


## Renewing the mind, transforming the society: Reflections on Romans 12:2 from a Ghanaian perspective



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### ABSTRACT

This article examines how the practicalization of Paul's concept of the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2) may contribute to the transformation of the human society. It is a sequel to an earlier article written on Romans 12:1 which considered how the offering of the believer's life as a living, holy and pleasing sacrifice to God might inform the worship life, ethical decisions and lifestyle of the believer. It noted that living a sacrificial life involves a total dedication to God in response to his gracious mercies manifested toward the believer. The two papers are meant to encourage believers to engage the public sphere with their faith. The present paper is literature-based research that gathered data from books, articles, and dissertations. After a textual analysis of the text (Rom. 12:2), it was discovered that social transformation is an inevitable result of the transformation of the individual through the renewal of the mind. The paper contributes to the public theological discourse on how Christianity may transform the human society.

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### INTRODUCTION

A careful observer of the Ghanaian religious landscape would appreciate that Ghanaians are very religious. Christianity is the most dominant religion in Ghana today. About 71.3% of the populace profess to be Christians.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the country continues to show high levels of indiscipline, corruption, bribery, sexual immorality, armed robbery and other social vices. Various scholars have considered these issues from both secular and Christian perspectives. The discourse is still ongoing because the issues still persist. This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on how the Ghanaian society can be transformed by Christianity by exploring how Romans 12:2 may facilitate the renewal of the individual and subsequently, enhance the transformation of the country.

Paul is considered by many New Testament scholars as the author of the letter to the Romans. Paul used Tertius as his secretary in writing this letter (see 16:22). The general belief is that Paul wrote Romans between 57 and 58 AD to foster good Jewish-Gentile relationships in the church at Rome (cf. Rom. 3:20-31; 11:17-32), to discuss some Christian doctrines (see 1:16; 3:8 and 9:1-2) and to ask for support for his mission to Spain (15:24, 28).<sup>2</sup> Paul was not the founder of the church in Rome. He,

<sup>1</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census* (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Powell, *Introduction to the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 258; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Romans," In Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer

however, decided to write to them as part of his role as a shepherd of God's church. There is a high probability that the Roman church was founded by Christian converts from Palestine and Syria (cf. Acts 2:10). The passage under consideration (Rom. 12:2) forms part of Paul's moral teachings in Romans 12:1–15:13. Romans 12:1-2 follows directly from the preceding text (1:1–11:36) and serves as the summation of Paul's teachings that follow in 12:3–15:13.<sup>3</sup> With this brief introduction, the study proceeds to read the text more closely.

### Textual analysis

The Greek text reads: *καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.*<sup>4</sup>

The NIV rendition is as follows: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”<sup>5</sup>

### Nonconformity to Worldly Standards

The verse under consideration has two commands constituting two sides of the believer's commitment. The first is the negative command, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world” and the second, the positive command, “... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (NIV). The first command exhorts the believer not to live according to the standards of the world. The Greek word translated “conform” is *schema* from which the word “scheme” is derived.<sup>6</sup> The word *aiōn* translated “world”, though can mean “the created universe” (cf. Heb. 1:2), is used in the present context in reference to “the current or passing age” (cf. 1 Cor. 7:73; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21; 1 John 2:17) which is under Satan's dominion.<sup>7</sup> Paul's use of the word *aiōn* is in line with the Judean tradition of distinguishing between the present age of evil and suffering and the coming age of redemption from evil and suffering.

John D. K. Ekem opines that “the world” in the present context “embodies worldly systems that are based on human philosophies without any recognition of God's involvement or submission to his will.”<sup>8</sup> This means that whatever the world values does not depend on God but on what human beings deem fit. Again, one cannot follow worldly standards and be subjected to God's will at the same time. The idea that one cannot serve two masters, God and Mammon, at the same time without despising one and loving the other (Matt. 6:24), is reminiscent of this fact. The Bono-Twi (Akan) proverb, *Wontumi mfa wo ani mmienu nhwe toa baako mu*, “You cannot look into a bottle with your two eyes (at the same time),” when applied to the present text means that one cannot conform to worldly standards without rejecting or contradicting God's standards. Similarly, the one who conforms to God's standards will inevitably contradict worldly standards. A similar idea is found in 1 John 2:15-17 where it is asserted that love for the world and its schemes amount to a failure to love God and to do his will.

