




Christians and Muslims in Ghana: A Case Study of Togetherness

Eric Oduro Wiafe¹ 

¹ Catholic Institute of Business and Technology (CIBT), Accra - North, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

Religion deals with the sacred sphere through ritual or non-ritual cults. Many of the world conflicts have religious undertones. Notwithstanding the negative impact of religion on society, it plays an essential role in promoting peace and preventing and resolving conflicts. Unlike the situation in some West African countries typically Nigeria where religious extremism has been on the rise, Christians and Muslims in Ghana, in spite of extreme provocations have continuously avoided conflicts and have been living together peacefully for years. The Christian-Muslim relationship in Ghana is an interesting case for research. The qualitative research methodology was used to gather data for analysis. The interviewees included two Catholic priests, Muslim clerics, security personnel, and teachers each from Christian and Islamic Senior High Schools. In all, a total of ten interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted over the phone. It is undeniable from the research that Christians and Muslims in Ghana can live side by side without conflict. They coexist peacefully because the Ghanaian society and social climate are inherently tolerant and welcoming, government policies and legislation on religious freedom have been progressive, the objectivity of the communication media in fostering and maintaining religious tolerance, the co-mingling of religious studies with basic education, and the leadership provided by the leaders of these two faiths have helped to shape a promising future for their members. Though there exists an interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, it is critical for their leaders to sustain the religious discourse and tolerance and peace in the country.

Correspondence

Eric Oduro Wiafe
Email: frekow5@yahoo.com

Publication History

Received 25th June, 2023
Accepted 13th August, 2023
Published online: 8th September, 2023

Keywords: *Christianity, Islam, togetherness, relationship*

INTRODUCTION

Religion is the practice of dealing with the sacred sphere through ritual or non-ritual cults. The interpretation of everyday experiences, the concordance with social norms, as well as many other life domains, are all embedded in this individual and complex system.¹ Thus, religion's influence remains

¹ William S Pollack, *No Man Is an Island: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Psychology of Men*. (Basic Books/Hachette Book Group, 1995).

pervasive.² Religion has been used to organize, control, and socialize people of many ethnic groups. It has had a good impact on society by absorbing moral principles, assisting individuals in living together, boosting confidence, maintaining, and transmitting spiritual values, and promoting peace and tranquility.³

However, it cannot be denied that religion in many parts of the world has contributed to violent conflict.⁴ West, Central, and East Africa have experienced religious discrimination, which left them feeling excluded and under-integrated. More than 500,000 educated Jews emigrated to Western Europe, the United States, and Israel because of the interreligious conflicts and violence during the past two decades;⁵ probably because these are regions with high levels of religious diversity. Nonetheless, North America, Asia Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa are the most religiously diverse regions. Ironically, regions with high religious diversity tend to have the most serious government restrictions and social hostilities towards religion, and the least restrictive government policies and religious antagonism are seen in the most religiously homogeneous communities (the Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023).⁶ In sub-Saharan Africa, there have been more religious armed conflicts in the Central African Republic, Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia than in other areas on the continent.⁷ For instance, in northern Nigeria, Muslims and Christians have been the targets of intergroup conflict since 1999.⁸ More than 20,000 people have lost their lives in conflicts involving Islamist Boko Haram since 2009.⁹ In Somalia, more than 30,000 Muslim herders and Christian farmers were killed as a result of religious extremism.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the rise in religious conflict in Nigeria, has been attributed to the failure of government institutions.¹¹

Also, according to the relative deprivation theory, prejudice raises the likelihood of violent crime. For instance, it has been suggested that high degrees of discrimination are ingrained in unsatisfactory state-religion interactions which can lead to violence.¹² Religious minorities faced repression in the former Soviet Union, where there was a cap on the number of Jews who could enroll in prestigious institutions and government agencies. Jewish people were subjected to socially acceptable Soviet Union's new immigration laws under Mikhail Gorbachev.¹³

When people are marginalized by a dominant group or the state, the oppressed may become irritated, and consequently, result in hostility and violence. For instance, Comoros Island is ethnically and religiously homogenous society, but Islam is perceived as a strong unifying element.¹⁴ However, Christians and other non-Islamic religions are strongly discriminated against.¹⁵ The suppression of the members of the minority group may result in violent conflict at a point.

² Emmanuel Obeng-Mireku, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Ghana and Nigeria* (University of Lethbridge (Canada), 2017).

³ Toshpulotov Shokhijakhon Eshpulotovovich and Sapayev Utkir Turayevich, "International Political Mechanisms for Ensuring Religious Tolerance and the Importance of Its Teaching in Educational Institutions," *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2020): 5265–68.

⁴ David R Smock, *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War* (US Institute of Peace, 2006).

