



“SHARE FAKE PROPHECIES AND BE JAILED”: RELIGIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE REGULATION OF PROPHETIC COMMUNICATION IN THE GHANAIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the complex role of pastor-prophets and prophecy in Ghana’s public sphere by examining the Ghana Police Service’s 2021 directive against “negative” prophetic communication. It argues that this directive reveals tensions between the state’s constitutional responsibility to maintain public order and its parallel duty to uphold religious freedom and human rights. Deploying theories of postcolonial secularism, mediatization of religion, and African political theology, the paper analyzes the legal, ethical, and political dilemmas raised by public prophecy. Three core issues emerge: the state’s legal authority (locus standi) to regulate religious speech, the threat such regulation poses to religious expression and privacy, and the evolving dynamics of prophetic communication in a media-driven religious economy. The paper participates in the discussion on secular governance and religious pluralism in African democracies.*

KEYWORDS: Ghana, prophecy; religious freedom, postcolonial secularism, pastor-prophets.



INTRODUCTION

On December 27, 2021, the Ghana Police Service issued a public directive cautioning religious leaders, particularly pastor-prophets, against issuing “doomsday” prophecies during New Year’s Eve services. This directive marked a significant moment in the legal and political management of religion in Ghana’s Fourth Republic. The Police inferred from Section 208 of the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), to warn that individuals who made prophecies that provoked panic or endangered public order could be arrested and prosecuted. The said section criminalizes the publication of false news likely to incite fear and alarm. While the directive did not explicitly ban prophecy, it marked a notable shift in the state’s approach, from passive accommodation of religious speech to proactive regulation of its public expression.

Relying on this state-led regulation on prophetic communications in the Ghanaian public sphere, this paper examines the intricate relationship between state and religious actors in Ghana, with special emphasis on pastor-prophets. By pastor-prophetic actors, I mean actors of Ghana’s new prophetic churches who combine pastorship with prophetic ministry in their operations. To a very large extent, pastor-prophets perform even the role of the laity and are held as “the visionary of the church” (Golo, 2023). They are mainly men who are believed to be marked by an overflow of spiritual powers, and, as possessors of charisma, they are leaders who are capable of foretelling the future and addressing the existential crises that their followers find themselves in. The paper demonstrates that, notwithstanding these significant roles of prophetic figures and their communications, recent events and experiences of prophetic activities’ fakery have necessitated state intervention. Prophetic fakery here refers to the activities of pastor-prophets who claim to communicate the mind of God or can tap into the spiritual realm to predict certain happenings but who, through manipulative tactics, ultimately exploit or mislead their followers for personal gain (Agbenorsi, 2025). This paper explores the function of pastor-prophets and prophetic communication in the Ghanaian public domain and interrogates the implications of state regulation for the entanglement of religion, law, and secular governance.

This paper argues that the police directive reveals tensions between the state’s constitutional responsibility to maintain public order and its parallel duty to uphold religious freedom and human rights. I contend that while the state attempts to uphold a secular constitutional order, its intervention in prophetic communication simultaneously frustrates the principle of religious non-interference and generates religious human rights dilemmas (Henkin, 1998; Jamnejad and Wood, 2009; Palomino, 2011; Naigen, 2016). Moreover, the wide media coverage of prophecy interlaced with political messages and personal revelations blurs the lines between public interest, private spirituality, and the reach of legal authority.

Theoretically, I strengthen this argument by engaging three intersecting frameworks. I draw on scholarship on postcolonial secularism to show how the modern Ghanaian state inherits and reconfigures colonial modalities of religious governance. I also deploy the mediatization of religion to examine how prophecy, amplified by digital media, reconstitutes religious authority and public influence. Finally, I also use African political theology as espoused by Emmanuel Katongole, Elias Bongmba, and Laurenti Magesa to situate prophecy within broader debates on spiritual sovereignty, moral governance, and public legitimacy in Africa.

These theoretical commitments shape my methodological approach in three ways and enable me to engage in a multidimensional reading of the 2021 directive. First of all, I embark on a



genealogical reading of legal texts to trace how colonial and post-independence regulations construct “acceptable” religion. Secondly, I engage in a detailed media ethnography and discourse analysis of televised and online prophecies to uncover how mediatized charisma operates and takes shape. Third and finally, I also rely on theological-political hermeneutics of prophetic speech to understand how pastor-prophets imagine the nation and negotiate state authority. By deploying this triadic framework, I hope to move beyond description to argue that Ghana’s attempt to regulate prophecy dramatizes the unresolved negotiations of modern secularism in a religiously saturated, digitally connected, postcolonial society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This section offers theoretical bases for understanding the paper’s central tension: while secular governance tries to limit legitimate religious speech, mediatized prophecy and African theological ideas resist these limits, leading to legal and human rights conflicts. I first deploy the very idea of postcolonial secularism to present the Ghanaian state as custodian and constructor of religion.

Talal Asad’s (2003:190) argument that the presence of secularism does not eliminate religion from political affairs but rather entails “a redefinition of the essence of ‘religion’ as well as of ‘national politics’” provides vital insights. Through his genealogy of the secular (2003:192), we get the sense that the modern state is not simply a neutral protector of religious freedom, but it, importantly, plays an active role in constructing, regulating, and managing religion. According to Asad (2003:2), secularism “presupposes new concepts of ‘religion,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘policies,’ and new imperatives associated with them” through legal and administrative practices. It produces new norms of public reason and acceptable belief. The state’s construction of religion takes place via its institutions, such as the courts, and in the context of the current discussion, the police administration. As the constructor of religion, the state legitimizes some forms of religious expression while marginalizing or, to cite Foucault (1995), disciplining others, especially those deemed incompatible with liberal democratic values.