The word “conform” means “to be fashioned or molded according to a pattern” or “to comply with rules or standards.” These rules or standards refer to the philosophies, and worldviews that

and Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 830-868 (Ibadan: Society of St. Paul, 2011), 830; Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* 5th edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 433-434.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this consult Isaac Boaheng, “Applying Paul's theological and ethical teachings in Romans 12:1 to an African context.” *International Journal of Social Science and Religion* (IJSSR). 4(1) (2023): 23-41.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I have used the Greek text here, I will use transliterated forms in the discussions that follow in order to make the work accessible to readers who do not have the ability to read the Greek text. I have adopted this strategy to meet the needs of readers with working knowledge in Greek and those without such knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> The NIV has been adopted because it appears to the author as a relatively more faithful, natural and accurate rendering of the Greek text.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 208.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, *Romans*, 208.

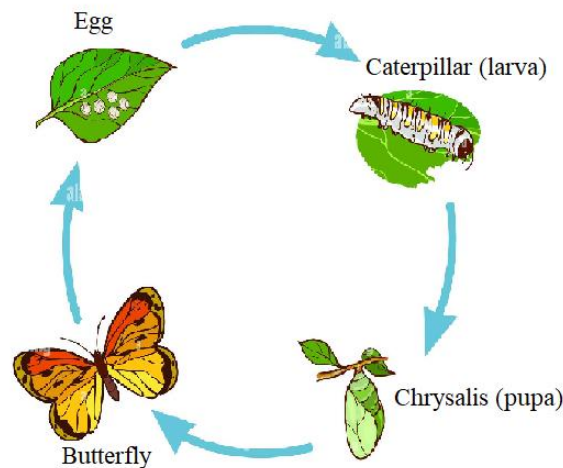
<sup>8</sup> John D. K. Ekem, “An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2 using Ghanaian mother tongue translations” In *Living a Transformed life in Jesus Christ (Romans 12): Reflections on Discipleship* edited by John Abedu Quashie and Mark S. Aidoo, pp. 25-38 (Accra: JEM Publications, 2021), 33.

prevailed among unbelievers in Paul's days. Though many of such worldly standards may have elements common in all societies, some of them are contextually conditioned. In the construction industry, there are block molds that are used to fashion the sand according to a particular pattern. The sewing industry also has a pattern for various sewing styles according to which cloths are cut for sewing the same style. The original pattern always fashions the new cloth to be sewn. The expression "show me your friend and let me show you your characters" considers one's life as patterned according to his/her friend's character. Such is the relationship between the pattern and the object that follows the pattern.

One may translate Paul's command as "Do not conform to the schemes of this passing evil age."<sup>9</sup> For Paul, the believer, considering the mercies of God manifested in his/her life (Rom. 12:1), must put aside the lifestyle of the "present evil world." Nonconformity to this age "may include not investing heavily in the transitory values of 'this world' that is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31)."<sup>10</sup> Anyone who conforms to the standards of this world makes the wrong choice because of the transient nature of the world. Earthly values and treasures are transient, vulnerable, and have no eternal value. They are really passing and fading off.

### The Mind and Transformation

For Paul, God's redemptive act must yield the transformation of the believer by the renewal of the mind, evident in the believer's ethical life.<sup>11</sup> The word *metamorphoō* (translated as "transform") means "to be changed from one thing into another" and a transliterated form gives the English word "metamorphosis," which is commonly used to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly as shown in fig. 1 below. There are four stages in the metamorphosis of the butterfly; egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The change from one stage to another is irreversible, meaning the larva cannot become an egg, the pupa cannot become a larva and the adult cannot turn into a pupa.



**Fig. 1: Life cycle of the butterfly**

Similarly, the believer has metamorphosed. The transformation of the believer is meant to make him/her conform to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29). This requires the believer to identify with the eschatological hope rather than identifying with the transient things of this world. Since believers have died with Christ to sin and resurrected with him to righteousness (6:4–5; 8:11), they must locate their

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, *Romans*, 208; cf.; John A. Witmer, "Romans," In John F. Walwood and Roy B. Zuck (eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 435-504 (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1983), 487; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988), 487.

<sup>10</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 151.

<sup>11</sup> Royce Gordon Gruenler, "Romans" In *Baker Commentary on the Bible* edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2008), 950.

identity in their eternal destiny rather than in people's perspective about them in this world (6:11).<sup>12</sup> If the believer's identity is located in his/her eschatological state, then he/she must be determined to endure the hardship of this temporal world in order not to lose the glory that awaits him/her in the world to come.