⁵ Ludovic Lado and Tiffany Lynch, "Religious Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Future of the Secular State," 2014.

⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace (2023, June). *Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, Sydney, June 2023. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources> (accessed July 3rd, 2023).

⁷ Matthias Basedau and Johanna Schaefer-Kehnert, "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?," in *The Correlates of Religion and State* (Routledge, 2020), 29–46.

⁸ Lado and Lynch, "Religious Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Future of the Secular State."

⁹ Matthias Basedau, "The Rise of Religious Armed Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: No Simple Answers," 2017.

¹⁰ Basedau, "The Rise of Religious Armed Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: No Simple Answers."

¹¹ Lado and Lynch, "Religious Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Future of the Secular State."

¹² Basedau and Schaefer-Kehnert, "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?"

¹³ Vincent J. Schodolski, "Gorbachev Rues Jewish Exodus," *Chicago Tribune*, October 07, 1991.

[Http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-10-07/news/9103310768_1_soviet-jewsemigration-soviet-society](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-10-07/news/9103310768_1_soviet-jewsemigration-soviet-society).

¹⁴ Chrysantus Ayangafac, "Situation Critical: The Anjouan Political Crisis," 2008.

¹⁵ Yehiel Poupko, "Jews and Evangelicals-between Prophecy And," *Uneasy Allies?*, 2007, 155–65.

Another factor of interest is that competition between religious communities is alive in interreligious relations. It is common practice to employ competition over doctrine and scripture as a means of disseminating the word of God and growing the membership of the religious sect. Such competitive circumstances regularly rupture, resulting in aggressive and polemical conduct, including the burning of churches, the Bible, or the Qur'an.¹⁶

In postmodern society, religious diversity and interfaith conversations are important for the promotion of peace, religious tolerance and concord. The focus of this paper is to examine the factors that account for the cordial relationship that exists between Christian and Muslim communities in Ghana as well as examine the extent to which leaders of both religions have worked together to sustain the cordial relationship. Consequently, the study proceeded along the following criteria. First is an overview of the historical relationship that exists among members of the two religions. Second, is the application of multilevel analysis to identify how the role of government policies and human relations influenced Christian-Muslim relations.¹⁷ The final section provides a summary of the results and outlines several challenges for future research.

Background of Christians and Muslims in Ghana

In Ghana, religion permeates pretty much every aspect of the lives of Ghanaians.¹⁸ The Ghanaian society is religiously pluralistic with Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous faiths serving as the dominant religions in the country.¹⁹ Interestingly, interactions among the members of these religions are based on the indigenous Ghanaian communal values to address religious diversity such as interreligious rivalry.²⁰ In India's Kashmir region, religious diversity increased gun battles with loss of lives among the religious groups and the security forces,²¹ Ghanaians turn to God to provide for their needs when the going becomes tough.²² For instance, those who align themselves in a given dispute, tend to position themselves along lines of confessional groups. A confessional group refers to a situation where a member of a religious group must hold strict allegiance to the tenets of the group. Thus, when a person has a strong sense of belonging to a confessional community, abandoning the group through conversion, intermarriage, or refusal to strive toward common goals may be viewed as a kind of treason and may be subjected to severe punishment.²³

In the early part of the year 2000, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements incurred the wrath of the Muslim community when they sought to convert a section of the Muslim community to Christianity.²⁴ Recently in 2019, Reverend Isaac Owusu Bempah prophesized that the Chief Imam Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu was going to die. The idea of the death of the Chief Imam by a Christian cleric incensed a section of the Muslim youth against the Christian community, especially, against Reverend Isaac Owusu Bempah and his Church, the Glorious Word Power Ministries International.

Notwithstanding the negative developments, religion plays an essential role in promoting peace and preventing and resolving conflicts. It can lead to peace through interfaith conversation and dialogue with non-believers. The Peaceworks report contains case studies that address distinct religious disputes using various techniques. Case studies from Kashmir, Iraq, Macedonia, Nigeria, and

¹⁶ Cephas N Omenyo and Abamfo O Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana," *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 55–68.

¹⁷ Thomas Michel, "Social and Religious Factors Affecting Muslim-Christian Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 1 (1997): 53–66.

¹⁸ Lonely Planet et al., *Lonely Planet West Africa* (Lonely Planet, 2017).

¹⁹ Omenyo and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana."

²⁰ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Ghana: Competition or Co-Operation?," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 2017, 47.

²¹ Chris Ngwodo, "Understanding Boko Haram: A Theology of Chaos," *Retrieved May 20* (2010): 2014.

²² Phil Zuckerman and John R Shook, *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

²³ Michel, "Social and Religious Factors Affecting Muslim-Christian Relations."

²⁴ John Azumah, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup," *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000): 5–9.