Through Mahmood (2015), we get an extended insight as he shows how liberal-secular governance often intensifies rather than resolves religious difference. This is precisely because the state claims the prerogative to delimit the sphere of legitimate religious expression. When Ghana’s police invoke public safety to curtail prophetic speech, they participate in this wider post-Enlightenment logic: The state presents itself as a neutral arbiter capable of distinguishing between “edifying” prophecies and those deemed “harmful” or “unverified.” Yet in a postcolonial context, this claim to neutrality is shadowed by colonial precedents such as missionary regulations, witchcraft laws, and media controls that historically rendered religion a subject of state governance. Mahmood’s analysis of secularism resonates well with Asad’s, a kind of double movement. On one hand, secular states promise religious freedom; on the other, they define and constrain the forms that such freedom may take in public life. This dynamic is particularly evident in postcolonial contexts like Ghana, where the state simultaneously protects and regulates prophecy, defining its legitimate scope while invoking legal authority to suppress its “disruptive” expressions. As I will show, Postcolonial secularism helps explain why the Ghanaian government’s effort to control prophetic speech ends up weakening its own promise to stay out of religious matters, as stated in the constitution. I take inspiration from these works to show that state regulation of prophetic communication is not



an accidental overreach but intrinsic to a secular formation that continues colonial patterns of governing religion.

The paper also draws on the concept of the mediatization of religion. Stig Hjarvard's (2008, 2013) theory of mediatization posits that modern media are not mere channels conveying existing religion. They actively reshape religious content, authority, and practice, subjecting them to a "media logic" of immediacy, personalization, and spectacle. Hjarvard (2008:19) notes that "[T]he media as cultural environments have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community." Birgit Meyer's (2011) work on "sensational forms" in Ghana further demonstrates how Pentecostal actors harness audiovisual technologies to create affective experiences that render the divine tangible. Pastor-prophets in Ghana exemplify this dynamic. Livestreamed church services, TikTok clips of prophecies, and viral "31st Night" predictions circulate far beyond the physical congregation, transforming pastor-prophets into national celebrities and their utterances into news events. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu observes that social media now functions as the primary arena for prophetic branding. It allows prophets to cultivate trans-local followings and to monetize revelation. He writes that: "the combination of texts and visual imagery, whether it appears on street banners, wall posters, handbills, newspapers, book blurbs, or television, is carefully crafted to mediate a certain theological identity" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:349). The mediatized environment magnifies both the public prominence of prophecy and the speed with which negative prophecies reach millions, precisely the conditions that provoked the police directive.

Using this as my analytical starting point, I aim to demonstrate how mediatization contributes to the emergence of prophecy as a governance problem. The main point is that when prophecy moves out of private religious spaces and into the national media, it begins to follow the rules of the news, focusing on shock value, capturing public attention, and raising legal concerns about potential harm. Regulating prophecy, then, is an attempt to promptly regulate media effects.

The paper also uses ideas from African thinkers like Bongmba (2007, 2006), Katongole (2017, 2010), and Magesa (2013, 2004, 1997), who see religion as a powerful force for guiding moral values and challenging unfair political systems. To be sure, the African political theology is a notion that highlights how spiritual idioms articulate claims about power, legitimacy, and the common good. Elias Bongmba provides us with an understanding of a political theology grounded in an ethic of responsibility and the critical role of religion in responding to Africa's political and social challenges. Drawing from Christian theology, African moral traditions, and continental philosophy, Bongmba emphasizes the centrality of human dignity, compassion, and democratic accountability. He critiques political corruption, authoritarian governance, and systemic inequality and advocates for a theology that empowers civil society and promotes justice and reconciliation. For Bongmba, political theology is not solely a critique of political failures. It is also a constructive engagement with Africa's pluralistic and postcolonial realities.

Katongole similarly focuses on reimagining the relationship between faith, politics, and identity in postcolonial Africa. He critiques the failures of the modern African state and the complicity of colonial Christianity in undermining justice and peace. Katongole (2017:121) urges theologians to respond to "the hopelessness" that grips the continent by embodying an alternative, more hopeful form of social existence." He calls for a theology rooted in the Church's countercultural witness marked by reconciliation, lament, memory, and hope.



Katongole believes that to deal with problems like violence and displacement, there is a need for new political ideas shaped by the Christian community and honest, hopeful storytelling. As he argues, the Church must “provide for a compelling counter-narrative and interpretation to the forms of modernity that readily sacrifice Africa” (Katongole, 2010:349).

Magesa likewise contends that Christianity in Africa must confront injustice and support human flourishing. He emphasizes that African values such as respect for life, communal responsibility, and fairness should shape Christian engagement. Magesa critiques political misrule and ecclesial structures that neglect people’s lived struggles. For him, African spiritual traditions provide ethical resources “to fight against injustice and corruption, social marginalization, nepotism, tribalism and racism” (Magesa, 2004:30). Faith, he insists, must extend beyond ritual into transformative action for the common good.

In Ghana, pastor-prophets routinely declare election outcomes, pronounce judgment on corrupt officials, and claim divine mandate to “speak truth to power.” Studies of prophetic practices show that prophets often use messages they believe come from God to either challenge or support political leaders and governments (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015). This way of thinking about God and prophecy changes how we understand who holds power and authority. Ultimate authority is ceded not to the state alone but shared or contested by prophetic figures who claim insight into hidden spiritual realities shaping the nation. The police directive, therefore, will be seen as colliding with a religious imaginary in which pastor-prophets see themselves as guardians of national destiny, not merely private spiritual advisers. From this vantage, state regulation appears as an encroachment on a higher, divinely sanctioned jurisdiction, raising concerns over the religion-state relationships.

Religion, law, and the state support for religion

To understand the intersection between religion and law in contemporary Ghana, we must first historicize the relationship between state politics and religion in this society. Ghana’s constitutional commitment to secularism is frequently celebrated as proof of the nation’s religious tolerance. Even so, the very concept of “secular” governance was imported through colonial rule and subsequently indigenised or inculturated in ways that blur the classic religion-state divide (Atiemo 2013). Talal Asad (2003) reminds us that secularism is not merely the withdrawal of religion from politics but a governing project that redefines religion, stipulating when and how it may enter public life. In the Gold Coast (colonial Ghana), this redefinition began with missionary education, the privileging of English common-law norms, and a host of ordinances collectively aimed to encode a Western Christian moral grammar into colonial law (Hayford 1970:105; Dovlo 2005; Tweneboah 2020). Independence has not significantly erased these templates as successive governments continue to translate these Western-based legal norms into a postcolonial register that promises religious freedom while reserving the right to discipline “excessive” devotion. Much of the constitutions of Africa, as Makau wa Mutua (1999:345) has observed concerning the African Charter, is “an instrument that is largely promotional with an ambiguous protective function and no credible enforcement mechanism.”