Paul considers the mind as instrumental in the believer's offer of his/her body as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice to God (12:2; cf. 12:1). The transformation of the believer takes place by the renewal of the mind. The mind is that part of the body where the processing and analysis of information take place. Whatever one sees, hears, smells, touches, or tastes is processed by the mind. The mind was created with consciousness and it was created to know and relate to God. The fall affected the state of the mind. The state of the mind of the fallen human requires the redemptive power of God to redeem it from corruption so that the negative effects of the fall on it could be reversed. The renewal of the mind requires one to "recognize and share the act of redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus."<sup>13</sup>

For Paul, the mind is not necessarily good; it needs to be renewed. The imperfect nature of humanity requires the mind to be renewed in order to control the thoughts, and emotions which will affect one's feelings and subsequently, determine his/her actions. As Thomas R. Schreiner asserts "Even though believers have been converted, transformation and utter submission to God occurs as new ways of thinking are adopted."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the mental focus of the believer must be different from that of the unbeliever. Being transformed by the renewal of the mind is the opposite of being conformed to the world. The believer, whose mind is renewed, does not think like an unbeliever. The thinking pattern of believers "must be informed by truth so that they can comprehend and carry out God's will."<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Paul's concept of the renewal of the mind is practical and contrasts the Greco-Roman idea that one could become new through conversion to philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

Paul considers the "power of reason" as a tool by which one can be molded to have Christ's way of thinking. Being in Christ means thinking like Christ (cf. Phil. 2:5). This, however, does not mean believers are to be emotionless; rather it means "irrational thinking will result in irrational emotions, while rational thinking will result in rational emotions."<sup>17</sup> Thus, Leon Morris writes: "Paul does not envisage a mindless emotionalism, but a deeply intelligent approach to life, as characteristic of the Christian who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit."<sup>18</sup> This means that even though emotions can be expressed by Christians, they must be guided by reason. Morris continues, "The term 'mind' is not confined to intellectual pursuits (it includes an important moral element), but it certainly embraces them. The force of the present tense should not be overlooked; Paul envisages a continuing process of renewal."<sup>19</sup> The mental renewal Paul has in mind is, therefore, a process rather than an event. The renewing of the mind has been initiated by God's mercies and the believer is only expected to cooperate for it to be completed. God is, therefore, the one who brings the transformation, and so one can say "Let God transform you inwardly", the inward transformation being "a complete change of your mind", "a new attitude of mind" or "a mind that is remade."<sup>20</sup> The renewed mind of Romans 12:1-3 is markedly different from the corrupt mind of Romans 1:18-32 (as shown in the table 1 below).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2009), 144.

<sup>13</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Continuum, 1991), 215.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 253.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's glory in Christ*, 253.

<sup>16</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 152.

<sup>17</sup> Edward D. Andrews, *Evidence That You Are Truly Christian: Keep Testing Yourselves to See If You are in the faith—keeping examining yourselves* (Cambridge: Christian Publishing House, 2015), 52.

<sup>18</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 435.

<sup>19</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 435.

<sup>20</sup> Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans: UBS Handbook Series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), n.p. (ParaText version).

<sup>21</sup> This table has been adopted from Keener, *The mind of the Spirit*, 155.

**Table 1: Differences between a corrupt mind and renewed mind**

<b>Romans 1:18–32</b>	<b>Romans 12:1–3</b>
Humanity failed to thank God (1:21) and eventually worshiped idols (1:23)	Believers worship God, dedicating themselves as sacrifices (12:1)
They corrupted their bodies (1:24)	They offer their bodies (12:1) to serve Christ's body (12:4–8)
They belong to the present age (cf. verb tenses in (1:18–32))	Not conforming to this age, their minds are made new (12:2)
They did not approve the knowledge of God, so God allowed their minds to be corrupted (1:28)	God renews their minds so they may approve his will (12:2)
Their corrupted minds yielded selfish vices (1:28–31)	The renewed mind yields acts of service to Christ's body (12:1–8)

### Ways in which the renewed mind proves God's will

As a result of the renewal of the mind, the believer is able to *dokimazō* (“discern”) “what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (NRSV).<sup>22</sup> “The will of God” may refer to God's sovereign will (which always comes to pass without fail) or God's revealed will (such as “Do not steal”, or “Do not kill”) which sometimes does not come to pass. God's will is always perfect and whoever lives according to it becomes good and acceptable to God. The renewal of the mind makes one live a kind of life that one can know is “good in itself, satisfying, and complete.”<sup>23</sup> Paul outlines eight ways in which the renewed mind proves God's will.<sup>24</sup> First, the renewed mind offers sacrificial worship which requires one to offer his/her whole being for the service of God. Sacrificial worship becomes one's way of life rather than occasional events. The renewed mind, therefore, accomplishes what the law purposed to achieve.

Secondly, the renewal of one's mind leads to the effective use of one's gifts of grace for the benefit of the entire body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8).<sup>25</sup> The gifts of grace are diverse and each believer is given one or more for the common good of the Christian community. John F. MacArthur Jr. argues that “Spiritual gifts are given to edify the body, not the gifted individual (1 Cor. 14:4-5, 17, 26). When you see someone using his gift selfishly or as a performance, or putting other people into a state of unconsciousness, you can be sure that whatever he is doing, he is not using a legitimate spiritual gift.”<sup>26</sup> It takes the renewal of the mind to accept the communal use and benefits of these gifts. The renewed mind promotes the appreciation and use of one's gift rather than abandoning it and craving for other gifts.