Sudan demonstrate the unique contributions of religion to peace.²⁵ The increase in religious conflicts around the world highlights the need for a better understanding of the role of religion and religious freedom in socio-economic development.²⁶ However, religion and violence are seldom studied in Sub-Saharan Africa.²⁷ Furthermore, the need to promote religious co-existence among diverse religions arises from the fact that the economic and entrepreneurial activity that arises from the characteristics cultivated by religious convictions can be reduced by a lack of religious freedom.²⁸ Though further examination of religious disputes and their interplay with secular social and political variables is recommended, Basedau could not establish a straightforward link between religious prejudice and violent conflict.²⁹ In places like Nigeria, riots between Muslims and Christian minorities have become very common since the 1980s.³⁰

Christians and Muslims maintain positive relationships with one another, yet, recent religious abuse and misunderstanding, for instance, in Adisadel College, where a Muslim student lost his life, and Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region, when female Muslim students were prevented from taking passport photographs, could have led to full blown conflict between members of these two religious groups. Notwithstanding the bad blood that these incidents might have produced among the members of the two religious groups, they continue to live peacefully and, in some cases, cohabitate. The following examples from Ghana will buttress the point home better. Even though John Dramani Mahama is a Christian, his parents and siblings are Muslims. Fentuo Tahiru, a well-known sports Journalist with the Multi Media Company (JoyNews) is a Muslim, but his wife is a practicing Catholic. The Muslim society to which Fentuo Tahiru belongs has agreed and embraced the views of his wife. In addition, the late Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama and Vice President Dr. Alhaji Mahamadu Bawumia, both Muslims agreed to deputize for Christian presidents. These instances illustrate peaceful co-existence rather than competition to win over new converts for each faith.³¹

History of the Advent of Christianity and Islam in Ghana

The first group of European (Portuguese) navigators and traders introduced Christianity to Ghana in the 15th century.³² This explains why the South has many Christians. In 1906, the Missionaries brought Christianity to Navrongo in the northern region of Ghana.³³ On the other hand, Islam penetrated modern-day Ghana through her northern boundaries using commerce, storytelling work, and administrative responsibilities by itinerant traders from Northern Nigeria in the late sixteenth century.³⁴ Whereas experts concur on the route and method by which Islam invaded the northern portion of Ghana, there is no consensus on the time.

²⁵ Smock, *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War*.

²⁶ Ilan Alon, Shaomin Li, and Jun Wu, "An Institutional Perspective on Religious Freedom and Economic Growth," *Politics and Religion* 10, no. 3 (2017): 689–716.

²⁷ Basedau, "The Rise of Religious Armed Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: No Simple Answers."

²⁸ Ilan Alon and John Spitzer, "Does Religious Freedom Affect Country Risk Assessment?," *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 2003, 51–62; Robert J Barro and Rachel M McCleary, "Religion and Economic Growth" (National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge, Mass., USA, 2003).

²⁹ Basedau, "The Rise of Religious Armed Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: No Simple Answers."

³⁰ Steven J Salm and Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana* (greenwood publishing group, 2002).

³¹ Konadu Adam, Frederick Mensah Bonsu, and Dorcas Amedorme, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, May 13, 2022, 175–87, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2022352>.

³² Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values," 2010, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:127863703>.

³³ George Bob-Milliar and Gloria Bob-Milliar, "Christianity In The Ghanaian State In The Past Fifty Years," GhanaWeb, 2007, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Christianity-In-The-Ghanaian-State-In-The-Past-Fifty-Years-119921>.

³⁴ M. K. Antwi, *Development of education in Ghana (1880-1990)*. Introduction to education in Ghana Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited. (1992): 11-29; M.A.M. Hashim, "A Journey through Islam: Muslims have come up well in Ghana," (2013).Arab News, 1st March, 2013.

However, Ghana's Muslim population spread from the north to the south as the gold and cocoa industries thrived. Muslims soon became integrated into Asante even while maintaining their identity as Muslims. In fact, compared to other West African countries, the proportion of Muslims is quite low, limited mainly to the northern half of the country and urban centers.³⁵ In addition, the expansion of Islam and its position as sociocultural integration created social and cultural polarisation between strangers and hosts (Asante during the era of colonialism)³⁶ because the colonial and Western contact brought great changes and modifications of indigenous institutions.³⁷

Most Muslims in Ghana follow Sunni Islam; about 20% are part of the Ahmadiyya movement, and about 8% are adherents of the Shia Islam faith. Some metropolitan areas and cities in Ghana have Islamic or Arabic schools offering primary, junior high, senior high, and tertiary education. The policy of positive discrimination was adopted towards Muslim Missionary schools, popularly referred to in Ghana as "English/Arabic schools". The Government provided financial, personnel and material support for these schools.