The works of previous researchers have furnished us with the idea that religion and politics have always intersected in this society (Max-Wirth 2024; Haynes 2023; Tweneboah 2020; Atiemo 2013; Dovlo 2005; Yirenkyi 2000; Quashigah 1999; Pobee 1987). As a state that was formed out of over seventy-five ethnolinguistic groupings, contemporary Ghana is religiously



and legally plural (Tweneboah 2020; Atiemo 2013). While a secular state by legislation, the office of the traditional chiefly authorities, which combines both religious and political powers, continues to be influential and relevant in the public sphere. This aligns with studies that have well noted an inextricable intersection between religion and politics dating back to pre-colonial times (Dovlo 2005, 269; Pobee 1987). Dovlo has maintained that while Ghana (then Gold Coast) was conceived as a secular state, the colonial administration privileged Christianity and English common law (with its Judeo-Christian underpinnings), shaping many post-independence legislations.

In the post-independence state, religion continues to play an influential role in the public sphere. A number of religious traditions compete in the religious field for space, influence, and dominance, with Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions being the most prominent. Statistical data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census suggest that 98 percent of the population affiliates with one religion or another. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is the fastest-growing stream, claiming at least one-third of the country's 71.3 percent Christian population. A 2023 International Religious Freedom Report estimates that more than 4,000 charismatic churches operate nationwide. Alongside their numerical strength, the claim to possess divine insight makes charismatic pastor-prophets indispensable actors in Ghana's public sphere. This prominence increasingly places them on a collision course with the state's aspiration to remain religiously neutral.

As is characteristic of many modern democracies, the Ghanaian Republic professes to be secular and maintains this stance through legal, policy, and institutional frameworks. The state's claim to secularity finds expression in the Constitution of 1992. Article 1(2) provides that the Constitution is the apex law of the land and renders void any other law (including religious or customary norms) that is inconsistent with it. Yet there is minimal routine state intervention in religious affairs; no state-ordained religion exists, and the Constitution's Article 56 expressly bars Parliament from establishing any body empowered to impose religious or political programs. Article 12(2) guarantees freedom of religion and expression, and Article 21(1c) assures the manifestation of belief.

The Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) likewise protects religious functionaries and their rites. Section 296 criminalizes irreverent or indecent behavior in places of worship and the molestation of religious officiants. Institutionally, the Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs seeks to ensure peaceful coexistence and national development. At the same time, Article 21(4) authorizes the state to impose reasonable restrictions on religious freedom in the interests of defense, public safety, public health, or essential services. Religious groups must register with the Registrar General to obtain legal personality, though non-registration presently carries no penalty. The net effect is a distinctive configuration of post-colonial secular governance that both accommodates religion and reserves the right to discipline it. While such arrangements are common across formally secular African states (Afolayan et al, 2018; Marshall, 2009; Obadare, 2008), Ghana's experience with charismatic prophecy has exposed a novel strain within this accommodation. Over the years, the activities of pastor-prophets, especially their public predictions of elections, deaths, and disasters, have generated social anxiety and prompted both parliamentary debates and executive attempts at regulation (Tweneboah, 2022). In some instances, national security agents have acted on prophetic predictions to put certain security measures in place to forestall security eventualities (Graphic, 2016). A salient case occurred in April 2016, when the late



Nigerian pastor-prophet T. B. Joshua foretold an impending terrorist attack on Ghana and Nigeria. Within twenty-four hours, the Ghana Police Service issued a statement urging calm and announcing tactical deployments “to nip any breach of the peace in the bud” (Ansah, 2016; Graphic, 2016; Myjoyonline, 2016).

It is against this backdrop that the December 2021 police directive restricting doom prophecies must be read. The directive does more than police public order. Significantly, it dramatizes the central tension this paper investigates: in regulating prophetic communication, the Ghanaian state simultaneously upholds and subverts its own secular ideal. It upholds it by invoking constitutional authority, yet subverts it by intervening in the very religious speech it claims not to judge. This intervention inevitably produces religious-human-rights dilemmas (concerning free exercise, privacy, and the right to spiritual counsel) and underscores how mediatized prophetic utterances blur boundaries between public interest, private revelation, and legal jurisdiction. In short, the pastor-prophet phenomenon turns Ghana’s celebrated model of “benevolent secularism” into a crucible where the limits of both state neutrality and religious freedom are publicly contested (Buckley, 2017).

My paper, therefore, situates the directive from the police administration barring the supposed negative prophetic communication within this wider history of religion-state entanglement. I attempt to illustrate how a post-colonial secular regime contends with a rising, media-savvy prophetic culture, thereby ultimately revealing the fragility of its secular foundations.

Prophetic communications and statecraft

In further understanding the religion–politics relationship, it is important to appreciate the symbolic power or public influence of pastor-prophets. As individuals who claim access to divine or supernatural insight, pastor-prophets have risen at a particular epoch in Africa’s history as guides to appreciating the complexities of social, economic, political, cultural, and legal life. They have also emerged as moral authorities who warn against societal decay and offer hope to many of the disenchanted and marginalized masses during the continent’s turbulent moments (Freston, 2001).

Over the past two decades, the phenomenon of public prophecy in Ghana as elsewhere, has undergone important transformations in form, frequency, media visibility, and public reception. While prophecy remains a powerful expression of spiritual authority and religious agency, this practice has neither remained static nor been universally celebrated. Its dynamism reflects broader changes in Ghana’s religio-political landscape, the evolution of media technologies, and shifts in the public’s appetite for spiritual spectacle. In Ghana’s public domain, for instance, two remarkable moments capture the intersection of spiritual authority and public visibility - the New Year’s Eve services and electioneering seasons.

In the early 2000s, the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism brought with it a new wave of prophetic energy. This was characterized by ecstatic spiritual expressions, healing crusades, and predictive utterances made during church revivals. The New Year’s Eve service, popularly known as 31st December Watch Night, became the chief stage for prophetic pronouncements. These declarations are often delivered with eschatological fervor and are aimed at setting the spiritual tone for the incoming year. As charismatic figures like Rev. Owusu Bempah, Prophet Emmanuel Badu Kobi, and others gained national prominence, prophecy moved from the church pulpit into the media limelight. With the proliferation of private television stations and,



later, social media platforms, these watch night declarations became increasingly theatrical and competitive, morphing into a kind of *prophetic economy* where the most dramatic or politically consequential prophecy could dominate headlines and secure online virality. For some time now, New Year's Eve has become the summit towards which prophetic communication is translated. As just noted, it is an annual climax where prophetic actors race to communicate the mind of God. It is during this period that divine revelations are most fully revealed, circulated, and consumed. At the same time, this prophetic ritual is not merely spiritual. It has become a public spectacle and a performative contestation of religious power. The New Year's Eve prophetic, especially between high-profile pastor-prophets, is marked by a flurry of predictions ranging from presidential election outcomes and deaths of public figures to disasters and international events.