Thirdly, the renewed mind proves God's will in loving acts of service and hospitality (Rom. 12:9-13).<sup>27</sup> In Ghana, these loving and hospitable acts include sharing resources with others, including sharing food, money, water, and clothing with the needy. Interdependence, interconnectedness, and solidarity are key defining characteristics of the Christian community. The believer should be at the disposal of others, living not for him/herself but for others. The Christian disposability espoused by Paul draws on the Gospel account of Jesus' self-giving. Paul admonishes his readers to demonstrate sincere love, as opposed to “showy and counterfeit superficiality”, and serve God in spirit and in truth, focusing on nothing but the eschatological reward that awaits them so that they can patiently endure sufferings in the present age.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 144.

<sup>23</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), 193.

<sup>24</sup> Gruenler, “Romans,” 950.

<sup>25</sup> Gruenler, “Romans,” 950.

<sup>26</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Oasis International Ltd, 1992), 161.

<sup>27</sup> Gruenler, “Romans,” 951.

<sup>28</sup> Gruenler, “Romans,” 951.

Fourthly, the renewed mind proves God's will in imitating the teachings of Christ (Rom. 12:14-21).<sup>29</sup> According to Jesus, the believer's love for him should be exhibited in the believer's keeping of his commandments (John 14:15). Keeping Jesus's commandments makes one conform to his (Jesus's) likeness, which is the main focus of discipleship. Paul's exhortation that believers bless and not curse (Rom. 12:14) and also that believers should not "take revenge" (v. 19) draws on Jesus's teachings in Matthew 5:43-48 and also on his assertion that the believer's righteousness must be higher than the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). Without following Christ there is no evidence of the renewal of the mind.

Fifthly, the renewed mind proves God's will in contributing to the development of the society, "rendering Caesar's to Caesar" (13:1-7). Paul makes the point that governing authority comes from God and so believers are to subject themselves to their leaders. He exhorts his readers to live in harmony with others as far as possible and avoid insubordination to divinely established governing authority (13:1-2). He advises his readers to pay taxes, maintain social orderliness and contribute their quota to the socio-economic and political development of their society. These teachings are in line with Peter's admonishment that believers must not use their freedom to bring reproach to the gospel but must have a servant attitude that leads to respect for the believing community (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-17).<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that while the renewed mind is expected to obey the ruling authority, the believer must resist laws that contradict moral imperative(s).<sup>31</sup> In this regard, the Apostolic principle of obedience to God rather than to humans (Acts 5:29; see also Dan. 3:6) must be applied.<sup>32</sup> The resistance must, however, be peaceful, not involving arms and violence. Persuading the ruling authority to do what is right and just is a good step. Above all, the believer is expected to seek divine intervention.

Sixthly, the renewed mind proves God's will in loving one's neighbor as oneself (13:8-10).<sup>33</sup> For Paul, righteous, harmonious living through faith is a hallmark of the believer. One of the essential aspects of harmonious living is to love one another. While Paul admonishes his readers to subject themselves to the rules of the government, he also acknowledges a higher law that will always be appropriate, no matter the circumstance. This higher law was given by Paul when he said whoever loves his/her neighbor has fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8). This is a development of Jesus' identification of the greatest commandment as loving God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind—and to loving others as one loves him/herself (Matt. 22:37). The declaration that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10b NIV) parallels the assertion that "Christ is the culmination of the law" (10:4 NIV) because "it is in the act of disposability on behalf of others that Christ is seen to be the personification of love and the fulfillment of the law."<sup>34</sup> The renewed mind appreciates God's love and then, in response, loves God back and loves the neighbor as God's treasure. Craig asserts "It is not the self-focused struggle under the law in 7:14–25 but rather the others-focused character of love in 13:8–10 that fulfills the law."<sup>35</sup> Clearly, no one can fulfill the law without loving God and other humans.

Seventhly, the renewed mind proves God's will in living as in the day not as in darkness (13:11-14).<sup>36</sup> Paul considers the things done in the day as things done in accordance with God's will and in the light of the gospel. Things done in darkness are those that are done by unbelievers and that contradict the gospel. While it is difficult to reconstruct the situation that Paul addresses in this letter, it is likely that his strictness to questionable behavior (vv. 12b-13) may have been his reaction to people who were claiming to be Christians and yet involving themselves in worldly things that they used to do. This situation is not peculiar to this letter. In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages the

<sup>29</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 951.

