsides. Atiemo's (2016) analogy of Ghanaian Christianity as clouds that gather without giving rains further underscores this comparison. Despite the prevalence of Christian activities, they often fail to catalyze the necessary change in the Ghanaian public square. Criminal activities persist, sexual immorality is widespread among the youth, and even among pastors. Sermons are filled with motivational messages with no power to convict sin. Atiemo (2016) rightly attributes this to the emphasis on material wealth and health as indicators of God's favor and blessings within Ghanaian Christianity. This obsession with prosperity has led many Christians to prioritize wealth over their spiritual well-being. The pressure to demonstrate one's spiritual standing through material wealth has fueled the commercialization of religious practices. Some churches and ministries resort to aggressive marketing tactics to attract followers and solicit donations. Various commodities are sold as part of spiritual direction to address people's needs. The promise of financial success and material blessings perpetuates unrealistic expectations among believers, leading to disappointment and disillusionment when these expectations are not fulfilled. This religious emphasis on wealth has also yielded a "get-rich-quick" mentality among Ghanaian youth, many of who now use unethical means in the pursuit of wealth.

Like Wesley's England, contemporary Ghana shows a prevalent misconception about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts within the faith

community. Spiritual gifts are given are given market values, referring to how often people patronize their display. In a recent study in Ghana, Kissi (2017) found a high market value in the prophetic ministry than others ministries such as teaching and preaching. Kissi (2017) also observed a direct correlation between the popularity of a minister and the number of people who will attend a program at which he/she is ministering. Aside prophetic utterances and the popularity of the minister, the ministers ability to cause manifestations, healing, deliverance and others spiritual experiences to occur also attract people to church revival meetings. These supernatural occurrences are often perceived as tangible signs of God's presence and power, sparking curiosity and fostering a sense of awe among attendees. In some instances, ministers who lack these extraordinary gifts may feel compelled to emulate them in a bid to enhance their popularity and relevance within their congregations. Kissi (2017) observed that while ministers "whose gifts have high market value might feel too important, others who might not be divinely given those gifts might feel insignificant and be tempted to operate gifts they do not have or neglect their own gifts." This situation can create a competitive environment within ministry circles, where the pursuit of sensational manifestations and popularity eclipses the authentic expression of individual gifts and callings. Rather than embracing and cultivating their unique God-given abilities, ministers may succumb to the temptation to imitate or overshadow the gifts of others, compromising their integrity and diluting the authenticity of their ministry. The current situation has also created a troubling trend where the display of spiritual gifts is mistakenly seen as a measure of one's spiritual maturity or closeness to God. The fixation on outward displays of spirituality risks overshadowing the

genuine fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Koduah (2004, p.156) is, therefore, right to say that "If the current situation remains unchecked, it would be a matter of time that the masses will lose hope in the empty sensationalism being projected in most churches today."

There is also a misconception of Christian spirituality whereby people consider it as largely manifested through one's participation in church activities. This misconception, coupled with the commercialization of Christianity has led to a trend of a very high demand by churches for members to participate in so many activities. There are many churches that have programs throughout the week. Some organize forty (40) days revival meeting with morning, afternoon and evening sessions. Such activities are highly patronized because of the high religiosity of Ghanaian. Such situation breeds negative work ethics as people devote virtually the whole day for church activities and fail to undertake commercial activities for their living. Unfortunately, most of these church activities fail to facilitate spiritual growth of participants because their focus is on money rather than the spiritual wellbeing of attendees (Atiemo 2016). Therefore, attendees do not get the anticipated benefits. Apart from that, the over-emphasis on church activities also deprives families of the needed time to meet and build their relationship and spirituality. The obvious consequence is the increase in immoral activities among the youth.

Ghana's sociopolitical context

Ghana is currently faced with a number of sociopolitical challenges that were present in Wesley's society. One such challenge is the issue of inequality, prevalent both then and now. Just as Wesley's society struggled with disparities in wealth and opportunity, Ghana contends with a similar divide,

where access to resources, education, and healthcare remains unevenly distributed among its populace. A lot of Ghanaians are not able to afford their basic needs such as food, electricity, medical treatment and education. The Ghanaian economy favors the rich and makes the poor poorer and this has resulted in economic disparities in different parts of the country.