Nowhere is the prophetic contest more apparent than in the sphere of electoral predictions. During election seasons in Ghana, pastor-prophets often stake their reputations on foretelling the victors of upcoming presidential races (Ghanaweb, 2024; Peacefmonline, 2024). These predictions are not only presented as spiritual insights but also as public interventions that attempt to shape the political imagination of the electorate. Notable prophets, such as Rev. Isaac Owusu Bempah and Prophet Nigel Gaisie, have in past elections declared God's anointing on particular candidates, sometimes making opposing pronouncements on who would win. Such instances create what may be termed "prophetic polarization," where prophetic authority is split across party lines, fueling suspicion, excitement, or tension among party supporters (Peacefmonline, 2024). These prophetic declarations are not only declared on live radio and television stations, but they are also picked up by media outlets, dissected by political analysts, and discussed in public forums. This reinforces the prophet's position as a legitimate public voice even in matters constitutionally reserved for electoral institutions.

The implications of this prophetic engagement with secular politics are significant and align with this paper's central argument: that the increasing entanglement of pastor-prophets with partisan politics challenges Ghana's secular democratic framework. First, it disrupts the normative principle that elections are to be decided by the will of the people through rational, democratic procedures. Instead, through prophetic predictions and contests, divine will becomes a rival source of electoral legitimacy. Second, such predictions have the potential to undermine the credibility of the Electoral Commission and the judiciary, especially when a pastor-prophet's preferred candidate loses and claims of spiritual manipulation or electoral rigging are advanced. Scholars have labelled such predictions as "anti-democratic," observing that it is a practice "amounting to an unacceptable intrusion of religion into politics" (Haynes 2024). Third, these prophecies invite state scrutiny and sometimes institutional intervention, as seen when the Ghana Police Service issued warnings ahead of elections to curtail fear-inducing doom prophecies. In taking this step, the state ventures into the precarious territory of regulating religious speech, a move that brings it into tension with constitutional protections for religious expression.

As noted, these political prophecies, staged and amplified across media platforms, frequently position competing pastor-prophets in a race for accuracy, divine legitimacy, and national relevance. In this sense, political prophecy has evolved beyond spiritual edification into a public currency with material, symbolic, and partisan consequences. Pastor-prophets engage in what can be termed "spiritual entrepreneurship," where the "product" is divine knowledge and the returns include increased media visibility, heightened political access, expanded



congregational loyalty, and, in some cases, financial gain. As Gifford (1998:87) has noted, the uncritical support offered by these pastor-prophets “is not to be explained through any conspiracy, but through something far more pragmatic - the desire for the respectability conferred by government recognition, and for the material rewards a well-disposed President can dispense.”

Certainly, in Ghana’s religio-political landscape, this trade in spiritual capital translates into real influence. Politicians court pastor-prophets for endorsement or spiritual covering, while citizens weigh prophetic pronouncements as part of their civic interpretations of political reality. These prophetic interventions can shape public expectations, heighten electoral tensions, and even provoke institutional reactions from state agencies (Ansah, 2016; Graphic, 2016; Myjoyonline, 2016). Consequently, the prominence of political prophecy and the fierce contestations over who truly hears from God challenge the secular ideal of religious neutrality in state affairs. As I argue, the mediatized and politicized nature of Ghanaian prophecy does not merely complicate the relationship between religion and politics. It also exacerbates the tensions within a postcolonial secular state attempting to regulate spiritual actors whose influence transcends the legal and political boundaries that define the secular public sphere.

It is vitally important to state again that signs of prophetic fatigue have begun to surface within the public domain. Whereas in the 2000s and 2010s, prophetic declarations, especially electoral prophecies, were eagerly anticipated and fervently debated, recent years have seen a more skeptical reception. A number of high-profile missed prophecies, that is, predictions that failed to materialize, have contributed to growing public criticism. Media satire, citizen pushback on social platforms, and watchdog interventions have led to a more critical public discourse around the accuracy, ethics, and social impact of prophetic declarations (Denteh, 2022). In certain quarters, especially among the educated youth and urban middle class, prophecy has come to be viewed less as divine insight and more as political theatre or spiritual opportunism. For example, on February 8, 2018, Priscilla Opoku-Kwarteng, known in Ghana’s entertainment industry as Ebony Reigns, was involved in a fatal lorry accident (Yeboah, 2018). At just 20 years old, Ebony had become a legendary female dancehall artist. Her sudden death brought deep sorrow to many Ghanaians. But crucially, it quickly became a fertile ground for prophetic contests. One after another, prophets claimed they had received divine revelations warning of her impending death if she failed to abandon her racy lifestyle (Ghanaweb, 2018a; Kasapafmonline, 2018; Larnyoh, 2018). Her death also triggered a surge in celebrity death prophecies. Notably, on October 18, 2021, Pastor Stephen Akwasi, known as Jesus Ahuofe, prophesied that dancehall artist Shatta Wale would be shot dead before Christmas (Benedict, 2018). Taking cues from Ebony’s case, many fans panicked. The audience was also indirectly invited to get involved in “rescuing the perishing” by following the prophet. In a video, a visibly emotional Shatta Wale warned that if he survived, he would burn the pastor-prophet’s church (Ghanaweb, 2018b; Kabutey, 2018).

Nonetheless, it would be premature to suggest that prophecy in Ghana is waning. If anything, the phenomenon has become more diffuse, diversified, and digitized. Social media has enabled lesser-known prophets to gain traction, livestream services, and circulate prophetic content beyond traditional broadcast media. Moreover, prophecy remains meaningful to millions of believers, especially those facing precarity, unemployment, and political uncertainty. For them, prophets remain spiritual intermediaries and sources of hope and direction. In this sense,



prophecy continues to perform an important religious and psychosocial function, even as its political implications and public scrutiny intensify.