<sup>30</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 951.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "'Be Subject to the Governing Authorities': A Ghanaian Christian Understanding of Romans 13:1," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences (JETEMS)* 3 no.5 (2012): 485-490, 487.

<sup>32</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 952.

<sup>33</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 952.

<sup>34</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 952.

<sup>35</sup> Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 155.

<sup>36</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 952.

Corinthian believers to live a new life in accordance with the gospel of Christ. He rejects the factionalism that had crept into the church (1 Cor. 3:1-10) and asked for orderliness in worship service (12—14). He makes the point that, whoever is in Christ is a new creature, the old things are gone and the new things must be done (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul's point is that when one becomes a Christian, the person has to turn away from the sinful deeds that he/she used to do and live as one who has the light of Christ (Eph. 5:8-9). This thought is in line with the concept of metamorphosis and transformation examined earlier. Paul's admonishment that those who have their minds renewed are expected to live in the day but not in darkness is an encouragement to believers to conform to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

When one becomes a Christian, the person's sinful nature or the desires of the flesh still wants to overcome him/her. Therefore, one has to be cautious and alert. Paul's teaching is reminiscent of Jesus' call for alertness and watchfulness (Matt. 25:31-46, Mark 13:33-37) and alludes to the fact the coming of the Messiah is going to be sudden and expected. Therefore, those whose minds are renewed must be alert all the time so that they will not be taken by surprise when the Lord comes back. Paul's points can be summarized as follows: "Believers have already clothed themselves with Christ by being baptized into him (Gal. 3:27), which signals their new essence in Christ but they must express this in practice (existentially) as they stand into each new moment of decision."<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the renewed mind proves God's will in pursuing peace between the weak and strong (Rom. 14:1—15:13).<sup>38</sup> As it is in every human community, the church at Rome was made up of those with weak faith and those with strong faith. In Romans 14:1-12, Paul addresses both Christians with strong faith and those weak in the church and encourages them to agree on the essential issues of the Christian faith and also to consider their differences regarding such issues as the eating of meat and Sabbath laws as matters of individual conscience and hence, unessential to salvation.<sup>39</sup> This problem was not unique to the church in Rome. The churches at Corinth and Colossae all had similar problems (1 Cor. 8:1—10:33; Col 2:16-23).<sup>40</sup> As the result of differences between individuals concerning these issues, the church was divided into two main groups; namely, those who argued that the Sabbath law and the food law were required for one to be saved and those who argued that those laws were not a requirement for salvation.

For Paul, even though these laws are not required for salvation, it was important that one does not use his/her freedom to cause another person to stumble. The key to Paul's appeal in the larger sense is found in Romans 15:3 which says "For even Christ did not place himself" (NIV). Based on this, Paul's point is that Christians are not to live for themselves but for their neighbor's good; to build them up in the faith (15:1-2) so that there will be a spirit of unity in the body of Christ. It is against this backdrop that Paul strongly warns against passing judgment (14:1, 3-4, 10:12) on one whose faith is weak or the one who lacks the maturity to make a distinction between essential and non-essential matters as long as the person is fully convinced in his/her own mind and gives thanks to God like the stronger believer in his/her own mind (14:6). Paul warned the renewed mind to acknowledge the fact that at the end of the day, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will be the final judge and will judge fairly. Therefore, those with a renewed mind are not to judge others in regard to trivial matters.

Given the above eight ways in which the renewed mind proves God's will, one realizes that the transformation of the mind is fundamental to the Pauline ethical teachings in Romans, especially from chapter 12 to chapter 15. Without the renewal of the mind, one can neither please God nor offer acceptable sacrifice to God. The direction of the renewed mind is godliness. A person whose mind is renewed lives to please God and not to please others.

The above exposition has implications for social transformation, some of which are outlined below.

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<sup>37</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 953.

<sup>38</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 953.

<sup>39</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 953.

<sup>40</sup> Gruenler, "Romans," 953.

## Implications for societal transformation

In this section, the paper outlines two key areas in which the renewal of the believer's mind might help transform the society. The two areas are Christian spirituality and work ethics.

### Mental renewal and Christian spirituality

The Ghanaian church has in the last and present centuries, witnessed a great enthusiasm for spirituality within all Christian denominations. Christian spirituality within the modern-day church manifests itself in a wide variety of forms—including activities such as prayers, offerings, “mercy” ministries, church attendance, retreats and revivals, music, architectural designs of the church and biblical interpretation—each of which aims at enhancing higher consciousness of God. Given that the kingdom of God is spiritual rather than physical, the rise in the quest for spirituality must be considered as a necessary step toward the preparation of the church for the Kingdom to come. Paul's concept of the renewal of the mind relates to and must inform Christian spirituality.