In the past Muslims did not show great openness to, and appreciation for non-Islamic education. This may be due to the fact that the preoccupation of those who introduced Islam to Ghana was to convert the people to Islam but not to formal education. In the case of the Christian Missionaries, the introduction of English education was to enable their converts to be able to read the Bible. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission is recognized as the Muslim sect most open to formal education. Ghana's Muslim population is expected to rise from 15% in 1996 to 20% in 2021, according to the Ghana Statistical Service's Population and Housing Census.

Institutions that have Fostered Peaceful Christian-Muslim Relations In Ghana

a. Forum of Religious Bodies

The Forum of Religious Bodies (FORB) which comprises representatives from the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Ghana Pentecostal Council, the Council of Independent Churches, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana, and the Federation of Muslim Councils of Ghana is an umbrella Forum of Religious Bodies emanated from discussions that dated back to 1978.

FORB promotes religious tolerance, harmony, and understanding; upholds freedom of worship as a fundamental human right; promotes the oneness of mankind, eliminates prejudice and discrimination, and protects cultural diversity; and encourages comparative religion in all educational institutions.³⁸ Its activities include organising joint meetings as religious leaders and between them and parties in dispute, producing collective messages for Ghanaians, and showing that differences of faith and creed should not hinder love, peace, and harmony.³⁹

b. The Roman Catholic Church - Interreligious Dialogue Committee

The 1949 Conference and First Plenary of the Roman Catholic Church in 1950 issued the first official declaration promoting the spiritual virtues of world faiths.⁴⁰ This declaration formed the basis for the Vatican Council's favourable view of various faiths. Pope John XXIII urged Christians to work with individuals of various religions who seek the unknown God in peace and kindness. Ghana's Catholic Church has a dialogue document based on Vatican II's policy. The Interreligious Committee of the Catholic Church in Ghana promotes peace and unity among followers of different religions, promotes

³⁵ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*.

³⁶ Enid Schildkrout, "Islam and Politics in Kumasi: An Analysis of Disputes over the Kumasi Central Mosque. Anthropological Papers of the AMNH; v. 52, Pt. 2," 1974.

³⁷ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*.

³⁸ David Owusu-Ansah and Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Ecumenicalism in the Context of Traditional Modes of Tolerance," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30, no. 2 (2019): 1–18.

³⁹ Nathan Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*, vol. 7 (LIT Verlag Münster, 2006).

⁴⁰ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

collaboration among religious bodies to improve humankind, designs participatory programmes and activities to bring people of different faiths together and stimulates mutual friendship, knowledge, and love, and provides a forum for all religious bodies to express their opinions on current issues. The committee joins Muslims for mosque worship and sends gifts and congratulatory messages during Muslim holidays. Ghanaian Muslim communities get yearly greetings from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.⁴¹

c. Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) is the pioneer interreligious organization in the continent of Africa, with a specific focus on Christians' relations with Muslims. PROCMURA promotes Christian-Muslim productive cooperation for peace and diplomatic coexistence.⁴² PROCMURA works with Ghana's Christian and Muslim communities to resolve the recurring crises in the north and advises Christians and Muslims in conflict-related matters across Africa.⁴³ According to Samwini, the mission statement of PROCMURA is;

“To keep before the churches in Africa their responsibility for understanding Islam and Muslims in their region in view of the Church’s task of interpreting faithfully in the Muslim world the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to effect the research and education necessary for this.”⁴⁴

Samwini posits that the mission statement brings out five essential issues:

- i. The churches have a responsibility, perhaps a duty, to understand Islam and the Muslims in Africa.
- ii. The churches are not prevented from their missionary mandate by the project's position, and they should faithfully interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of Muslims in Africa.
- iii. PROCMURA’s position differs quite radically from the position of the Roman Catholic Church which seems to seek collaboration with Muslims for justice and peace. PROCMURA aims to faithfully interpret the Gospel in the Muslim world – a missionary approach devoid of polemics but with the ultimate goal of achieving tolerance and recognition for Muslims
- iv. PROCMURA avoids dialogue, which appears to mean "no evangelization", and
- v. It avoids overt all-out evangelization of Muslims as a target group.

The Ghanaian Government and PROCMURA

The Ghanaian government promotes religious tolerance, respect, and acknowledgment of religious freedom. The 1992 Ghanaian Constitution states that all Ghanaians, regardless of race, origin, political opinion, color, religion, creed, or gender, are entitled to fundamental human rights and freedoms, but only if they respect others' rights and the public interest. This allows diverse religions to operate without unjustified interference. PROCMURA members pray for peace and tranquility for Ghanaians, leaders, and Africa.