The 2021 Prophecy Directive: Contexts and Controversies

As already narrated, on Monday, December 27, 2021, the Ghana Police Service, through its Public Affairs Directorate, issued a statement titled “Communication of Prophecies and their Legal Implication,” warning against negative prophecy. It defined negative prophecy as any prophetic communication predicting harm, danger, or death to individuals or groups without proof of fulfilment. Violators, it warned, could face up to five years in jail. The statement acknowledged that prophetic communication is integral to Ghanaian Christian practice. “The Ghana Police Service wishes to place on record that the Police are not against prophecies; we acknowledge that we Ghanaians are a religious people who know, and believe in, the centrality of God in our lives.” Nevertheless, it emphasized its potential to cause public fear and panic. It reminded the public that producing or spreading statements likely to cause fear and alarm is a crime under Ghanaian law. “We want to caution that under Ghanaian law, it is a crime for a person to publish or reproduce a statement, rumour, or report which is likely to cause fear and alarm to the public or to disturb the public peace. That is, where that person has no evidence to prove that the statement, rumour, or report is true.” On the directive’s first anniversary, the police reiterated that the regulation remained in force. They also declared December 27 as Prophecy Communication Compliance Day to encourage faith practices “within the confines of the law,” promoting public safety and reducing anxiety caused by harmful predictions (Myjoyonline, 2022). The directive sparked widespread public debate, attracting mixed reactions from both Christians and non-Christians (Boakye, 2021; GNA, 2021; Sablah, 2021).

From what is known so far, it is safe to say that the police directive did not arise in a vacuum. Instead, it came against the backdrop of heightened public concern over the proliferation of high-profile prophetic declarations, which often focus on the deaths of politicians, celebrities, or national disasters. These prophecies, we have seen, had become a routine feature of the New Year’s Eve liturgical calendar. We have also shown that these doom prophecies, amplified across television, radio, and especially social media, were criticized for causing unnecessary panic, infringing on individual privacy, and sometimes escalating partisan tensions. Public safety considerations, intensified by the evolving nature of religious media and audience reaction, undoubtedly influenced the Police Service’s intervention. However, the legal and political implications of the directive run deeper. As I will elaborate below, it highlights a core tension in Ghana’s constitution, viz, how a secular democratic state coexists with an intensely religious population that openly expresses its faith.

In framing prophecy as potentially criminal speech, the police directive raised fundamental constitutional questions about the boundaries of free religious expression and the scope of the state’s regulatory power. Article 21(1)(c) of the 1992 Constitution, cited earlier, guarantees all persons “freedom to practise any religion and to manifest such practice,” while Article 12(2) prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. Critics of the directive including church leaders, legal scholars, and civil society actors, argued that it threatened to violate these guarantees by policing spiritual speech in ways that exceeded the limits of lawful restriction. We can also contend that the directive, while well-intentioned, created a precedent for the state to determine what counts as legitimate religious practice, thereby potentially breaching the principle of state neutrality in matters of faith (Sullivan, 1998).



On the other hand, one could argue in favor of the directive by pointing out that constitutional rights are not unlimited. They must be balanced with the wider interests of society. Article 21(4)(c) permits the state to impose restrictions on freedoms, including religious expression, “in the interest of public safety, public health or the running of essential services.” From this standpoint, the regulation of prophecies that could induce fear, disrupt public peace, or incite harm was not an attack on religion. Rather, it is a rational act of governance in a pluralistic society. Moreover, the Ghana Police Service’s appeal to “law and order” was positioned as part of a broader effort to modernize security governance and align religious practices with civic responsibility. Yet, the directive must also be understood within the broader context of Ghana’s postcolonial religious governance. As previous scholarship has shown, Ghana’s secularism is not the French-style *laïcité* that rigidly separates religion from public life (Tweneboah, 2020; Atiemo, 2013; Dovlo, 2005). Rather, it is a form of moderate secularism that permits religious pluralism in the public sphere, even as the state seeks to negotiate and manage excesses and ensure religious harmony (Atiemo and Tweneboah, 2022). The 2021 directive thus brings to the fore the internal contradictions of this secular model. It simultaneously affirms the state’s responsibility to safeguard public order while revealing its vulnerability to being perceived as encroaching on spiritual sovereignty.

The controversy surrounding the directive also underscores the mediated nature of prophecy in the digital age. As Hjarvard (2008) and Meyer (2011) have argued, the mediatization of religion transforms spiritual practices into public spectacles subject to state surveillance, commercial incentives, and mass opinion. In this context, prophecy is not simply a church-bound ritual but a media event. It is staged, disseminated, and consumed within a hyper-visible public sphere. The state’s directive can therefore be seen not only as a legal instrument but also as a media intervention, a way of managing the “soundscape” of the nation at a moment of heightened public anticipation (Newman, 1984; Oster, 2015). Significantly, the police directive and its fallout speak to the ambivalent status of pastor-prophets in Ghana’s religio-political landscape. On the one hand, they are revered as bearers of divine knowledge and moral guardians of the nation. On the other hand, they are increasingly viewed as unpredictable agents whose unregulated speech can disturb or even destabilize public trust, manipulate political sentiment, and undermine national security. In attempting to regulate their activities, the state both acknowledges their influence and problematizes their legitimacy. Thus, in cautioning the public, the statement indicated that “Over the years, communication of prophecies of harm, danger and death, by some religious leaders, has created tension and panic in the Ghanaian society and put the lives of many people in fear and danger.”

I want to emphasize that the 2021 prophecy directive is not just a routine government decision, but it reveals something vital about how religion and state relate to each other in Ghana’s postcolonial context. It exposes the tensions inherent in the state-religion relations in a secular democracy shaped by prophetic prominence. In its attempt to police religious expression, the state confronts the limits of its legal rationality in a spiritualized public sphere. The directive, then, serves as a key example of how Ghana continues to navigate the tension between the authority claimed by prophets and the legal power of the state and between what is seen as the voice of God and the rule of law.