The spiritual (and transformed) person should use his/her gift of grace for the benefit of other believers (Rom. 12:6-8). Gifts are given for the edification of the entire church, not just the edification of the individual. If so, then believers are not to commercialize the graces and gifts that they have been endowed with. Unfortunately, some pastors in Ghana exploit their “clients” in the name of helping them to have their breakthroughs. People continue to pay such consultation fees because they have become vulnerable and believe that their help will come from these pastors. According to Pashington Obeng, deliverance practices in Ghana are characterized by “the demand for monetary support from the vulnerable in exchange for blessing...”<sup>41</sup> Some prophets “charge exorbitantly, sometimes even before attempting a cure. The patient's generous donation in the form of a tithe is sometimes made a prerequisite for healing.”<sup>42</sup> Rockson Adofo observes that the foremost priority of some pastors in Ghana “is to make money rather than to seek the salvation of their congregants.”<sup>43</sup> Such pastors “entice their church members, victims I may call them, with completely false prophecies in most instances. Their churches have turned into mints; their members are subserviently brainwashed to churn out money at the crack of the pastor's fingers. What a pity!”<sup>44</sup>

The above approach to ministry, in which pastors focus mainly on making money by providing a solution to people's problems, does not enhance effective discipleship. It makes Christians think that God's blessings can be bought. It also makes people think that only the pastor can access God's blessings directly. No wonder church members continue to rush to their pastors with petty issues. Instead of effectively nurturing their members to relate directly with Christ, most pastors stand in between Christ and the believer, such that it is the pastor who accesses blessings from God and then passes them on to their believers. This not only makes Christians lazy but also contradicts the priesthood of all believers which means that all Christians have direct access to God because of their priestly nature.

Moreover, the contemporary society is full of misconceptions about spirituality. There is confusion about God's view of Christian spirituality. Many people consider spirituality in terms of aggressive prayers and shouting when preaching or when leading a church program as indicators of genuine Christian spirituality. One should note that while aggressive prayer is not necessarily an unchristian practice, it neither necessarily determines one's spirituality nor make prayer effective. A spiritually-effective prayer is one that is offered with faith and in accordance with the will of God. As noted earlier, when one's mind is transformed, not in accordance with worldly standards but in accordance with biblical standards, the person knows the perfect will of God. The prayer of the mentally renewed person is, therefore, expected to be effective because he/she is capable of discerning

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<sup>41</sup> Pashington Obeng, “Abibisom (Indigenous religion) by Another Name: Critical Look at Deliverance Ministries in Ghana,” *Trinity Journal of Church and Society* 18(2) (2014):27–40, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Dominic Umoh, “Prosperity Gospel and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Nigerian Story African,” *African Journal of Scientific Research*, 12(1) (2013):654-668, 663.

<sup>43</sup> Rockson Adofo, “Modern Day Pastors Involved in Quackery” (2014). [Accessed: January 16, 2023 from <http://newsghana.com.gh/modern-day-pastors-involved-inquackery>].

<sup>44</sup> Adofo, “Modern Day Pastors Involved in Quackery.”



the will of God and then praying in line with it. Preaching at some worship services is full of the prosperity theology that promises abundant wealth to those who donate in support of church projects. The audience are made more wealth-conscious than holiness-conscious. In the end, such services fail to have the needed impact on the believer. It is, therefore, not surprising that Atiemo Ofori Abamfo observes in his recent article that despite the many revival meetings going on in the country, there are still increasing issues of corruption, bribery and immorality.<sup>45</sup> Abamfo's point is that these programs do not actually affect the spirituality of people. To address this issue there is a need to develop and promote biblical teachings in the church, especially on the subject of Christian spirituality and wealth creation.

The relationship between spirituality and family life needs consideration at this point. True spirituality must also affect the approach and purposes of the activities of the church. Contemporary spirituality does not provide adequate time for families to fellowship together. The church's over-emphasis on programs deprive families of the time to develop their own spiritual lives. The family is expected to sit as a unit, relate and build their own kind of spirituality. This means the church must not occupy all the days with programs and deprive member of the time to unite with their families. In the contemporary world because of businesses and work schedules, parents leave home early in the morning when their children may not even be awake and come back late in the night when the children are already asleep. This makes it very difficult for some people to interact adequately with their children during the working days of the week. Unfortunately, the weekend that is available for them to meet as a family and enjoy family life is also packed with church and other social activities. Most pastors also fix church programs on every public holiday and hence make it more difficult for families to enjoy their fellowship. This kind of church spirituality has negative repercussions on the future of the family and the society. The author is not saying that it is not good to organize or attend church programs; rather, the author is making the point that the church should allow time for the family to meet as a unit to build their union and to have their devotion which will help them build their spirituality.