The Government’s educational policy recognizes the teaching of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam to promote religious tolerance among the citizens. In addition, the government has also made Christian holidays as well as days of observance of Islamic holy days for the celebration of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, statutory holidays.⁴⁵

⁴¹ An interview with Justus Abban, the priest in charge of the Kumawu Rectorate of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Interview date, 04/01/22.

⁴² Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

⁴³ Interview with Reverend Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, the former General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana. Interview date, 30/10/20.

⁴⁴ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

⁴⁵ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*; Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, “An Analysis of the Socioeconomic Impacts of the Lockdown Policy in Ghana,” *Pandemic Response and the Cost of Lockdowns: Global Debates from Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2022.

Institutional Theory

Institutions can be divided into formal and informal governing mechanisms (constraints). Religious liberties could be delineated from formal government restrictions and social attitudes. Informal institutions, such as culture and social acceptance, may impact formal processes. On the other hand, the two systems (formal and informal systems) may collide, resulting in social tensions and violence which will require a dialogue between the formal and informal aspects of religious freedom, as well as between religious freedom and religion to address.⁴⁶ For example, non-democratic states impose a ban on religious defamation to protect the integrity of religious communities and minimize inter-religious conflict, as well as to gain support from religious groups, reduce religious opposition, and legitimise the regime.⁴⁷

Religious freedom is the right to act in public life based on one's religious views and identity.⁴⁸ This suggests that interference should be avoided since it might raise the expense of practising and spreading religion. It makes it easier to practise religion and more effective in spreading it. If unregulated, religious freedom may infringe on the religious freedom of others. Without the involvement of a third party, such as the government, violent conflicts may erupt, causing economic devastation. Religious laws imposed by the government, which are generally perceived as limits on religious freedom, may be important for social order and economic efficiency.⁴⁹

Article 18 of the UDHR and Article 25 of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief guarantee this right, which is also recognised by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. UNDRIP ensures that people have the right to visit and care for sacred places, and ceremonial artefacts, and repatriate them, and Article 25 acknowledges the spiritual significance of traditional lands.

Repression of Religious Minorities

Experts from the United Nations have urged the Iranian government to discontinue its persecution and harassment of religious minorities and its use of religious dogma to restrict basic freedoms. They have demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and that those responsible for the systemic persecution of religious minorities be held accountable. Concerns have also been raised about the harsh punishments for blasphemy under Iran's Criminal Code.⁵⁰

Legal Framework

The right to profess and practise any religion is guaranteed under the Ghanaian constitution, although no state religion is designated. The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana requires all religious organisations to register with the Ministry of Justice's Office of the Registrar General. Failure to register is not punishable by law, however, all religious organisations must register. The government and interfaith leaders continued to work on a proposed regulatory framework that would ensure religious rights and de-politised conflicts. The constitution outlaws religious discrimination, guarantees freedom of religion, and does not establish a national religion.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Alon, Li, and Wu, "An Institutional Perspective on Religious Freedom and Economic Growth."

⁴⁷ Peter S Henne, "The Domestic Politics of International Religious Defamation," *Politics and Religion* 6, no. 3 (2013): 512–37.

⁴⁸ Anthony Gill and Timothy S Shah, "Religious Freedom, Democratization, and Economic Development: A Survey of the Causal Pathways Linking Religious Freedom to Economic Freedom and Prosperity and Political Freedom and Democracy," in *Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture, Washington, DC Available at <http://www.asrec.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2015/10/Gill-Shah-Religious-Freedomdemocratization-and-Economic-Development.Pdf>*, 2013.

⁴⁹ Alon, Li, and Wu, "An Institutional Perspective on Religious Freedom and Economic Growth."

⁵⁰ United Nations, "Iran: UN Experts Alarmed by Escalating Religious Persecution," UN Human Rights, August 22, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/iran-un-experts-alarmed-escalating-religious-persecution>.

⁵¹ US Department of State, "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ghana," June 2, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ghana/>.

METHODOLOGY

The study relied on the qualitative research method to gather data for analysis. Interviews were used as the medium to gather data. The interviewees included two Catholic priests, two Muslim clerics, two security personnel, and two teachers each from Christian and Islamic Senior High Schools. In all, a total of ten interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted over the phone. Approximately 42 minutes were spent on each interviewee. The interview was conducted over a period of three days with the possibility of seeking clarification from an interviewee, if necessary. In addition to phone calls, a comprehensive literature survey was conducted to guide the selection of key issues as inputs for the interview. Content analysis was used to identify, summarize, and synthesize the themes.