Postcolonial secularism and the permanent zone of discretion

It has been previously mentioned that, unlike French *laïcité*, Ghana's 1992 Constitution espouses an "accommodative" or "negotiated" secularism. As indicated earlier, Article 21 guarantees freedom of religion and its manifestation. Yet Article 21(4) simultaneously empowers the state to restrict that freedom "in the interest of defence, public safety, public health or the running of essential services." This double clause institutionalizes what might be called "a permanent zone of discretion." A permanent zone of discretion here refers to the enduring legal and administrative space within which the state reserves the right to limit or regulate fundamental freedoms such as religious expression based on broad and often subjective criteria like public safety, order, or morality. The concept of a "permanent zone of discretion" highlights the ambivalence inherent in liberal secular constitutions such as Ghana's. While the state of Ghana guarantees freedoms, it also authorizes their restriction under certain conditions. While the Constitution of 1992 and other legislations formally guarantee freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly, they also embed clauses that allow the state to limit those freedoms "in the interest of public safety, public order, public morality, or the general welfare." These limitations are not temporary exceptions but are structurally built into the legal system, giving the state an enduring or permanent authority to decide when and how a right can be curtailed.

In practice, this means that the exercise of constitutional freedoms is never absolute. Instead, it is always subject to interpretation and judgment by state institutions such as the courts, police, or regulatory agencies. Accordingly, the police administration directive against negative prophecies was justified within this zone of discretion by citing threats to public order and disturbances of state security concerns, even though it touched on core religious freedoms.

The permanence of this zone lies in its continual presence as a fallback legal mechanism, not just during crises. Its discretionary nature means that the threshold for intervention is often undefined, allowing the state significant latitude in interpreting what constitutes a threat. As previous studies have demonstrated, such discretion is a hallmark of modern secular governance (Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2015). As the consecrator and guarantor of public order, the state does not eliminate religion from the public sphere but seeks to regulate or consecrate it, often by deciding which forms of religiosity are acceptable and which are excessive, threatening, disturbing, or irrational. In this sense, the state may decide that a particular religious utterance, notably a public prophecy, is a matter of security rather than devotion. As Mahmood (2015) argues, such discretionary power is emblematic of post-Enlightenment secular states: liberty is granted, but only so long as it aligns with public order as the state defines it.

Thus, the concept of a "permanent zone of discretion" helps us understand how secular states like Ghana simultaneously protect religious freedom and impose limits on it. This situation creates a dynamic terrain where prophetic speech can be celebrated in one moment and criminalized in the next.



Religious Human Rights and the Limits of Free Expression

As discussed above, in issuing its warning against negative prophetic utterances, the Ghana Police Service drew attention to how: “Over the years, communication of prophecies of harm, danger and death, by some religious leaders, have created tension and panic in the Ghanaian society and put the lives of many people in fear and danger” (Ghana Police Service, 2021). As previously mentioned, as a duty-bearer, failure to regulate negative prophecies may lead to tensions and public safety challenges. At the same time, over-regulation may constitute a violation of the principle of the religion-state separation, raising concerns over infringement on religious freedom. The key question of interest here is whether or not, and to what degree, society’s outrage alone justifies suppressing religious human rights, especially the right to free prophetic speech. Prophetic communication, the argument goes, is given voluntarily and no one can be compelled to accept it. The police directive seeking to ban negative prophetic communication can, therefore, be seen as a siege of religious human rights. State regulation of the prophetic realm is an intolerable action for anyone concerned with the principle of separation.

Ghana’s Constitution of 1992 guarantees religious freedom as a fundamental human right, particularly in Article 21(1)(c), which ensures “freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice.” This provision reflects international legal standards, notably Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which affirm the right of individuals to profess, practice, and manifest their religion without interference. In this sense, prophetic communication, whether expressed through speech, gesture, or ritual, falls squarely under protected forms of religious expression. This notwithstanding, the same constitutional framework that guarantees religious freedom, we have seen, also permits its limitation. Article 21(4), for instance, allows the state to impose restrictions “in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of others.” This clause reflects a structural ambiguity inherent in liberal democratic frameworks: rights are protected, but not unconditionally. The state thus possesses a permanent zone of discretion that enables it to define what forms of religious expression are acceptable within the bounds of public interest. The 2021 directive exemplifies the exercise of this discretionary power. By invoking the threat of fear, panic, and public disorder, the Ghana Police Service transformed prophetic utterance, an otherwise constitutionally protected practice, into a potential security offence. This act of reframing shifts the discussion from theological legitimacy to legal culpability. It betrays how secular states discipline religion not by banning it outright, but by regulating its form, timing, and impact. This regulatory move raises several challenges to religious human rights.

First, it prompts questions about whose religion is being restricted, and under what terms. While the directive claimed neutrality, it disproportionately affected Pentecostal-Charismatic pastor-prophets, whose modes of revelation, which are largely public, spontaneous, and emotionally charged, contrast with more formalized, liturgical expressions of faith. This introduces a potential bias in state enforcement. Some religious forms, particularly those considered “rational” or “moderate,” remain untouched, while others are deemed disturbing and threatening and hence subject to control. Such selectivity undermines the principle of equal protection of religious rights.

Second, the directive forces us to confront the problem of adjudicating sincerity. Prophets who claim divine communication are often treated with suspicion, their messages subjected to



secular standards of “truth,” “fraud,” or “false news.” But how can a secular state determine the veracity of divine speech without violating the very neutrality it professes? Thus, to paraphrase Sullivan, focusing on legal and political settings in determining what is religious has a democratizing effect. She proposes that, in seeking to judge religion,

Instead of a language about religion and religious practice based only on the lives and mostly theoretical writing of religious professionals, there can be a give and take between the actual religious lives of ordinary people and the language of legal and religious studies. And our focus can be on the justice of the process rather than on control of the categories (1998:458).

By assessing whether a prophecy is “true” or “harmful,” the state risks inserting itself into theological terrain, effectively deciding what counts as acceptable belief a move antithetical to both liberal secularism and international human rights law.