Further still, the renewal of the mind is a key requirement for victorious Christian living. The believer's battle with the evil one is the battle of the mind. It requires a strong determination not to defile oneself "with the royal food and wine" (Dan. 1:8), which is worldly and sinful pleasures. The devil does not fear the person who prays throughout the night and goes to work the following day to receive a bribe. He does not fear the one who supports the church with his/her resources, attends church every Sunday and gives alms to the needy, but engages in extramarital or premarital sex. In short, he does not fear religiosity that is not backed by true spirituality. A key weapon to fight the devil is holiness. Therefore, the renewal of the mind must result in the recognition and affirmation of the newness of life already initiated in Christ (6:4; 7:6), which contrasts with the thinking of this 'age' (*aiōn*; not merely 'world,' as in some translations).<sup>46</sup> For Paul renewal is inward and includes the idea of the new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) which, in the present, includes a new approach to current realities based on the believer's position in Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-16).

### **Mental Renewal and Work Ethics**

One of the main challenges facing contemporary Africa is poverty. A lot of people in Africa and for that matter Ghana are living below the poverty line. People are not able to afford three square meals a day let alone pay school fees, utility bills and cater for other needs of daily life. Most of the youth who are also expected to work and cater for the aged are also unemployed. Graduate unemployment keeps rising as more people graduate every year from the university. There is a get-rich-quick attitude among the youth and this has led many of them to engage in unethical ways of gaining wealth. Betting, internet fraud, and *sakawa* are key examples of such means. In a context like this, the transformation of the society is expected to deal adequately with the issue of poverty.

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<sup>45</sup> Atiemo Ofori Abamfo, "Clouds that bring no Rain: Religious Revival and Corruption in Ghana," *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 18(5) (2016): 6-23, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 144.

The paper contends that the renewal of the mind must yield a positive work ethic that will help Christians to improve their lives. It can be said that work is a core aspect of human nature. Having created Adam and Eve, God gave the mandate to rule other creatures and to take care of all that he had created. In Genesis 2:8, one reads that God created a garden for humankind and asked them to work and till it. The expressions “to work” and “to till” imply that they were to take care of the environment, derive benefit from it, without destroying it, and multiply it. Work is, therefore, part of human nature; idleness is not a good thing. People must engage in a godly industry under the guidance of God to acquire their basic life needs. While work is good, the fall affected its nature. After the fall of humanity in Genesis 3, God cursed the environment and said that the environment will not produce its yield without painful toil. Human beings were now going to work and eat by the sweat of their brow. This does not mean work is an evil thing. Work is not an evil thing; it is the means by which humankind acquires the needs of life and improves upon the state of the society.

The renewal of the believer’s mind must inform his/her view about and attitude toward work. Here, the paper summarizes John Wesley’s work ethic to serve as a guide for Christians. The reason for relying on Wesley’s thought is that his theology is based on the renewal of the believer and of the society. Wesleyan soteriology has it that salvation is based purely on the grace of God. God’s grace works in a person even before justification (prevenient grace), at justification (justifying grace) and after justification (sanctifying grace). The grace that God shows toward the sinner in saving him/her from the penalty of sin prompts the believer to love God and his/her neighbor. Having experienced this grace, the love for God and for the neighbor becomes the guiding principle for one’s actions and inactions. Thus, actions based on love are ethical and those apart from love are unethical. Wesley considers the sanctifying power of God as achieving two main things; namely, the renewal of the individual and the renewal of the society. Thus, one’s personal renewal (or holiness) must necessarily yield the renewal of the society.

Against the backdrop of Wesley’s view on salvation (outlined above), he espouses the following theology of work. Wesley argues that what makes work godly or ungodly is not what one does but how one does it, the motivation for doing it and the character out of which those actions flow. According to Wesley commercial activities must be done to glorify God. Therefore, any vocation that does not glorify God is not worth undertaking. From this central principle, Wesley proposes the following guidelines. First, it is ungodly to undertake any commercial activity that weakens one’s faith in God or has a negative effect on the mind, body or spirit.<sup>47</sup> This rule prohibits people from undertaking vocations that deprive them of the amount of sleep or food that is naturally required by the body. Ghanaians who have travelled abroad for greener pastures usually work to the extent that they hardly have enough rest. They do so because the amount they earn is tied to the number of hours they work. With the slogan “Time is money”, most of these people fail to take good care of their health. They work hard for money to cater for their family members in their home countries and also to support church projects both at home and abroad. Given Jesus’s teaching that life is more valuable than wealth (Matt. 6:25), the ungodly nature of such attitudes becomes evident.