FINDINGS

Tolerance and the desire to live in harmony among people of different faiths and backgrounds are the main contributory factors which promote good cordial relationships among members of the two religious groups. It was clear from the findings that members of the two religions make deliberate efforts, even in the face of provocations, to maintain the peace they enjoy. The connection between followers of the two religions has been shaped in part by the country's societal climate. Most Ghanaians are tenants in rented homes and apartments. As a result, they can have compassion for one another because of socialization which binds them together while living in apartments. Misunderstanding between adherents of the two faiths, according to the respondents, only leads to bloodshed in extreme cases. Many times, they resort to the proper authorities to settle any confusion. Respondents said members of a particular religion do not treat members of the other faith any differently because of their ethnicity. The respondents were unanimous in their assessment that Ghanaians are open to living with those of different ethnicities and religions. The findings confirm the fact that Ghana has a high level of religious and racial tolerance, with 80% of the population welcoming people of different religions and 14% indifferent to their friends' religion or race.

In addition, Christians and Muslims in Ghana living together in relative harmony is also due largely in, part to the efforts of the media. The media both celebrates the successes and condemns any behaviour that threatens social harmony. The capacity of the broadcast media to muzzle religiously motivated bigotry has been marked out. Furthermore, both faiths use television and radio as educational tools for their followers. Today, millions of individuals all over the country can tune in to religious and Islamic programming on national television networks. They employ various means of mass communication to disseminate their religious doctrines and instruct their followers. There has been no promotion of religious extremism through the media. The two major faiths are freely preached in both state-run and privately-owned media outlets. There has not been any Christian-Muslim tension in Ghana.

Religious officials from the two largest denominations in Ghana offer prayers at public events. The government has also declared days of celebrating Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter and days of celebrating Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, the statutory public holidays.⁵² Christians and Muslims now have an equal footing to the legalisation of Christian and Islamic festivals. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana prohibits religious discrimination and ensures the right of people to declare and practice any faith. In many predominantly Christian areas, there are mosques and in Muslim predominantly areas, there are churches. There has never been an occasion that either faith had complained about the activities of the church or the mosque. The peaceful coexistence of these faiths is a direct result of the regular ecumenical discourse among their respective leaders. Most of these conversations have come out of the positive collaborative efforts from both sides to increase mutual knowledge and acceptance. Several religious groups in Ghana, including the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Ghana Pentecostal Council, the Council of Independent Churches, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana, and the Federation of Muslim

⁵² Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*; Adu-Gyamfi, "An Analysis of the Socioeconomic Impacts of the Lockdown Policy in Ghana."

Councils of Ghana, have participated in and used the results of interfaith dialogues to call for unity. The significance of these talks lies in the fact that they have contributed to the spread of religious tolerance, harmony, and understanding, and have defended the right to religious freedom. As a result, the interfaith talks have helped Ghanaians feel more united and have reduced instances of prejudice and bigotry.⁵³ Christians and Muslims frequently entertain each other during religious festivals.

Islamic and missionary education have also contributed greatly to the peaceful harmony among the members of the two faiths. People of many different faiths study under the same roof of these institutions. The students pick useful information and skills from one another. Thus, Christians and Muslims can learn from and respect one another's faith. Non-Christians enrolled in Christian schools are often required to attend Sunday church services or vespers. The practice is to instill in the diverse student population a healthy respect for authority and tolerance of those who practise different faiths.

Also, the inclusion of religious studies in public schools has helped to foster understanding and mutual respect for the diverse religions in Ghana, especially the two religions. Religious and spiritual studies are included in the curriculum from elementary school through ninth grade. At age six, children are exposed to the three major religious practices in Ghana: Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion. The students are taught the morals and ethics of the faith as well as the importance of family.

Most Ghanaian schools now incorporate Christian religious practices into their daily morning and midday assembly routines. At the beginning and end of each school day, Muslim students say the Lord's Prayer. The Fatiha is said instead of the Lord's Prayer in classrooms that are part of Islamic organisations. Through personal testimonies, connections, teaching, and marriage, Muslims in Ghana have shown that they are missionary-minded and tolerant of non-Islamic schooling.

On the contrary, there are cases of inter-religious violence even though there are formal structures in place to promote collaboration in some Senior High Schools. Despite their role as a hub for encouraging religious tolerance and coexistence, the country has also witnessed some inter-faith disputes in Senior High Schools. A Muslim student was killed at one of the schools in the Central Regional capital of Ghana, and also in Sekondi-Takoradi, Western Region, female Muslim students were barred from getting their passport photos taken. The leaders of Ghana's two largest faiths deserve commendation for their contribution towards the peaceful coexistence between their followers. These leaders are well aware of the potential for religious extremism to spark wars of religion among their followers over differences in text interpretation. While it can be argued that great enthusiasm has been displayed from both parties, this has not been well received by the people. The results also show that the apparent lack of major religious conflict in Ghana can be attributed to the good counsel of the leaders of these two faiths.