Third, this dynamic creates a chilling effect on religious speech and “the impossibility of religious freedom” (Sullivan, 2005). Although the directive did not outright ban prophecy, its ambiguity, coupled with threats of arrest, created an environment of fear and self-censorship among religious actors. Prominent pastor-prophets like Nigel Gaisie, Badu Kobi, Isaac Owusu Bempah, and Archbishop Salifu Amoako used evasive strategies to defy the directive. But others like Prophet Nicholas Osei, popularly known as Prophet Kumchacha, and Charles Agyin-Asare, while criticizing the directive, remained restrained. In this sense, the directive did not simply regulate religious expression. It constructed and reshaped the very contours of prophetic discourse by forcing it to conform to secular expectations of order and restraint. This reinforces William Cavanaugh's migration of the holy. Cavanaugh argues that in modernity, religious devotion has shifted from the Church to the nation-state. He probes how the state has taken over many roles traditionally held by religion, such as offering meaning, sacrifice, and identity, while presenting itself as secular.

The broader point for our discussion is that in postcolonial Ghana, where pastor-prophets act as moral leaders, political influencers, and sources of hope, any effort by the state to limit prophetic speech is more than just a legal action or a shift in religious boundaries. It has a deeper social and political meaning. It is a cultural and theological intrusion. It broadens the ongoing debates over whether religious freedom in Ghana, like most professed post-independence states, is truly unconditional or whether it is conditional upon the state's interpretation of public order. The 2021 directive is emblematic of the broader ambivalence faced by postcolonial secular states. They are constitutionally committed to protecting religious liberty. However, they are also structurally predisposed to regulate their public manifestations. In such contexts, religious human rights are not merely about legal protection but about negotiating the boundaries of power between divine authority and state sovereignty.

State's Locus Standi: Legal Boundaries, Religious Rights, and Prophetic Resistance

A fundamental tenet upon which liberal secularism thrives is the view that the state should remain neutral in matters of religious conviction. Neutrality assumes that the state must neither privilege nor penalize specific conceptions of the good life. Rather, it ought to provide a framework within which different and even conflicting worldviews can coexist and flourish (Kymlicka, 1989). Since religion is considered an individual, private matter, the principle of neutrality presupposes that the state must not interfere with how religion is expressed, particularly in ways that are central to faith communities (O'Halloran, 2021).



Against this theoretical backdrop, the 2021 Ghana Police Service directive on prophecy raised complex legal and constitutional questions about the state's legitimate standing or locus standi - to regulate religious speech. As pressure mounted following the directive, it became clear that the red line had been drawn and any pastor-prophet who crossed it risked state sanction. Given that prophecy remains a defining feature of Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic practice, many Christians viewed the directive as overreach. The accusation was that the Police Administration had assumed evaluative power over the authenticity of divine speech, thereby insinuating that prophecy must conform to what the state deems legally permissible. Critics argued that this move not only contradicted Ghana's constitutional secularism but also posed a direct challenge to religious freedom and freedom of expression guaranteed under Articles 21(1)(c) and 12(2) of the Constitution of 1992 (MartinezTV, 2022).

Indeed, prophetic communications, regardless of their theological accuracy, constitute spiritual speech acts deeply tied to the prophetic actor's faith and calling. As such, it is contended that unless there is evidence of fraud, incitement, or imminent harm, the state has no legal or moral mandate to intervene. Legislating on what is ultimately a supernatural claim is tantamount to the state inserting itself into the spiritual domain, an act that violates the principle of separation of church and state.

Consequently, as outlined earlier, despite widespread demand for prophecy (Omenyo, 2011), a section of the public interpreted the directive as an infringement on religious human rights. The MP for Ningo-Prampram, Hon. Sam George, publicly questioned the legal basis for the directive. In a tweet dated December 31, 2021, he asked: "So what exactly will the IGP be charging the Pastors and Prophets with if they prophecy tonight? Which part of our Criminal Codes bars prophecy? I would like to be educated. Thanks."

Pastor-prophets also condemned the directive, arguing that the Ghana Police Service, an institution with no spiritual jurisdiction, had failed to consult religious stakeholders. Some viewed the directive as a deliberate effort to frustrate the work of God and muzzle the prophetic office. Prophet Kumchacha, for example, vehemently rejected the idea that any earthly authority could silence prophecy. For him, prophecy is a divine utterance over which the prophet has no autonomous control; it is not a calculated statement but a supernatural compulsion to speak God's mind (MartinezTV, 2022).

Despite the police's assurance that the directive was not against prophetic communication per se but against fear-mongering and panic, prophetic actors such as Prophet Nigel Gaisie, Reverend Owusu Bempah, and Prophet Badu Kobi have interpreted it as an unconstitutional gag order. These prophetic figures have defied the directive and have continued to pronounce what they believe to be divine messages about political leadership, impending deaths, and national crises. Although the police claimed to be reviewing video footage and monitoring compliance, no arrests or prosecutions have followed.

This legal inaction is telling. On the one hand, it reflects the delicate balance the state must maintain in a religiously saturated public sphere. On the other hand, it underlines the political prudence of non-enforcement. Pastor-prophets command large, loyal followings and wield significant influence in Ghana's moral and political discourse. Arresting one could incite public unrest, religious backlash, or partisan divisions. Thus, the state's restraint may be a strategic acknowledgement that formal legal authority does not always translate into unchallenged legitimacy when the religious imagination holds sway over public trust.



In essence, the 2021 directive and its aftermath exemplify the complex interplay between constitutional secularism, religious human rights, and the lived realities of public religion. It shows that while the state may assert its authority through legal instruments, the efficacy of such regulation depends on navigating a terrain where religious sovereignty remains potent and widely respected. The episode becomes a site of contestation over who has the final word in matters of divine communication: the state, with its claim to public order, or the prophet, with their claim to divine mandate.

Prophecy and the invasion of privacy

The question of the relationship between prophetic communication and intrusion into personal life belies at least three interrelated dimensions of prophecy in the public domain, namely the legal, ethical, and human rights concerns. At this point, therefore, I wish to consider these. I wish to demonstrate here that public communication of private affairs in the name of prophecy leads to invasion of privacy. This prophetic invasion of privacy also underscores a core dilemma for postcolonial secular states like Ghana in terms of how to affirm the legitimacy of charismatic spiritual expressions while safeguarding individual rights in an increasingly mediatized religious economy. In line with the core argument of this paper, I further explicate how the regulation of prophetic expression illuminates the paradoxes of Ghana's secular constitution. For one thing, the state must balance its commitment to religious freedom with its obligation to protect public order. Yet in doing so, it frequently relies on discretionary judgments that reflect deeper political and theological anxieties about the role of religion in public life. I want to emphasise that the state's engagement with pastor-prophets and their prophetic utterances is not merely a matter of law enforcement. It is, as I demonstrate, a site of contestation over the meaning, scope, and limits of religious human rights in a postcolonial democracy.