Secondly, work is a divine calling. As part of the believer’s call from God, one must seek God’s direction in whatever decision he/she takes concerning a vocation. This does not only apply to decisions taken after securing a job or after starting one’s own enterprise but also relates to the decision to accept an appointment or to start one’s own business. A person with a renewed mind must undertake the work that he/she is convinced that God has called him/her to undertake. It is, therefore, wrong to enter into a particular vocation simply because it is lucrative. There are examples of people who enter into the health profession simply on the basis of the perceived lucrative nature of such job. The fact that work is part of one’s divine call means every work undertaken by the believer must contribute to solving societal problems. Contributing to the quest for solutions to societal problems is a key goal of the renewed mind. Thus, the believer’s work must have communal relevance. As a person with a renewed mind, the believer must consider using his/her expertise to help solve the challenges facing

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<sup>47</sup> Paul K. Bofo, *John Wesley’s Theology and Public Life: His Socio-Political Thought in the Ghanaian Context*. Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2014), 220.

his/her community rather than traveling abroad simply because of the higher possibility of making money there. Yet, one may choose to use his/her professional knowledge in a context where it may benefit more people. Therefore, it may be permissible to leave one's own community and work in a context where more people may be served even including people from the worker's own community. For example, one may leave a village for a town where his/her services can serve a wider community, including even members of the village he/she left. One has to seek the face of God in making such decisions.

Thirdly, one's work is not to be considered in isolation but as an integral part of the society's life. Therefore, the effect of one's work on other people in the community is as important as its effect on the individual. As a rule, the vocation of a person with a renewed mind should not have a detrimental effect on other people in the society. In the Ghanaian context, two issues need to be mentioned at this point. The first one is the devastating effects of illegal mining activities on the Ghanaian society, especially those living in the mining areas. The effects of illegal mining activities on land and water bodies in mining areas are making Ghana's mineral resources seem to be a curse than a blessing. Water bodies that serve as sources of drinking water have been poisoned by chemical residue resulting from illegal mining activities. The pollution is so much that these water bodies are no longer able to support aquatic life. The theology espoused by Paul (in Rom. 12:2) requires Christians to have nothing to do with these ungodly activities. The renewed mind promotes environmental friendliness; it does not destroy the environment. A person with a renewed mind cares about the wellbeing of other people in the society and so is mindful of how he/she makes money.

The inappropriate use of agrochemicals for farming activities is another practice that also affects the environment. It is unfortunate that some agrochemicals that are banned by law find their way into the country. The use of agrochemicals has improved farm yield and improved community health. However, the inappropriate use of these chemicals affects the community negatively. There are farmers who spray their crops with pesticides and harvest them for the market the same or the following day with a high level of the chemical residue still on the crop. The health implications of illegal mining activities and improper use of agrochemicals include the increasing health challenges confronting contemporary Ghana.

Finally, the renewal of the mind must lead to attitudinal change at the work place. A lot of Ghanaian workplaces are filled with people who care less about their contribution to the common good of the society. Many people do not bother about the impact of their attitude to work on the employer, and the society. Bribery, corruption, dishonesty, lack of commitment and lack of integrity are not uncommon in many workplaces in Ghana. For Paul, the renewal of the mind must lead to having the mind of Christ and behaving like him. The Christian must reflect Christ in all he/she does and lead others to do the same. The renewed mind must set ethical examples in the workplace for others to emulate. It is ethically wrong to work harder in their private industries and be lazy in the government sector. This practice is common in Ghana especially among public-sector workers who have also established their own business where they render the same services rendered in the public sector. Many of such people work better in at their private establishments than in the public sector. The idea that government work can be done anyhow is inconsistent with the renewed way of doing things. Those working for the government should work as they are doing for the Lord (Col. 2:23). The socio-economic transformation of the society requires everyone to contribute in his/her own small way. This can only be achieved by the renewal of mind, and the practicalization of what the renewed mind urges the believer to do. In other words, the transformation of the society requires believers to confront the public space with their faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper has examined ways in which Paul's theology in Romans 12:2 may apply to public life and the transformation of the society. It was noted that the renewed mind evaluates issues of this world in the light of the world and values God's opinion, not the world's opinion. Thus, such a mind prioritizes heavenly treasures over earthly ones, maintaining a strong faith in and hope for the eschatological kingdom and its reward to its subjects. The paper has also noted that the believer is called to be in the

world, but not of it. Therefore, he/she must not live by the standards of the world but by the standards of the new kingdom to which he/she belongs, that is, the kingdom of light. Furthermore, the believer must avoid schematizing with the ungodly or aligning themselves with the standards of this passing age. On the whole, the paper has argued that the transformation of the society is an inevitable result of the transformation of the individual through the renewal of the mind. By developing and promoting the concepts espoused in this paper, it is believed that Christianity would have greater impact on the society than it has now.

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