Sheikh Osmanu Sharubutu, Ghana's National Chief Imam, has been an outstanding leader in the country's efforts to promote religious harmony, peace, and tolerance. His untiring efforts in this area have promoted cordial relationships between Christians and Muslims in particular. On Easter Sunday of 2021, as a gesture towards strengthening Christian-Muslim ties, he attended a ceremony at Accra's Christ the King Catholic Church. He has been instrumental in facilitating the end of religious disputes and disasters in a timely manner.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, religious leaders from both divides reached out to the most disadvantaged members of their communities, including members of the other religion. Christians and Muslims get along well because they treat each other with kindness and acceptance.

According to the Pew Forum on Faith & Public Life, no faith appears to be gaining ground.⁵⁴ Christianity and Islam are both on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the poll suggests that neither religion will have the pleasure of experiencing the same explosive expansion in the twenty-first century

⁵³ Owusu-Ansah and Akyeampong, "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Ecumenicalism in the Context of Traditional Modes of Tolerance."

⁵⁴ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 1615 L Street NW Suite 700, 2010).

that it did in the past. This is because many locals have already chosen to follow either Christianity or Islam, leaving fewer people of other religions as potential recruits.

It is thought that the rise in the literacy rate in Muslim communities in Ghana has contributed to the cordial relationship among members of the two faiths. More importantly, in recent years, there has been a rise in the fraction of Muslims who are students or graduates of postsecondary institutions. Until recently, the northern part of Ghana lacked adequate access to mainstream educational institutions. Even though the literacy rate among members of these two faiths can be said to be on the rise, despite the level of education attained by members of the two faiths, some members continue to misinterpret religious events and societal development.

The statutes and provisions in the Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992 that calls for respect of religious freedom and organisation may also be credited with contributing to the peaceful coexistence that exists between people who adhere to the Christian and Islamic religions. Respondents expressed the opinion that because there are repercussions for any kind of infraction, Ghanaians would rather protect such liberties. The television media in Ghana must be commended educating the people on the need to respect the rights of others. This necessary civic education is broadcast over both publicly and privately owned channels and television networks. The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) has also made significant contributions in this regard.

Finally, Christian and Muslim coexistence is seen generally as peaceful, though in past the members of these two religions had some form of disagreements and confrontations.⁵⁵ However many Muslims are becoming alarmed by the widespread tendency to link their faith with violence. In their view, stigmatising a belief system in this way only serves to further marginalise it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though there exists an interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, it is critical for leaders of these faiths to sustain this positive achievement to promote religious discourse and tolerance, and peace in the country. Interfaith organisations should take a proactive stance rather than a reactionary one if they are to maintain their relevance in the conversation about religious harmony. However, efforts by individual agencies, religious organisations, and civil society groups to promote religious tolerance have been seen as one-sided due to the fact that they deal with people in authority which leads to a credibility gap on the part of these institutions.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that Christians and Muslims in Ghana can live side by side without conflict. They can coexist peacefully because of the following: i) the Ghanaian society is inherently tolerant, ii) progressive government policies and legislation, iii) welcoming social climate, and iv) the media's objective role in fostering and maintaining religious tolerance. The media boldly lauds the achievements of these religions while condemning actions that disrupt societal peace. Interfaith organisations have been at the forefront of ensuring the friendly connection between the religions that exist today. The leadership of the two faiths additionally helped to shape an even more promising future. However, Muslims are concerned that stigmatising their faith can lead to a religious war, as not all northern Ghanaians practise Islam and Muslims are not the only ones who commit crimes. More effort should be put into creating awareness of the need for religious peace in all societies across the country to ensure growth and development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adam, Konadu, Frederick Mensah Bonsu, and Dorcas Amedorme. "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, May 13, 2022, 175–87.
<https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2022352>.

⁵⁵ Obeng-Mireku, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Ghana and Nigeria*.