Another enduring challenge facing contemporary Ghana is the persistence of corruption. Wesley's era saw corruption and abuses of power, and Ghana faces similar struggles today (Boafo 2014). Corruption refers to the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain or to benefit others unlawfully. Corruption in Ghana is a significant challenge that permeates various sectors of society, including politics, business, and public services. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Ghana ranked 72nd out of 180 countries in 2022, 73rd in 2021, 75th in 2020, 80th in 2019, 78th in 2018, 81 out of 180 countries (CPI) in 2017, 70th in 2016 (Ghana - Corruption Perceptions Index 2022). Notably, Ghana's best position since the start of the millennium was 50th in 2002 during Kuffour's administration. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report (2022), approximately 26.7% of the adult population in Ghana engaged in bribery with public officials in 2021. Among these individuals, the youth aged 25 to 34 were the most active participants in bribery, likely driven by their pursuit of employment opportunities and other favors to establish themselves in life. The top ten categories of public officials who received more bribes in 2021 were found to be: Police officers (53.2%), Ghana Immigration Service officers (37.4%), GRA customs officers (33.6%), Lands Commission (32.4%), Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (29.5%), Passport agency officials (29.0%), Prosecutors, judges or magistrates

(22.3%), National Intelligence Bureau (21.2%), National Road Safety Authority (17.8%), Prison officials (17.0%) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report 2022). Ghana lost approximately GH¢5 billion was paid in cash as bribes to public officials in 2021 (Korankye 2022).

Corruption manifests in forms such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, and extortion, among others. Bribery is a form of corruption where individuals offer or receive something valuable, often money, in exchange for favorable treatment or services (Kunhiyop 2008; Hall 2023). Embezzlement occurs when someone entrusted with managing or overseeing funds or assets illegally appropriates them for personal use (Zgheib 2015). Nepotism is the practice of showing favoritism towards relatives or close associates, particularly in the context of hiring or promoting individuals within organizations (Zgheib 2015; Kunhiyop 2008). In Ghana, nepotism manifests itself in the practice where an elected official appoints relatives to government positions based on personal relationships rather than merit. Fraud is any deliberate action or failure to act with the intent to deceive another party, resulting in financial loss for the victim and/or financial gain for the perpetrator (Zgheib 2015; Kunhiyop 2008). Notable examples of fraud within the Ghanaian context include the falsification of checks and the manipulation of service costs. Extortion is the act of unlawfully obtaining money, goods, or services from someone through the use of threats, coercion, violence, intimidation, or abuse of authority (Kunhiyop 2008). This can involve demanding payment or benefits from an individual or entity under duress, often through the threat of harm, blackmail, destruction of property, or the disclosure of sensitive information. Corruption affects the country in diverse ways. It undermines the rule of law, erodes public trust in government institutions, and distorts the allocation

of resources. Economically, corruption stifles growth by hindering investment, increasing costs for businesses, and creating barriers to fair competition. Socially, corruption exacerbates inequality by diverting resources away from essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Moreover, corruption corrodes the moral fabric of society, normalizing unethical behavior and diminishing social cohesion.

Moreover the smuggling of such commodities as cocoa and tax invasion are common in Ghana. Smugglers exploit porous borders and lax enforcement measures to evade taxes and take advantage of price differentials across regions, especially between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The smuggling of cocoa not only deprives the government of crucial revenue but also undermines the integrity of the cocoa industry, which serves as a backbone of Ghana's economy and a vital source of livelihood for countless farmers. Similarly, tax evasion remains a pervasive issue in Ghana, with individuals and businesses resorting to various tactics to avoid their tax obligations. This includes underreporting income, inflating expenses, and engaging in informal economic activities to evade detection by tax authorities. The widespread prevalence of tax evasion not only undermines the government's ability to fund essential public services but also erodes public trust in the fairness and integrity of the tax system.

Given the above religious and sociopolitical situation, how can we apply Wesley's pneumatology to address Ghana's situation? The next section focuses on this question.

APPLYING WESLEY'S SPIRITUALITY TO THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT

Wesley's conception of Christian spirituality encompasses the transformation of the church for the purpose of mission, with the ultimate goal of effecting change within the

society. The following sociopolitical and religious areas are considered for application of Wesley's pneumatology within the Ghanaian context.

Proper perspective of spiritual gifts

In the Ghanaian context, where there may be tendencies towards commercialization or undue emphasis on certain spiritual gifts, Wesleyan pneumatology provides a balanced perspective. By emphasizing the equality and importance of all spiritual gifts, Wesleyan pneumatology discourages the elevation of certain gifts above others, thus mitigating the potential for division within the church. The numerous fights over who is the greatest in the kingdom business would stop if people really understand ministry and spiritual gifts from the Wesleyan perspective. Again, Wesley's emphasis on the collective benefit and edification of the church through the use of spiritual gifts should encourage believers in Ghana to use their gifts for the greater good rather than for personal gain or status. Therefore, those blessed with spiritual gifts must use them for the service of others (Kissi 2017). This approach will not only prove an effective antidote to any individualistic approach to use of the spiritual gifts but will also promote a sense of unity and cooperation among believers.