It must be stressed that in spite of the centrality of prophecy and its salience in both private and public domains, attempts have been made not to essentialize it. As we have seen in the previous section, some prophetic communications have been received with scepticism. Besides, concerns over the consequences of negative prophetic messages predate the 2021 and 2022 police directive. There have been past calls on the state to regulate the prophetic pronouncement of death on high-profile persons in Ghana (Razak, 2018). Most notably, critics argue that open prophetic declarations of prophetic messages not only create needless fear and panic in society, but they also raise some concerns regarding the right to privacy.

Indeed, one of the most contentious issues arising from the public practice of prophecy, particularly as mediated through television, radio, and social media, is the perceived violation of individuals' right to privacy. We have seen that in Ghana's Pentecostal-Charismatic space, pastor-prophets often publicly disclose intimate details about the lives of individuals ranging from health conditions and sexual histories to predicted deaths and family secrets under the claim of divine revelation (Adomonline, 2018; Peacefmonline, 2018). Such revelations are, in truth, regarded by adherents as evidence of spiritual authority and supernatural insight. But they also frequently expose subjects to ridicule, shame, and reputational damage, especially when delivered in real time before large congregations and livestreamed to wider publics.

As a matter of fact, under Ghana's Constitution of 1992, the right to privacy is protected in Article 18(2), which states: "No person shall be subjected to interference with the privacy of his home, correspondence or communication." Although this clause was crafted primarily to



protect citizens from unlawful surveillance, its spirit resonates with global human rights standards, such as Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which affirms that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.” Public prophecy, revealing personal affairs as narrated already, challenges these protections by collapsing the boundary between the personal and the performative. For instance, when a prophet declares that an individual will die, contract a disease, or is the target of witchdemonic influence, and does so on national television or via a Facebook livestream, the utterance functions not only as a religious pronouncement but as a form of unsolicited disclosure of private information.

This is particularly problematic when the subject is a non-consenting individual, a public figure, congregant, or even an unidentifiable viewer whose story becomes part of a larger spectacle of spiritual power. For example, in a sermon on December 31, 2018, Prophet Owusu-Bempah, noted for his controversial New Year’s Eve prophetic predictions, made eighteen prophecies for the upcoming year. Among others, he prophesied about the death of high-profile Ghanaians, including two former presidents, John Agyekum Kuffour and John Dramani Mahama (Ghanaweb, 2018c). Owusu-Bempah also prophesied that the Vice President, Mahamudu Bawumia, could die through poisoning. Importantly, he also prophesied about the death of the centenarian National Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharabutu, a prophecy which did not go well with some Muslim youths. They therefore warned the prophet to retract and apologize to the Chief Imam. On January 1, 2019, a machete- and stone-wielding youth presumed to be Muslims attacked one of Prophet Owusu-Bempah’s churches in Accra, signaling that they would continue until the prophet apologized (Frimpong, 2019).

Media ethics are also implicated in the prophecy and the invasion of privacy conundrum. We have earlier seen that the mediatization of religion in Ghana has transformed prophecy into a competitive performance in a saturated religious marketplace. Pastor-prophets, competing for visibility and spiritual legitimacy, I have also shown, increasingly rely on dramatic and intrusive revelations to demonstrate divine access. In such cases, the prophetic act is not only theological but commercial and reputational. It commodifies spiritual knowledge by offering exclusive access to private truths (Anderson Jr and Tweneboah, 2023), sometimes without the subject’s prior knowledge or consent. Moreover, this breach is not merely ethical but psychological. Some targets of public prophecy have taken preemptive legal or media action to disassociate themselves from prophetic claims, as was the case of Ghanaian musician Shatta Wale, whose story we narrated earlier. On October 19, 2021, the police arrested Prophet Stephen Akwasi, the founder and leader of New Life Kingdom Chapel International, for prophesying that the dancehall artiste was to be shot dead. The Ghana Police Service’s 2021 directive can therefore be partially read as an attempt to preserve the dignity and autonomy of individuals by discouraging unsolicited or sensationalized prophetic pronouncements. Though framed as a public safety measure, the directive also resonates with contemporary human rights debates about digital privacy, consent, and the regulation of intrusive speech.

Also at stake is not merely freedom of religion, but the contested line between divine speech and personal sovereignty. Who has the right to reveal another’s future, and under what circumstances? And when divine revelation becomes indistinguishable from public broadcast, to what extent can state law intervene to protect the private self? This tension will undoubtedly persist in Ghana’s public sphere, and scholars are likely to continue debating its implications.



CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the contested role of pastor-prophets and prophecy in Ghana's public domain. By focusing on the 2021 Ghana Police Service directive as a starting point, I have examined the broader tensions between secular governance and religious prominence. First, I have demonstrated that the directive reflects a growing effort by the secular postcolonial state to regulate religious speech in the interest of public order and national security. This raises questions about the state's locus standi in adjudicating spiritual matters, especially within a legal system that professes religious neutrality. Second, the regulation of prophetic communication exposes critical concerns about religious freedom and human rights. While the state is mandated to protect its citizens from harm and unrest, attempts to restrict prophecy risk violating constitutionally and internationally guaranteed rights to religious expression. Third, the paper examined how public prophecy, particularly doom-laden or invasive revelations, can violate the right to privacy, turning sacred speech into a spectacle that compromises personal dignity and autonomy. Ultimately, the 2021 directive reveals the complex and dynamic entanglements between law, religion, media, and public life in Ghana. It shows how the state's attempt to uphold secular rules often clashes with the influence and respect that prophetic leaders have in society. As Ghana continues to negotiate these tensions, a careful and dialogical approach one that balances legal principles with religious pluralism, will be essential in safeguarding both public interest and fundamental freedoms in a religious democratic society. I have argued that trying to control prophecy in Ghana shows how weak secular government can be when religion is very powerful, and it highlights key tensions between state power, religious freedom, and public responsibility. I maintain that tensions between pastor-prophets and the state reflect a struggle over how secularism, religious rights, and privacy work in a mostly Christian but religiously diverse society.

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