- Adu-Gyamfi, Samuel. "An Analysis of the Socioeconomic Impacts of the Lockdown Policy in Ghana." *Pandemic Response and the Cost of Lockdowns: Global Debates from Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2022.
- Alon, Ilan, Shaomin Li, and Jun Wu. "An Institutional Perspective on Religious Freedom and Economic Growth." *Politics and Religion* 10, no. 3 (2017): 689–716.
- Alon, Ilan, and John Spitzer. "Does Religious Freedom Affect Country Risk Assessment?" *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 2003, 51–62.
- Antwi, M. K. Development of education in Ghana (1880-1990). Introduction to education in Ghana. Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1992.
- Ayangafac, Chrysantus. "Situation Critical: The Anjouan Political Crisis," 2008.
- Azumah, John. "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup." *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000): 5–9.
- Barro, Robert J, and Rachel M McCleary. "Religion and Economic Growth." National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge, Mass., USA, 2003.
- Basedau, Matthias. "The Rise of Religious Armed Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: No Simple Answers," 2017.
- Basedau, Matthias, and Johanna Schaefer-Kehnert. "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?" In *The Correlates of Religion and State*, 29–46. Routledge, 2020.
- Bob-Milliar, George, and Gloria Bob-Milliar. "Christianity In The Ghanaian State In The Past Fifty Years." GhanaWeb, 2007. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Christianity-In-The-Ghanaian-State-In-The-Past-Fifty-Years-119921>.
- Eshpulotovich, Toshpulotov Shokhijakhon, and Sapayev Utkir Turayevich. "International Political Mechanisms for Ensuring Religious Tolerance and the Importance of Its Teaching in Educational Institutions." *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2020): 5265–68.
- Gill, Anthony, and Timothy S Shah. "Religious Freedom, Democratization, and Economic Development: A Survey of the Causal Pathways Linking Religious Freedom to Economic Freedom and Prosperity and Political Freedom and Democracy." In *Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture, Washington, DC Available at [Http://Www. Asrec. Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2015/10/Gill-Shah-Religious-Freedomdemocratization-and-Economic-Development. Pdf](http://www.asrec.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2015/10/Gill-Shah-Religious-Freedomdemocratization-and-Economic-Development.Pdf)*, 2013.
- Hashim M.A.M. "A Journey through Islam: Muslims have come up well in Ghana." Arab News, 1st March, 2013.
- Henne, Peter S. "The Domestic Politics of International Religious Defamation." *Politics and Religion* 6, no. 3 (2013): 512–37.
- Lado, Ludovic, and Tiffany Lynch. "Religious Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Future of the Secular State," 2014.
- Life, Pew Forum on Religion & Public. "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 1615 L Street NW Suite 700, 2010.
- Michel, Thomas. "Social and Religious Factors Affecting Muslim-Christian Relations." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 1 (1997): 53–66.
- Ngwodo, Chris. "Understanding Boko Haram: A Theology of Chaos." Retrieved May 20 (2010): 2014.
- Obeng-Mireku, Emmanuel. *Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Ghana and Nigeria*. University of Lethbridge (Canada), 2017.
- Omenyo, Cephas N, and Abamfo O Atiemo. "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana." *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 55–68.
- Owusu-Ansah, David, and Emmanuel Akyeampong. "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Ecumenicalism in the Context of Traditional Modes of Tolerance." *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30, no. 2 (2019): 1–18.

- Planet, Lonely, Anthony Ham, Michael Grosberg, Nana Luckham, Vesna Maric, Helen Ranger, Caroline Sieg, Helena Smith, and Paul Stiles. *Lonely Planet West Africa*. Lonely Planet, 2017.
- Pollack, William S. *No Man Is an Island: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Psychology of Men*. Basic Books/Hachette Book Group, 1995.
- Poupko, Yehiel. "Jews and Evangelicals-between Prophecy And." *Uneasy Allies?*, 2007, 155–65.
- Salm, Steven J, and Toyin Falola. *Culture and Customs of Ghana*. greenwood publishing group, 2002.
- Samwini, Nathan. *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*. Vol. 7. LIT Verlag Münster, 2006.
- Sarbah, Cosmas Ebo. "A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values," 2010.
<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:127863703>.
- . "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Ghana: Competition or Co-Operation?" *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 2017, 47.
- Schildkrout, Enid. "Islam and Politics in Kumasi: An Analysis of Disputes over the Kumasi Central Mosque. Anthropological Papers of the AMNH; v. 52, Pt. 2," 1974.
- Schodolski, Vincent J. Gorbachev Rues Jewish Exodus, Chicago Tribune, October 07, 1991. [Http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-10-07/news/9103310768_1_soviet-jewsemigration-soviet-society](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-10-07/news/9103310768_1_soviet-jewsemigration-soviet-society).
- Smock, David R. *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War*. US Institute of Peace, 2006.
- United Nations. "Iran: UN Experts Alarmed by Escalating Religious Persecution." UN Human Rights, August 22, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/iran-un-experts-alarmed-escalating-religious-persecution>.
- US Department of State. "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ghana," June 2, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ghana/>.
- Zuckerman, Phil, and John R Shook. *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Rev. Dr. Eric Oduro Wiafe is currently a Senior Lecturer and the acting President of the Catholic Institute of Business and Technology, Accra Ghana. He holds a Masters in Catholic Leadership, MPhil in Religion and PhD in Pastoral Theology. His research focuses on Pastoral Theological Issues, Church and societal issues and Inter-religious dialogue