Furthermore, the point that spiritual maturity cannot be equated solely with the manifestation of spectacular gifts serves as a caution against valuing outward displays of spirituality over genuine character and devotion to God, which is particularly relevant in contexts where flashy displays of spiritual prowess may be overvalued. Each believer needs to concentrate on what has been given them because what they have will be the basis of the accountability to God (Rom. 12:6-8). Moreover, no one should consider themselves more important than others based on the gift(s) they operate (Kissi 2017). If such tendencies are not

checked the devil will use these as a weapon to destroy the church.

Renewal of active family life and development

Nihinlola (2013) rightly observes that "In the plan of God the family is the most important institution for personal development of children and so it is the most effective means to humanize society." The family serves as the most potent vehicle for instilling values, shaping character, and fostering emotional growth. Wesley acknowledged the pivotal role that family plays in the spiritual and moral development of individuals and society as a whole. From the Wesleyan perspective, genuine spirituality ought to strengthen familial connections rather than erode them. This is important because the absence of proper upbringing at home results in a myriad of juvenile delinquencies, including idleness, academic misconduct, greed, theft, violent crime, substance abuse, sexual immorality, negative peer influences, involvement in cult activities, and similar behaviors (Nihinlola 2013). Obviously, something needs to be done to address the situation where over-packed church calendars deprive people adequate time for family interaction and corporate spiritual growth. Families must be allowed ample time to stay together and address their spiritual wellbeing and foster Christian growth within the family unit.

Therefore, instead of considering the church as a place where worship takes place, worship must be considered as part of every sphere of human life and activities. Christianity finds its true expression within the home, within society itself, rather than solely within the confines of a chapel. It is amidst our interactions in the broader community that our adherence to Christian values is most rigorously tested, not in the chapel. The church needs to encourage Christians to see every aspect of their lives as an opportunity to offer spiritual

sacrifice to God. The family has a huge stake in such an endeavor. It is believed that when Christian spirituality is built and promoted at the family levels, a large portion of the country's problem of public immorality will be addressed.

Promoting social justice and social cohesion

Christian holiness is intrinsically linked to social justice and social cohesion; the Christian faith is inextricably linked with transformation (Asante 2014). Faith, when expressed through acts of love, extends to every aspect of human interaction. Socioeconomic injustices have long perpetuated disparities in wealth and opportunity across Ghana. The disparities have led to marginalization and discrimination. Apart from closing infrastructural gap by providing roads, schools, hospitals, and utilities in underserved areas, there is the need to promote and ensure mutual respect and respect for human dignity and rights.

As noted earlier, tensions between individuals, between individuals and groups, and among various groups are common in contemporary Ghana. Ethnic/tribal and political differences are the two many factors that cause division among people. The Christian community must serve a vital role in resolving such tensions; this must be done based on the principles of love and justice. The emphasis on perfect love inherent in holiness can significantly contribute to addressing these tensions. Boafo (2014, pp.256-257) rightly observes as follows: "The emphasis on love for God and neighbor in a country made up of 'loosely knit' tribes could be the basis for national unity. Just as the early missionaries could bring hostile tribes into friendly relationships, the church's stress on love as the sum of all Christian religion would ensure national progress."

Wesley's understanding of sanctification and its impact on social change also holds immense significance in uniting the nation. His teachings on justification

and sanctification, rooted in God's unwavering love, highlight that in Christ, all individuals, regardless of their socio-political status or religious affiliations, are equally valued (Asante 2014). Here, the doctrine of *imago Dei* may serve as a good foundation to develop a theology of unity devoid of social classes. Based on this doctrine, Wesley argued that the rich, poor, royal, male, female are God's image bearers and therefore deserve to be respected as such (Boafo 2014). Authentic Christian spirituality should translate into a spiritual bond which puts us together in mutual respect, humility and love, where each member functions according to divine intent, interconnected and supportive of one another.

Poverty reduction

From the Wesleyan perspective, Christian spirituality transcend mere doctrinal adherence to the imperative of actively meeting the needs of others as a tangible expression of one's faith. Thus, genuine spirituality manifests in compassionate action, where believers not only professed their beliefs but also lived them out through selfless service to their fellow human beings. This is a call on the church to undertake concrete actions to reduce the plight of the needy. This can partly be achieved through the sharing of resources. Instead of amassing wealth, true Christian spirituality prompts a lifestyle of generosity and social responsibility. In Wesley's framework, the proper order of resource allocation begins with meeting the needs of one's own family, followed by providing support to the broader community of faith, and finally extending assistance to all those who find themselves in need (Lethale 2023). To have enough to share, one has to live modestly, focusing only on their needs. Anything that remains after catering for one one's needs constitute surplus that should be shared with the needy (Lethale 2023). Here, the Ghanaian communal sense of life and the sharing of resources can indeed serve as

powerful antidotes to poverty reduction. Ghanaians traditionally have a deeply ingrained ethos of community solidarity and mutual support, where individuals and families come together to help one another in times of need. The traditional extended family system may serve as a model for helping one another. The church and society need to develop a model that is patterned after this family system in order to ensure adequate provision for people's need.

Furthermore, the church need to prioritize providing social services (such as counseling, career guidance, and other forms of support) to the impoverished and marginalized members of society. They must visit impoverished communities regularly and take the opportunity to share the gospel and provide spiritual nourishment. Solidarity with the poor and socially marginalized through visitation and even residing within their community will also yield psychological healing. Boafo (2014, p.234) rightly says that "[m]ission alongside the poor in [Ghana] must consider setting up Inner City Mission centers to provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the poor in the cities." These missions should address the basic needs of vulnerable groups such as orphans, street children, and widows, thereby reducing instances of street hawking and begging. In order to achieve this, there is the need for the church to live modestly and stop overspending on peripherals.

Wesleyan spirituality embrace diligences, stewardship, and industriousness as integral aspects of their faith and stands as mutually exclusive to laziness. Wesley argued that work defines humanness; therefore, every abled person needs to be engaged in a commercial activity. This requires job-creation interventions. The primary responsibility for job creation lies with the government. Jobs can be created in such areas as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. The country's education system must equip

graduates with practical and problem-solving skill required on the modern job market. While the government spearhead efforts to combat unemployment, it is imperative for various stakeholders, including individuals, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions such as the church, to also contribute to job creation initiatives for the unemployed.

Wesley's economic principle "gain all you can" serves to underline the importance of hard work. Therefore, it is important for each person to cultivate a strong work ethic grounded in a sense of vocation and purpose. Staying idle is, therefore, not acceptable within the Wesleyan ethos. At the same time, one's work must be in line with God's purpose and will, glorifying God and serving others. Any work that is detrimental to the physical, and spiritual health of the worker or others is unacceptable within the Wesleyan framework. This principle contrasts the contemporary phenomena where many people engage in betting and other forms of unethical commercial activities to "succeed" in life. It also contradicts the get-rich-attitude and the use of wealth as basis of human worth that is promoted by the prosperity theology.

Dealing with corruption

Nihinlola (2013) considers corruption as a sinful manifestation inherent in human nature. This viewpoint underscores the necessity of spiritual renewal and transformation to address the underlying causes of corruption. Such renewal involves a fundamental shift in individuals' hearts and minds, leading to a rejection of dishonesty, greed, and deceitful practices. As noted earlier, spiritual renewal involves an inner transformation guided by moral and ethical principles. It requires individuals to confront and overcome their own moral weaknesses and inclinations towards corruption. Through sincere repentance, individuals can seek forgiveness for past wrongdoings and strive towards a life

characterized by integrity, honesty, and accountability.

The church is reminded of her prophetic task of fighting against any thing that hinders the wellbeing of the society (Asante 2014). In ancient Israel, the prophetic institution served multiple purposes, one of which was to establish a balance of power within the governance of the Promised Land (Asante 2014). Prophets were tasked with advocating for the rights of the vulnerable segments of society, including the poor, the needy, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Their intervention, particularly in matters concerning legal issues, social injustice, bribery, and corruption, aimed to address systemic inequities and ensure fair treatment for all members of the community (Asante 2014). Against this backdrop, Ghanaian Christian leaders are charged to preach messages that promote moral and spiritual integrity (Nihinlola 2013). God's attributes of truth, righteousness, holiness and justice (cf. Lev. 19:2; Exod. 22:8; Isa. 33:15; Mic. 6:8) should form the framework for such teaching. The Christian message should also focus on the proper stewardship of power and the principle of accountability. The church's activities must prioritize the moral growth of individuals.

Christians also need to engage actively in the governance of their nations, offering constructive criticism to political leaders with the goal of enhancing governance practices and fostering holistic development that uplifts all members of society. The church can also provide moral leadership to serve as a model for the society. Church leaders can use their platforms to advocate for ethical behavior, accountability, and transparency in both the public and private sectors.

CONCLUSION

The paper has argued that Christian spirituality should necessarily result in a

transformed life marked by righteous action and ethical living. Can holy people ignore such societal concerns as injustice, poverty, marginalization, exploitation, and the lack of good education? The truly spiritual and holy person cannot because Christian holiness inherently carries social implications. In an age of secularization and privatization of religion, the church must emphasize the social dimension of Christian spirituality. In light of this, contemporary Ghanaian Christians are urged to boldly confront the socio-political realm by pressing for justice, equity, compassion, and human dignity in the public sphere.

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